Multiculturalism: The Issue We Face Today in India

Vijay Kumar

Director Survey Research Unit,
Deptt. of Political Science,
Magadh University,
Bodh Gaya, Bihar

Abstract

Our rich legacy during freedom struggle of tolerance towards the Muslim is well known starting from Bahadur shah zafar being positioned as king while fighting our first battle of independence .Gandhi ji too started khilafat movement as a token of unity among hindu and muslim. Nehrus leftist inclination and having no special affinity for hindus all could not prevent the worst catasphore of our time resulting in the partition followed by brutal violence in the name of religious nationalsm.

Even with this scar independent India followed a path of secular policy in framing the constitution and running the government. We adopted a system of governance in letters and spirit represented through constitution as well as our by practice. Unfortunately independent India adding up to it the problem of religious minority also faces the problem of caste language and region. Here in my article I will like to analyze the problem of cultural integration in india as well as the question of managing multiculturalism today.

We recognize the Cultural Diversity in India as India has a history of thousands of years. People have been living in India since the Stone Age. People from different regions of the world came to India and all of them are living in different parts of the country. Though there is a difference in our languages, literature and art. Yet with this diversity which prevails there is also a sense of unity among the Indians. This diversity has enriched our social life. People such as Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, Sikhs, Christians, Jains, and Parsis etc belonging to different religion live in India. Different festivals are celebrated in India with lots of joys & happiness. Many festivals are celiberated festivals together such as Dassera, Diwalil, Holi in Punjab Baisakhi, in Andhra Pradesh Eruvak Punnam, in Tamil nadu Pongal & in Kerala Onam. Ramzaam – Id, Christmas, Buddha Pornima, Samvatsari, and Pateti are also important festivals. In allthe religious festival Indians happily participate in it. It increases the feeling of unity among them.

We find diversity in the clothing and food habits of Indians. Clothing depends upon the climate, physical feature & traditions of the respective regions. There is diversity in our foods habits too, due to climatic conditions crops and other geographical factors. For e.g. the people of Punjab eat dal – roti whereas people living in the coastal areas eat rice and fish. In constructions of houses also there is diversity especially in the traditional pattern.

Keywords: Multiculturalism, India, Cultural Diversity, Festivals.

Introduction

Multiculturalism is a body of thought in political philosophy about the proper way to respond to cultural and religious diversity. Multiculturalists take for granted that it is "culture" and "cultural groups" that are to be recognized and accommodated. Yet multicultural claims include a wide range of claims involving religion, language, caste ethnicity, nationality, and region. Culture is a notoriously overbroad concept, and all of these categories have been subsumed by or equated with the concept of culture

We were initially trained to govern and build our institution like united kingdom where Multiculturalism has been largely seen as a normative framework and a set of state policies which advance tolerance and advocate the recognition of cultural difference. Multiculturalism was adopted as an appropriate framework for dealing with cultural difference.

Multiculturalism has indeed been a key term in our political discourse over the last sixty six years of independence yet we have not been able co exist peacefully. Violence that appears again and again posing threat to our polity is a matter of great concern. During past decades, especially congress governments has affirmed this idea of plural identity that celebrates difference.

On Saturday 5th February 2011Prime Minister David Cameron has delivered a speech at the Munich Security Conference setting out his view on radicalisation and Islamic extremism Under the doctrine of state multiculturalism, we have encouraged different cultures to live separate lives, apart from each other and apart from the mainstream. We've measurably failed to provide a vision of society to which they feel they want to belong. We've even tolerated these segregated communities behaving in ways that run completely counter to our national values.

Multiculturalism is a heavily debated concept. It has been studied in numerous ways by many social science disciplines, including sociology (e.g. Modood 2005; Hall 2000), political philosophy (e.g. Taylor 1992; Kymlicka 1995), anthropology (e.g. Vertovec 2007a) and psychology (e.g. Berry 2011; Fowers & Richardson 1996)Multiculturalism: Debates and challenges('Has multiculturalism failed?' Caroline Howarth & Eleni Andreouli)

In its simplest form, multiculturalism can be seen as a demographic condition, as the result of increased human mobility and inter-cultural contact. While many scholars recognise that managing intercultural relations and multi-group governance have been social and political realities since before the Ottoman and Roman empires and therefore that multiculturalism is as old as humanity. We must recognise this was under a feudal monarchy that prevailed as the only valid structure of governance. We have to recognise that with the advent of democracy the rapid intensification of such mobility, intercultural exchange and 'super-diversity' as the result of globalisation has all changed the scenario. (It is important to stress that terrorism is not linked exclusively to any one religion or ethnic group.

