DIVERSITY AND MULTICULTURALISM – AN INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

Ramesh Mamidala
M A (Eng Litt.)
Ph D Scholar
Kakatiya University,
Warangal,
Telangana State

Abstract

Diversity and Multiculturalism are such two words that would attract me to take my country India as an outstanding case for the study. Multicultural India promotes many traditions and cultures within her secular jurisdiction. This is possible only with the juxtaposing of many cultures that are either created within or through immigration from variegated jurisdictions. Multicultural policies are part and parcel of Indian Constitution of 1950 and many a scholar has believed tht it is a role model of such multicultural accommodation with legal pluralism of every religious family law. When a nation is termed multicultural it should assert and gurantee the maintenance of diversified cultures, the distinct features of all cultures, social integration, and avoid racial segregation. The concept of multiculturalilsm is gaining lot of popularity and is enomoured by many as an acceptable one which is prominently losing its status and identity in most of the Western European countries. In this paper I limit my research of multiculturalism to India in particular and Asia in general. In West, the imminent failure may be the result of certain blame on immigrant minorities; while in other parts it is the majority of non-immigrants that go with maintaining multiculturalism. In the East charter majority assimilated the minorities but the in the counterpart West, the charter majority blamed charte minority for the cultural imbalances and differences. In this paper my main thrust would be on India and would like to quote a few things from Asia and West to strengthen my point of view on diversity and multiculturalism. By all means, the concept and practice of multiculturalism in India is a marvel and fascination for the rest of the world.
Keywords: Multiculturalism, Diversity, Indian perspective, immigration, dislocation

Introduction

Multiculturalism, as a set of ideas and policies, is one of the normative approaches to the current situation of cultural diversity in multicultural cities. But how can the ideas of multiculturalism be translated into the reality of urban form? The overall aim of this dissertation is to provide a

theoretical and conceptual frame of reference for distilling and identifying the ideas of multiculturalism which can be translated into spatial form, and in this way, to highlight the role urban form may play in addressing the situation of living 'together-in-difference'. In this study, the relation between the materiality of urban form and the political framework of multiculturalism is at the core of the discussion. In its exploration into multiculturalism, the thesis identifies theoretical lacunae in explaining the spatial dimensions of multiculturalism. To be able to discuss multiculturalism in urban form terms, the dissertation chooses the position of a 'civility of indifference', developed by Amin (2012), as one of many possible stances within this discourse as an operative conception for such an exercise. Adopting the logical argumentation as the research strategy, the thesis delves deep into the conceptual domain mapped by space syntax theory as a primary system in this endeavour, and accordingly, describes how the spatial form of the city, by way of human movement, has the potential to create a variety of social groupings. Thereupon the thesis develops a secondary conceptual system with explanatory applicability to the relation between multiculturalism and spatial form. Supported by these systems of argumentation, the study describes how the spatial morphology of the city may have influence on the situation of living together. It is suggested that overlapping spaces represent the spaces where urban structure potentially can provide the spatial viability for the emergence of a 'civility of indifference' and its two organizing principles of co-presence and multiplicity.

Hence, the dissertation intends to contribute to theoretical efforts into the experience of living 'together-in-difference' from architectural and urban design perspectives, and argues that multiculturalism distinctly possesses spatial dimensions, which should be conceptualized and addressed through the theoretical lens of spatial form. Hence, the thesis defends that notwithstanding being a complex of social processes, the spatial dimensions of multiculturalism should not be belittled in efforts to address the situation of living together in the multicultural cities of the West.

A perspective on Multiculturalism

The origin and etymology of multiculturalism can be traced back to 1970. The problem of dealing with the sufferings of immigrants to Canada gave rise to the concept of multiculturalism that spread its wings to countries like Australia, the USA, the UK and some countries in European Union. These are the places wherein we find many settlers coming from world over for a livelihood. All the people with variety of cultures and other intimate traditional taboos could not assimilate and obsorb themselves into other cultures and thus leading the governments to seek a policy either politically or culturally. The outcome has been multiculturalism leading to symbiosis of various cultural identities. In a country like India, multicultural aspect includes racial, religious, linguistic aspects that show lot of conformity to values, but at the same time aim at preserving their own historical perspective for their own survival.

Let me quote a few lines from "Multicultural Harmony" published by *Multicultural Symphony* by Dominic.

> Multiplicity and diversity
> essence of universe
> From atom to the heavens
> multiculturalism reigns
> This unity in diversity
> makes beauty of universe.

