

Fostering Multiculturalism: A Pathway to Strengthen the Cultural Cohesion

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Abstract: *This paper recognizes multiculturalism as an essential framework for fostering harmony, understanding, and collaboration among diverse cultural groups within society. By actively valuing and incorporating various cultural backgrounds, traditions, and perspectives, we can create stronger, more resilient communities that celebrate diversity and promote shared values and goals. Engaging in multicultural practices encourages dialogue and interaction among individuals from different backgrounds, helping to break down barriers and combat stereotypes. Educational initiatives, community programs, and inclusive policies can further support this integration, ensuring that all voices are heard and respected. Ultimately, embracing multiculturalism enriches our collective experience and strengthens the social fabric by building a sense of unity and belonging among all community members.*

Key Words: *Migration, Ethnicity, Pluralism, Cultural Diversity, Multiculturalism, Social Cohesion.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The term multiculturalism came from two Latin prefixes, ‘multi’, meaning many”, and the word ‘culture’. In simple terms, multiculturalism means multiple cultures. Multiculturalism implies the existence of two or more cultural or ethnic groups within a society; in its nature, the concept is more idealistic. Multiculturalism promotes and encourages cultural diversity and also gives public awareness of human diversity. Multiculturalism is the expression of appreciation for different societies for the maintenance and better understanding of diverse cultures and groups. Multiculturalism mainly focuses on the empowerment of racial and ethnic groups. It is commonly believed that multiculturalism existed after the Second World War. However, there is proof that the term existed in the 1930s. The 2005 Oxford English Dictionary Online traces the genealogy of the term multicultural back to 1935, when it was used in an article in the American Journal of Sociology. In "The Problem of the Marginal Man," Everett V. Stonequist analyzes the experiences of the person of mixed race "the marginal man" who "arises in a bicultural or multicultural situation"(Edelstein 2005: 16). And also, the OED Online traces another early use of the term multicultural to a 1941 New York Herald Tribune Books review in which it was applied to a book that provided "a fervent sermon against nationalism, national prejudice and behavior in favor of a 'multicultural' way of life" (Ibid). It got wide acceptance in the 1960s, and the term has also started to be used in academics by different scholars. According to some writers, the term multiculturalism has gone far; for some, it has not.

Many scholars and thinkers have used the concept of ‘multiculturalism’. The term is now associated with many disciplines and became an integral part of those disciplines. However, the definition of the term varies according to different disciplines, and it is not easy to define multiculturalism. In other academic literature, it has been described in several ways. The concept has strong ideological and political content, so the term is used in all decision-making processes and political discussions. After the 1960s, it has been a significant concept in most international, national, and even local debates and discussions. In general, it refers to various strategies for dealing with the cultural diversity and social heterogeneity of modern societies (Wilson 2010: 4-5).

“Multiculturalism considers itself as the route to a more tolerant and inclusive society because it recognizes that there is a diversity of cultures, and rejects the assimilation into the cultural traditions of the dominant group” (Philip, 2007: 14).

Multicultural policy was prompted by the presence of demographically very significant immigrant populations, and was formulated with the view that in the interests of national unity, newcomers need not be required to assimilate, to shed their previous identities and culture, but rather, the recognition and encouragement of ethnic diversity may help build the country and have a quite positive impact on social cohesion (Reitz, et al. 2009: 5). In the words of Rosado multiculturalism is a

“system of beliefs and behaviors that recognizes and respects the presence of all diverse groups in an organization or society, acknowledges and values their socio-cultural differences, and encourages and enables their continued contribution within an inclusive cultural context which empowers all within the organization or society” (Rosado 1996: 2).

The concept has different meanings, and positive and negative advantages or consequences have been a primary concern nowadays. Since 90s the degradation of the idea of multiculturalism has started because of conflicts and controversies that took place in different multicultural societies between different immigrant and host communities. Many countries began to implement some other policies instead of this. Scholars call this ‘backlash of multiculturalism’. Wide criticism of multiculturalism covered a lot of aspects, like a challenge to national identity and loyalty, political, economic, and social stability, etc. In the words of Kenan Malik, multiculturalism is a political mechanism that restricts people's ability to absorb diverse experiences is multiculturalism. Additionally, by separating society into set cultures and forcing inflexible identities on those who belong to each culture, it erodes the potential for discussion and disagreement (Malik, 2015: 21-22).

2. Origin and Growth of Multiculturalism

European history has always had problems dealing with multiculturalism. A lot of turns happened in multiculturalism according to changing migration conditions. Multiculturalism became relevant in Europe in the second half of the 20th century, especially after the Second World War. After that, every decade has been marked by major happenings. The present cultural diversity of most European countries is the aftereffect of this migration. The First and Second World Wars changed social and cultural life conditions, especially in Western democracies. Travelers and the labour force can migrate all over Europe much more simply and safely than ever in the contemporary globalizing world. An individual can move anywhere on the continent except for some countries. The Schengen agreement under the EU plays a vital role in this position. By this agreement, any European citizen can travel anywhere in Europe without a passport, other border restrictions, or a visa.

‘Unity in diversity’, the multicultural idea was the basis behind the foundation of the EU. The term means that the EU shall promote diversity in its member countries and share values with all members. In the year 2000, ‘unity in diversity’ was the official motto of the EU. Multiculturalism in Europe was built in the 20th century on political structures to deal with religious and linguistic divides. Many European countries contain two or three other nations or communities distinct from dominant cultural values, language, etc.