"Nevertheless, we should acknowledge that this threat comes in Europe overwhelmingly from young men who follow a completely perverse, warped interpretation of Islam, and who are prepared to blow themselves up and kill their fellow citizens. Last week at Davos I rang the alarm bell for the urgent need for Europe to recover its economic dynamism, and today, though the subject is complex, my message on security is equally stark. We will not defeat terrorism simply by the action we take outside our borders. Europe needs to wake up to what is happening in our own countries. Of course, that means strengthening, as Angela has said, the security aspects of our response, on tracing plots, on stopping them, on counter-surveillance and intelligence gathering." Prime Minister David Cameron has delivered a speech at the Munich Security Conference setting out his view on radicalisation and Islamic extremism.

But this is just part of the answer. We have got to get to the root of the problem, and we need to be absolutely clear on where the origins of where these terrorist attacks lie. That is the existence of an ideology, Islamist extremism. We should be equally clear what we mean by this term, and we must distinguish it from Islam. Islam is a religion observed peacefully and devoutly by over a billion people. Islamist extremism is a political ideology supported by a minority. At the furthest end are those who back terrorism to promote their ultimate goal: an entire

Islamist realm, governed by an interpretation of Sharia. Move along the spectrum, and you find people who may reject violence, but who accept various parts of the extremist worldview, including real hostility towards Western democracy and liberal values. It is vital that we make this distinction between religion on the one hand, and political ideology on the other. Time and again, people equate the two. They think whether someone is an extremist is dependent on how much they observe their religion. So, they talk about moderate Muslims as if all devout Muslims must be extremist. This is profoundly wrong. Someone can be a devout Muslim and not be an extremist. We need to be clear: Islamist extremism and Islam are not the same thing.

The point is this: the ideology of extremism is the problem; Islam emphatically is not. Picking a fight with the latter will do nothing to help us to confront the former. On the other hand, there are those on the soft left who also ignore this distinction. They lump all Muslims together, compiling a list of grievances, and argue that if only governments addressed these grievances, the terrorism would stop.

I believe the root lies in the existence of this extremist ideology. I would argue an important reason so many young Muslims are drawn to it comes down to a question of identity.

What I am about to say is drawn from the British experience, but I believe there are general lessons for us all. In the UK, some young men find it hard to identify with the traditional Islam practiced at home by their parents, whose customs can seem staid when transplanted to modern Western countries. But these young men also find it hard to identify with Britain too, because we have allowed the weakening of our collective identity. Under the doctrine of state multiculturalism, we have encouraged different cultures to live separate lives, apart from each other and apart from the mainstream. We've failed to provide a vision of society to which they feel they want to belong. We've even tolerated these segregated communities behaving in ways that run completely counter to our values.

So, when a white person holds objectionable views, racist views for instance, we rightly condemn them. But when equally unacceptable views or practices come from someone who isn't white, we've been too cautious frankly – frankly, even fearful – to stand up to them. The failure, for instance, of some to confront the horrors of forced marriage, the practice where some young girls are bullied and sometimes taken abroad to marry someone when they don't want to, is a case in point. This hands-off tolerance has only served to reinforce the sense that not enough is shared. And this all leaves some young Muslims feeling rootless. And the search for something to belong to and something to believe in can lead them to this extremist ideology. Now for sure, they don't turn into terrorists overnight, but what we see – and what we see in so many European countries – is a process of radicalisation.

Well, I'll tell you why. As evidence emerges about the backgrounds of those convicted of terrorist offences, it is clear that many of them were initially influenced by what some have called 'non-violent

extremists', and they then took those radical beliefs to the next level by embracing violence. And I say this is an indictment of our approach to these issues in the past. And if we are to defeat this threat, I believe it is time to turn the page on the failed policies of the past. So first, instead of ignoring this extremist ideology, we –as governments and as societies – have got to confront it, in all its forms. And second, instead of encouraging people to live apart, we need a clear sense of shared national identity that is open to everyone.