"There is a materialism, rationalism and individualism and a concentration on economic ends far more complete and absolute than in homogeneous Western lands: a total absorption in the Exchange and Market; a capitalist structure with business concern as subject: far more typical of Capitalism than one can imagine in the so-called capitalist societies which have grown slowly out of the past and are still bound to it by a hundred roots (quoted in Furnivall 1939, 452)."

Cultural indifferences

Culture is a set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices. The concept of culture has its genesis in the eighteenth century. The culture can be reflected in our beliefs, customs, traditions, languages, ceremonies, arts, values. The culture of people varies from place to place within the country. Culture is the amalgamation of all subcultures spread all over India. Culture is inseparable in the Indian society like an egg and yolk. It is a reflection of our thought processes and living styles. The concept of culture has been defined by various scholars.

According to Samuel Pufendorf culture "refers to all the ways in which human beings overcome their original barbarism, and through artifice, become fully human".

Valkey looks at culture as "the cultivation of the soul or mind".

Culture is deeply rooted in human lives. It is also rarely found to be variable. Culture and language have a symbiotic relationship. India is known for its unique policy of multiculturalism. Commenting on multilingualism and diversity of cultures Krishna Kriplani says:

Multiculturalism is the linguistic jigsaw puzzle of modern India. It has been said that Indian literature is one, though written in many languages – a faint echo of the famous Vedic verse: "Truth is one though sages call it by various names". This characteristic permeates not only literature but almost every significant aspect of Indian culture. Hence, the hackneyed phrase, 'Unity in Diversity'

Multiculturalism is an Indian philosophy which envisages that all the cultural groups should live together peacefully with lot of equality. In a multicultural country like India divergent cultures survive. Heterogeneity is the characteristic feature of Indian multiculturalism. Commenting on multiculturalism Ramakrishna D says that multiculturalism is "multistate, multicommunal, multilingual Indian nation as a whole".

Indian is known for its unique socio-linguistic policy of multilingualism. There is a social cohesion prevalent in Indian society. Our Indian literature is produced on the anvil of multiculturalism. In fact the Indian Literature – the essence of our varied regional literature – is a mirror of multiculturalism.

There is a cultural adaptation in India. People respect the cultures of others though different. This is in Indian subcontinent for generations together. Benjamin Lee Whorf observes the concept of this cultural adaptation in his hypothesis:

We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native languages. The categories and types that we isolate from the world of phenomenon we do not find there because they stare every observer in the face; on the contrary, the world is presented in a kaleidoscopic flux of impressions which has to be organized by our minds – and this means largely by the linguistic system in our minds.

His hypothesis puts all of us at alert to the chances that our experience of cultural realities is surely a characteristic of cultural view. According to Peter S. Alder on cultural difference and

euphoria of contact he says that "cultural difference is encountered for the first time there will be euphoria of contact and the confusion of disintegration".

Many Indian English writers like Mulk Raj Anand, Arundhati Roy, Khuswant Singh explored and exposed the theme of multiculturalism in their novels like *Untouchables* (1935), *Coolie* (1936)*, God of Small Things* (1997)*, Train to Pakistan* (1956).

I strongly feel that multiculturalism in India envisions a stark reality which in turn buttresses the very existence of diversified yet unified cultures of India. The uniqueness and distinct quality of our India are benedictions on our country. We all have to strive to bring out from within us the consciousness that is very much the need of the hour. The end result appears to be a perfect epitome of multiculturalism in India.

The Indian Multiculturalism shoud not be viewed from a constricted and restricted angle but from a broader perspective because of the simple fact that all the diversies are inherent in the Indian cultural system that assimilates all such variegated issues. This is because of the complexity of Indian cultural pattern that is viewed with awe by the world in the global scenario. The geographical patterns, multilingual arena, complexity of literatures produced by multiple people representing multiple characters prove a great way into India's multiculturalism.

Krishna Kripalani gives good thrust on the above aspect and says:

> Such then is the linguistic jigsaw puzzle of modern India. Without a proper appreciation of this complex pattern one is likely to miss the significance of one of the most characteristic aspects of modern Indian literature, namely, its multiple character. It has been said that Indian literature alone, though written in many languages – a faint echo of the famous Vedic verse: "Truth is one though sages call it by various names." This characteristic permeates not only literature but almost every significant aspect of Indian culture. Hence, the hackneyed phrase, "Unity in Diversity," which our politicians and culture mongers are never tired of repeating, although there is at least as much diversity in our unity as there is unity in our diversity.