Let me briefly take each in turn. First, confronting and undermining this ideology. Whether they are violent in their means or not, we must make it impossible for the extremists to succeed. Now, for governments, there are some obvious ways we can do this. We must ban preachers of hate from coming to our countries. We must also proscribe organisations that incite terrorism against people at home and abroad. Governments must also be shrewder in dealing with those that, while not violent, are in some cases part of the problem. We need to think much harder about who it's in the public interest to work with. Some organisations that seek to present themselves as a gateway to the Muslim community are showered with public money despite doing little to combat extremism. As others have observed, this is like turning to a right-wing fascist party to fight a violent white supremacist movement. So we should properly judge these organisations: do they believe in universal human rights – including for women and people of other faiths? Do they believe in equality of all before the law? Do they believe in democracy and the right of people to elect their own government? Do they encourage integration or separation? These are the sorts of questions we need to ask. Fail these tests and the presumption should be not to engage with organisations – so, no public money, no sharing of platforms with ministers at home.

Would you allow the far right groups a share of public funds if they promise to help you lure young white men away from fascist terrorism? Of course not. But, at root, challenging this ideology means exposing its ideas for what they are, and that is completely unjustifiable. We need to argue that terrorism is wrong in all circumstances. We need to argue that prophecies of a global war of religion pitting Muslims against the rest of the world are nonsense. Now, governments cannot do this alone. The extremism we face is a distortion of Islam, so these arguments, in part, must be made by those within Islam. So let us give voice to those followers of Islam in our own countries–the vast, often unheard majority–who despise the extremists and their worldview. Let us engage groups that share our aspirations.

Now, second, we must build stronger societies and stronger identities at home. Frankly, we need a lot less of the passive tolerance of recent years and a much more active, muscular liberalism. A passively tolerant society says to its citizens, as long as you obey the law we will just leave you alone. It stands neutral between different values. But I believe a genuinely liberal country does much more; it believes in certain values and actively promotes them. Freedom of speech, freedom of worship,

democracy, the rule of law, equal rights regardless of race, sex or sexuality. It says to its citizens, this is what defines us as a society: to belong here is to believe in these things. Now, each of us in our own countries, I believe, must be unambiguous and hard-nosed about this defence of our liberty.

Back home, we're introducing National Citizen Service: a two-month programme for sixteen-year-olds from different backgrounds to live and work together. I also believe we should encourage meaningful and active participation in society, by shifting the balance of power away from the state and towards the people. That way, common purpose can be formed as people come together and work together in their neighbourhoods. It will also help build stronger pride in local identity, so people feel free to say, 'Yes, I am a Muslim, I am a Hindu, I am Christian, but I am also a Londoner or a Berliner too'. It's that identity, that feeling of belonging in our countries, that I believe is the key to achieving true cohesion.

Conclusions

From discussions running in politics and the media around the world, it would seem that many agree that multiculturalism has failed – but this could be because of perceptions of increased racist hostilities and decreased cultural tolerance as much as perceptions of increased cultural tolerance, particularly towards Islamic values and practices. At the same time philosophical discussions debate whether multiculturalism is conducive to greater equality and cohesion or to greater inequality and segregation. Part of the problem is that there is an array of competing definitions of multiculturalism. Multiculturalism can mean many different things: a demographic condition, a set of institutional arrangements, objectives of a political movement or a set of state principles .In order to assess how far the question 'has multiculturalism failed' resonates with everyday knowledge and practice, we need to start precisely here: with a bottom-up understanding of how lay people in their everyday lives think about and To conclude: while normative and philosophical conceptualisations of multiculturalism help us develop frameworks for equal participation in culturally diverse societies, these conceptualisations are somewhat idealistic (in that they seek to develop frameworks of how things 'should' be) and tend to overlook the dynamics, tensions and meanings associated with multiculturalism as it is actually lived (Semi et al. 2009). Social psychology can help us relate these issues to people's real experiences. In the context of growing uneasiness regarding multiculturalism across European and other Western states, it is imperative to develop a deeper understanding of how multiculturalism 'works' in practice in order to advance appropriate policies that are grounded in people's actual experiences.

The comman people shaire life in india here is an example. Sofiya rangwala a Muslim lady, a practicing dermatologist by profession and I run my own high- end laser skin clinic, in Bangalore. I was brought up in Kuwait and at the age of 18, came to India to pursue medical education. I decided to stay back in India while almost all my friends left India for greener pastures. Not even once did I consider that

being a Muslim could create a problem for me, as my sense of nationalism held me back to my roots and so here I am, serving my country since the last 20 years. I studied in Manipal, Karnataka. I lived alone like all students do. While I was in college, all my professors were Hindus and almost all the people who I would interact with were Hindus as well. There is not a single incident when anyone showed partiality towards me based on my gender or religion. Every single one of them was kind and in fact sometimes, I felt as though they made an extra effort to make feel like I was one of them. I am ever so grateful to all of them for making my life in Manipal as comfortable as it could get.

After leaving Manipal, I relocated to Bangalore with my husband. By then I had been married and so we decided to make our life in Bangalore. There is a reason, why we chose Bangalore and here is where I will talk about my husband. He is a Muslim too, with a very typical first name, Iqbal. He is an aerospace engineer with MTech from IIT-Chennai and PhD from Germany. His profession takes him to the most highly secured organizations of India, like DRDO, NAL, HAL, GTRE, ISRO, IISc, BHEL; you name it and be assured that he has visited all of them without any hassles. Not even once he has been stripped off or asked for special security clearance or any such bias has been shown towards him. And NO, things have not changed even after Modi gov came into power. Things are in fact more disciplined and streamlined even at government organizations, from what I hear from my husband. As a matter of fact, Iqbal has been completely stripped each time he traveled to US and was under secret surveillance while he was doing his PhD in Germany, after the 9/11 attacks on US. We literally received a letter from the German government that he has been cleared and is not anymore under suspicion. Talk about Muslim paranoia! Its very understandable too due to the current situations in the world. My husband is highly respected and loved by the people he works with, and all of them happen to be Hindus. None of this has changed even in recent times, so Intolerance is just a word for us on a practical basis.

I opened my clinic last year, just before Modi gov came into power. I am a law-abiding citizen and I file my taxes like service tax on a monthly basis. I have never indulged in any activities, which could put me into any kind of trouble. I am comfortably running my clinic, which is doing very well, thanks to all my patients and clients, who all happen to be Hindus. A handful of my patients are from other communities. My entire staff is Hindu, and believes me when I say that they take better care of my clinic than I could any day! I interact with bankers, government officers and with so many people on a daily basis. Not even once in the last 20 years, did I have the need to even think of leaving India! My entire family lives abroad and all that I need to do is just decide that I don't want to stay here. I have open offers of opening clinic in Kuwait, which would fetch me huge amount of revenue and yet why should I stay in India, if I am not happy and if I am facing any kind of bias?

In Kuwait, we are considered as NOBODY. Yes, despite being in Kuwait for the last 40 years or

so, my family is still considered as expatriates, with no rights. We need to renew our resident permit periodically and the laws there constantly keep changing, making the life of expatriates only harder. We have to strictly comply with their rules and laws, which is fine but we are openly discriminated. They consider Asians as third grade people, while giving preference to their citizens, Arabs and Whites. We are not unhappy there but we have no sense of belonging either. At least, I never had and never have even when I visit Kuwait now. We are Muslims in a Muslim country, and yet we are considered as Indians with no special regards. I figured long back ago, that India is the only country, where I will have a sense of belonging. You are an Indian-American in US, Indian-Canadian in Canada, Indian-British in UK and so on but only in India you are an Indian. Period. Rest can say whatever they want and defend their choices but this is a fact. You can only feel at home, in your own home. I have lived in different places and everywhere I stand out but in India. No body in India asks me, 'Are you an Indian?', and this is what makes all the difference.

So, what are these celebrities ranting about? An ordinary citizen like my husband and I are not facing any such issues, then what have they faced? Why is Amir Khan's wife, Kiran Rao feeling so afraid? They are prominent people, living in posh localities, their children study in the best of schools and they have personal security escorting them at all times. I travel alone everyday and yet don't feel afraid. I want to know as a responsible citizen, from Amir Khan and Shahrukh Khan as well, why did they make such irresponsible statements and spoil the image of the 13 crores of Muslims in India? Who the hell are they to make public statements based on their personal perception? Who gave them the liberty to tarnish the image of my country on an International level, that Muslims are not safe in India? How dare Pakistan invites them to stay in Pakistan? I feel hurt when I read the statements of my Hindu friends on Muslims. I feel afraid that they are being pushed to the limit and the tolerance and acceptance that I have enjoyed all these years, might just vanish! I feel afraid that my own people might shun me and I may get alienated in my own country, because of a handful of ungrateful bunch of fools! How long can I expect majority of Hindus to tolerate this nuisance? It's high time that Muslims understand the value of the freedom and acceptance that we enjoy in India and if not, I pray that my Hindu fellow citizens continue to keep their patience.