In a recent article, Reed Way Dasenbrock uses the term "multicultural literature" to include "both works that are explicitly about multicultural societies and those that are impllicitly multicultural in the sense of inscribing readers from other cultures inside their own textual dynamics."

Since the 1990s a debate on multiculturalism has been on the surge that has taken shape into two diversified and distinct forms. First, a juxtaposition of fedaralism with multiculturalism and second, the meaning of unity in diversity with regard to culture, secularism, religion, language, habits, habitats, communal conformities, et cetera. In India, with population in the second highest positon following China, both the forms are pervasive in the current scenario. But, the debate did not attract many scholars in India for a debate until recently in the last decade of the twentieth century (Bhargava et al. 1999; *Seminar* (India) 1999). For Bhargava, the theme of multiculturalilsm "underscores the need to have a stable identity" therby degrading the stance of communities and cultures to develop multiculrual feeling. He is of the opinion that multiculturalism "stresses the importance of cultural belonging and ligitimises the desire to maintain difference" (1999, 1). Bhargava also felt that all the problems "relating to the need for community, a sense of belonging to it, the importance of a secure identity, of status and recognition, of particularity, and the need to recognise and mainain difference with others" (1999, 18).

Chatterjee, a prominent post-colonial theorist of South Asia, is dubious regarding the interference in the communities' affairs for various superseded reasons. He depicts that secular liberalism is not powerful enough to cater to the needs of person law reform.

Multiculturalism: Its Diversities politically

When it comes to diversities and that too politically one can easily comprehend the scenario from the Indian political arena, the diversities, the unity and integrity. According to Bhattacharyya, the debate that started long back into history has underscored the multicultural political arrangements (Bhattacharyya 2001*b*). The Indian leaders, the post-colonial and anti-colonial nationalist leaders, took oath to protect the multiculturalism and its reality including Jawarhalal Nehru, India's first prime minister. Only Nehru identified and proved very consequential and decisive in providing the well thrived framework to build multiculturalism in Indian sub continent with lot of respect to traditional values and Indian society. He thus, gave lot of emphasis to "unity in diversity." Nehru felt that

> The diversity of India is tremendous; it is obvious. It lies on the surface and anybody can see it. It concerns itself with physical appearances as well as with certain mental habits and traits. … Yet, with all these differences, there is no mistaking the impress of India (Nehru 1946, 61–2).

In these lines Nehru's wishfulness of delving into the cultural juxtaposition, plurality and the specificity about the "physical appearances" apart from the "mental habits and traits" is well exposed with a thumping clarity in a clangorous way. He advised his chief ministers in his *Letters to Chief Ministers* in the first quarter of 1950s that they should not treat the problems singularly as they vary from so many perspectives. Nehru advised chief ministers not "to treat them by some single formula because they differ greatly among themselves. It seems obvisouly undesirable to deny them some kind of self-government or autonomy" (Nehru 1986, 364). He rather cautioned the chief ministers;

> There is a tendency in Assam for what is called integration of these tribes and for establishment of a homogenous state. This really means merging in a cultural and the like sense the tribal people into the Assamese. I think that this is not a desirable movement and instead of achieving its objectives will lead to conflicts and difficulties (Nehru 1986, 185, 150).

He talked about Assam, now Assom, about her homogenous statehood. Was Nehru thinking about merging all tribal people into the fold of Assamese? He said that every care would be taken and the individuality of the tribal cultures would be given their own status. This undoubtedly leads to unity though diversified cultures and traditions. Nehru was talking not only talking about cultural unification but also political one. Nehru, in one of his for forewords to Verrier Elwin's work *A Philosophy for NEFA* (1957/1959), illustrated some good conventions that talk about the policy for all communities and tribes and castes and creeds in India, all parts of India.

1. People should develop along the lines of their own genius and we should avoid imposing anything on them. We should try to encourage in every way their traditional arts and culture.
2. Tribal rights in land and forests should be respected.
3. We should try to train and build up a team of their own people to do the work of administration and development.

4. We should not over-administer these areas or overwhelm them with a multiplicity of schemes. We should rather work through and not in rivalry to their social and cultural institutions.

5. We should judge results, not by statistics or the amount of money spent, but by the quality of human character that is evolved (Elwin 1957).