So it is not the question of common mans perceptions but when he is indoctrinated with economic incentives then he gets transformed. Now the whole world is facing a threat to life and liberty especially due to the activity of Islamic militants. The developments of Africa and Middle East are quite disturbing. The question is what should be done? Though a simple answer is not possible we will have to find out a way out.

What I feel is no regional culture ethnic group or religious sect should be allowed to violate the universal human rights. We all must learn to live now a day's respecting one another in spite of cultural difference. One should adhere to the basic framework

of modern society equality liberty and fraternity. No group should be allowed to think that they are superior and unquestionable.

References

1. Allport, Gordon Willard (1954) The Nature of Prejudice, Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books.
2. Arends-To´th, Judit & Van de Vijver, Fons J. R. (2003) "Multiculturalism and acculturation: Views of Dutch and Turkish-Dutch" in European Journal of Social Psychology, 33, pp. 249–266.
3. Beck, Ulrich (2006) Cosmopolitan Vision, Cambridge: Polity Press.
4. Benhabib, Seyla (2002) The Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
5. Berry, John. W. (1997) "Immigration, acculturation, and adaptation" in Applied Psychology: An International Review 1, 46, pp. 5-34.
6. Berry, John W. (2001) "A psychology of immigration" in Journal of Social Issues 3, 57, pp. 615-631.
7. Berry, John W. (2005) "Acculturation: Living successfully in two cultures" in International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 29, pp. 697-712.
8. Berry, John W. (2008) "Globalisation and acculturation" in International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 32, pp. 328-336.
9. Berry, John W. (2011) "Integration and multiculturalism: Ways towards social solidarity" inPapers on Social Representations, 20, pp. 2.1-2.21.
10. Bhatia, Sunil (2002) "Acculturation, dialogical voices and the construction of the diasporic self" in Theory & Psychology 1, 12, pp. 55-77.
11. Bhatia, Sunil & Ram, Anjali (2001) "Locating the dialogical self in the age of transnational migrations, border crossings and diasporas" in Culture & Psychology 3, 7, pp. 297-309.
12. Bhatia, Sunil & Ram, Anjali (2004) "Culture, hy Brah, Avtar & Phoenix, Ann (2004) "Ain't I a woman? Revisiting intersectionality" in Journal of International Women Studies 3, 5, pp. 75-86.
13. Billig, Michael (1987).Arguing and Thinking: A Rhetorical Approach to Social Psychology, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
14. Billig, Michael, Condor, Susan, Edwards, Derek, Gane, Mike, Middleton, David, & Radley, Alan (1988) Ideological Dilemmas: A Social Psychology of Everyday Thinking, London: Sage.11
15. Boski, Powel (2008) "Five meanings of integration in acculturation research" in International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 32, pp. 142-153.
16. Bowskill, Matt, Lyons, Evanthia & Coyle, Adrian (2007) "The rhetoric of acculturation: When integration means assimilation" in British Journal of Social Psychology, 46, pp. 793-813.
17. Brubaker, Rogers & Cooper, Frederick (2000) "Beyond Identity" in Theory & Society, 29, pp. 1-47.
18. Cameron, David (2011) PM's Speech at Munich Security Conference [online], Speech delivered at Munich Security Conference, Munich, 5 February 2011, available: .http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/pms-speech-at-munich-security-conference/(accessed 24 February 2012).
19. Cantle, Ted and the Community Cohesion Team (2001), CommJodelet, Denise (1991) Madness and Social Representations (T. Pownall, Trans.), Hemel Hempstead: Harvester-Wheatsheaf.
20. Joppke, Christian (2004) "The retreat of multiculturalism in the liberal state: theory and policy" in British Journal of Sociology 2, 55, pp. 237-257.
21. Jovchelovitch, Sandra (2007) Knowledge in Context: Representations, Community and Culture, New York: Routledge.
22. Kymlicka, Will (1995) Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights,Oxford: Oxford University Press.
23. Kymlicka, Will (2010) "The rise and fall of multiculturalism? New debates on inclusion and accommodation in diverse societies" in International Social Science Journal, 199, pp. 97-112.
24. Kundnami, Arun (2002) "The death of multiculturalism" in Race & Class, 43, pp. 67-72.
25. Marková, Ivana (2003) Dialogicality and Social Representations: The Dynamics of Mind, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.