A comparative study of Diversity and Multiculturalism

It has always been controversial to talk about Diversity and then achieving unity with so many cultures and races in India. It has also been very fascinating to find and understand the diversity of Indianness in her fullest level. The perspective of the citizen is all that matters when looking into this diversity of any nation or a continent; especially a nation like India, Canada, etc. In these nations, let me talk more about India, so, in India, there is not just one rule, there is not just one paradigm, there is not just one taboo, put aside diversified cultures, languages, castes and creeds. One has to look at these various facets of nation with awe and surprise only to find unity in all these diversities.

So, the agenda of multiculturalism itself involves not just talking about various cultures but identifying the maintenance of unity in the diversified cultures that are more conducive to the further development of any nation to her fullest possible extent finding a great place in the world scenario.

Multicultural Concerns

Multicultural country like India is and has always been called "salad bowl" or "cultural mosaic". Usually, when I consider such multicultural and multilingual nation, there are wide variety of concerns that are to be addressed properly even though unity in such a diversity is being maintained by people, governments, religions, castes, creeds, races, and et cetera. These concerns are broad in their spreading, deep in their rooting in the society, rife in their number, and cool in their temperament, surprisingly. In India, culture is defined as beliefs, thoughts, implementation, customs, traditions, and works created by thought processes by individual entity or a group of people of a particular ethnicity. This is well clarified as multicultural symphony that is being maintained by people and governments at all times because there is an interrelationship between gender, ethnicity, and class.

Any aspect, or incident of India in the writings of Indian history, culture and politics are purely differentiated and underscored by one concern or the other related to multiculturalism and multicultural society in India. Can a nation, or for that matter, any nation survive with all these concerns involved with various cultures? The answer is affirmative when a nation like India is taken as an example. In relation to socialist, and pluralist states, India scored a record high of political and cultural stability in the wake of multiplicity of culture and language during colonial period or post-colonial period. The rule of the British has shaken India a bit but the ground customs are still to be seen as a perfect example of maintenance of cultural diversity but unity in diversity.

We can take our Indian Constitution as an epitome and main source of such policies that nurtured the independent India in shaping herself and developing in her a sovereign, secular, republic state overcoming all hindrances that would collapse a large geographical nation. All this is possible, I think, is because of reorganization of individual territories after independence, that is, in 1950s and 1960s. Thus, the concept and idea of multicultural society or multiculturalism was developed and bolstered very much ununderstandably but steadily may be by the end of 19th century or early 20th century.

Conclusion

In the Global scenario, the American government has accpted, admitted, supported and encouraged this concept of cultural diversity following Canada and India. This reduced the problem of differences and variations in the living styles and equalised the standards of living among the citizens in whatever the nation it is adapted. The citizens enjoyed the right to preserve their cultures, traditions, and their cultural inheritance. Governments came out with laws that though not drastically but significantly reduced the racial discrimination, prejudice and other social evils that were prevalent in many societies obstructing the overall perceptual growth of any nation. This diversity also has led to the harmony and people found their lives rich and properous. I do think that multiculturalism is probably a virtue for any society and individual and it should be nurtured instead of identifying and understanding it as a vice.

References:
1. Anand, Mulk Raj, *Untouchable,* with a preface to E.M. Foster (1933).
2. Sinha, K.N., Mulk Raj Anand, 1972, New York: Tavanyme Publishers.
3. Peter S. Alder, "*Culture Shock and the Cross-cultural Learning Experience",* 1932.
4. Krishna Kriplani, "*Modern Literature",* in *A cultural History of India,* ed. A.L.Basham (1975; rpt, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987), 407.

BIBLIOGRAPHY
1. Bhargava, Rajeev (2000), 'Democratic Vision of a New Republic: India, 1950', in Frankel, F., *et al* (eds.), *Transforming India: Social and Political Dynamics of Democracy*, 26-59. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
2. Chatterjee, Partha (1986), *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*: *A Derivative Discourse?* London: Zed Books.
3. Chatterjee, Partha (1995), *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995.
4. Galanter, Marc (1984), *Competing Equalities, Law and the Backward Classes in India.* Delhi: Oxford University Press.
5. Hefner, Robert W ed (2001) *The Politics of Multiculturalism: Pluralism and Citizenship in Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia*. University of Hawaii Press.
6. Kymlicka, Will (1989), *Liberalism, Community and Culture*. Oxford: Clarendon
7. Press.
8. Kymlicka, Will (1995), *Multicultural Citizenship, A Liberal Theory of Minority*
9. *Rights*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
10. Kymlicka, Will and Baogang He (eds) (2005). *Multiculturalism in Asia*. Oxford:
11. Oxford University Press.
12. Mirmotahari, Emad "Islam in the Eastern African Novel" New York, NY; Palgrave Macmillan; 2011.
13. Martin Genetsch. *The Texture of Identity*. Toronto: TSAR, 2007. Discusses the work of Neil Bissoondath, Rohinton Mistry, and M G Vassanji.
14. Steiner, Tina.
    "'Dwelling-in-Travel.' Of Ships, Trains and Planes in M G Vassanji's Fiction." Eastern African Literary and Cultural Studies.
    2014. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/23277408.2014.941754

15. Barber, John
   "MG Vassanji: Seeking identity while dodging pigeonholes"
   in: *The Globe and Mail* 2012 http://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/books-and-media/mg-vassanji-seeking-identity-while-dodging-pigeonholes/article4686245/

16. Desai, Gaurav.
   "'Ambiguity is the driving force or the nuclear reaction behind my creativity': An E-conversation with M. G. Vassanji."
   Research in African Literatures (RAL) 2011 Fall; 42(3): 187

17. Jones, Stephanie
   "The Politics of Love and History: Asian Women and African Men in East African Literature"
   Research in African Literatures (RAL) 2011 Fall; 42 (3): 166-188.

18. Ramsey-Kurz, Helga
   "Glimpses of Paradise: Hope in Short Stories of Migration by M. G. Vassanji, Cyril Dabydeen, and Janette Turner Hospital"
   in: Ramsey-Kurz, Helga (ed. and introd.); Ganapathy-Doré, Geetha (ed.); *Projections of Paradise: Ideal Elsewheres in Postcolonial Migrant Literature.* Amsterdam, Netherlands; Rodopi; 2011.

19. Iyer, Nalini
   "No Place to Call Home: Citizenship and Belonging in M. G. Vassanji's *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall*"
   in: Wawrzinek, Jennifer (ed.); Makokha, J. K. S. (ed. and introd.); Gikandi, Simon (foreword); *Negotiating Afropolitanism: Essays on Borders and Spaces in Contemporary African Literature and Folklore.*Amsterdam, Netherlands; Rodopi; 2011.

20. Fu, Chun
   "The (Im-)Possibility of Backtracking in M. G. Vassanji's *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall*"
   in: Christian, Rita (ed. and introd.); Misrahi-Barak, Judith (ed. and introd.); *India and the Diasporic Imagination/L'Inde et l'imagination diasporique.* Montpellier, France; PU de la Méditerranée; 2011

21. Ojwang, Dan
   "Eat Pig and Become a Beast: Food, Drink and Diaspora in East African Indian Writing"
   Research in African Literatures (RAL) 2011 Fall; 42 (3): 68-87.

22. Makokha, Justus K. Siboe
   "The Eternal Other: The Authority of Deficit Masculinity in Asian-African Literature"
   in: Ouzgane, Lahoucine (ed. and introd.); *Men in African Film & Fiction.* Woodbridge, England; Currey; 2011. (x, 180 pp.)

23. Simatei, Peter
   "Diasporic Memories and National Histories in East African Asian Writing"
   Research in African Literatures (RAL) 2011 Fall; 42 (3): 56-67.

24. Siundu, Godwin
   "Locating Cultural Ambivalence and Afropolitanism: Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam as Heterotopia in the Fiction of Dawood and Vassanji"
   in: Wawrzinek, Jennifer (ed.); Makokha, J. K. S. (ed. and introd.); Gikandi, Simon (foreword); *Negotiating Afropolitanism: Essays on Borders and Spaces in Contemporary African Literature and Folklore.*Amsterdam, Netherlands; Rodopi; 2011.

25. Kalliney, Peter J.
   "East African Literature and the Politics of Global Reading"
   in: Connell, Liam (ed. and introd.); Nicky Marsh (ed. and introd.); *Literature and Globalization: A Reader.* London, England; Routledge; 2011.

26. Simatei, Peter
   "Hybrid Identities and Cultural Pluralism in East African Asian Writing"
   in: Singh, Jaspal K. (ed. and introd.); Chetty, Rajendra (ed. and introd.); *Indian Writers: Transnationalisms and Diasporas.* New York, NY; Peter Lang; 2010

27. Sheela, C. Amutha Charu Sundarsingh, J.
   "Style and Language in M. G. Vassanji's *The Assassin's Song."*
   Language in India; Jan 2010, Vol. 10 Issue 1, p316-325.