3. Sources of Multiculturalism

In a modern society, cultural diversity arises from various sources. Almost all cultures worldwide are diverse in their vast differences in ethnic, cultural, religious, and distinct ways of life within communities. There has been a significant change in the old traditional forms of a mono-cultural society. This is also reflected in the later nation-building process, where most societies became heterogeneous. The people in this modern world, including men and women, strongly believe in liberal individualism and are very much independent in making their own decisions and expressing their views and ways of life (Pretty, J, et al, 2009: 105). All individuals have their views of life. These people's attitudes have reinforced traditional moral values, which give much importance to an individual's choice rather than anything else. In this era of super globalization, people respond in different ways to events and happenings in society.

Immigrants, including skilled and unskilled labour, are needed everywhere globally and belong to different cultural groups. This represents one crucial source of diversity. Other countries allow international refugees and asylum seekers to complete international commitments. The process of globalization ensured the movement of people freely all across

the world, which also became an essential reason for cultural diversity. The conscious or unconscious efforts of globalization also promoted cultural diversity. The changes in the concept of an individual's liberal values and guiding principles compelled individuals to make cultural experimentation and live and learn about other cultures. It created new ways and spaces for understanding and organizing human life. There has been a change in cultural and moral values, which is reflected in understanding and organizing the social system. Economic, technological, demographic, and other changes are also a source of cultural diversity.

4. Themes of Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism is another term used to accommodate different ethnic of minorities and it is different from all other ways to maintain cultural diversity because it recognizes groups, not just individuals, at all levels like identities, associations, belonging, including diasporic connections; behaviour, culture, language, religious practice, etc.; and political mobilization. A multicultural society has five basic levels of resemblance. They are:-

- a) There are differences/groups.
- b) These are based on different societal elements like race, religion, language, etc.
- c) Not all groups are groups in the same Diaspora.
- d) They have different 'priorities' (e.g., attitudes towards customs and traditions, values and norms, responses to other socio-economic and political issues, and trajectories).
- e) The above will vary between individuals within groups and so not all group members are members in the same way (Modood, 2013: 110). This shows the intensity of diversity in every multicultural society.

5. Post Colonialism

Multiculturalism was a term that started to be used in politics and society after the Second World War. In the very next years, after the end of the Second World War in 1946 and 1947, decolonization started all over the world. Many colonies became independent, which were the colonies of many European countries. The term multiculturalism originated from its popularity shortly after 2 World War II. So, multiculturalism has been described as the offspring of post-colonialism. In the colonial era, importance was given only to Western ideologies and culture, especially European culture¹. It has been called the era of 'white culture'. Whites dominated everywhere in the world. They conquered the world, and many countries became the colonies of many European empires or nations. Through colonization, they spread Western culture everywhere in the world. However, in the post-colonial period, the situation changed; all colonies gained their independence through freedom fights, and some anti-Western cultures challenged the imperial cultures. Many scholars call it "black culture."² It came into the scene as a manifestation of post-colonialism.

The colonial period was the era of a Eurocentric³ world. In this era, Europeans promoted their culture, religion, and values. In a cultural aspect, post-colonialism was characterized by two main features. Firstly, it challenged the Eurocentric world, which gave prime importance to the dominant European ideologies. The challenges were from more

¹ In the Western world, Europe stands out for its rich cultural and linguistic diversity. This unique European culture is built on various elements, including its distinct historical and geographical characteristics, the socio-political evolution of its nations, and the cultural differences that emerged from colonization. These factors contribute to Europe's uniqueness compared to other parts of the Western world, such as the United States (<https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/cutting-edge-infinite-reservoir-cultural-diversity-shaping-future-we-want>).

² Black culture has come to signify the black community, where these traditions were kept, and whose struggles survive in the persistence of the black experience (the historical experience of black people in the Diaspora), of the black aesthetic (the distinctive cultural repertoires out of which popular representations were made), and of the black counter narratives we have struggled to voice (Hall 1993: 110).

³ The concept of euro centrism as currently used pays more attention to precisely this aspect: the distortion of the consciousness and self-knowledge of humanity by the insistence of people of European descent that all valid, universal scientific knowledge, economic progress, political structures, and works of art flow only from their ancestors. Euro centrism acknowledges contributions from non-European cultures but says that if they're important enough, they'll be subsumed within the Western legacy (Ucelli and O'Neil 1992: 35).

developing countries that demanded more liberal principles. Religions like Islam and their ideologies started to spread in the world. Secondly, the post-colonial era has been characterized by more importance to cultural identity. Culture has become an essential factor in determining one's identity everywhere. The Cultural Revolution and conflicts also occurred in the post-colonial era. For many, it was the start of an Afro-centric world⁴.

6. Diversity

Diversity has two connotations in a multicultural society: unity among diversity and diversity within unity. Diversity is the core feature of every multicultural society. All multicultural societies came into existence with the principle that in every society, different identities could be blended; they would not conflict with each other. In this sense, multiculturalism says people can have any culture without changing their values and traditions when immigrating to another society. Loyalty towards the mother nation and the country of settlement is entirely different. Multiculturalists argue that through cultural recognition, political stability can be acquired. People secure their identity rooted in their culture by participating in their cultural forms or traditions. So, denying their cultural practices may isolate or marginalize that section from society. Multiculturalists believe that multicultural policies cannot establish cultural diversity. Multiculturalism means enjoying and celebrating cultural diversity, including various lives, styles, cultural practices, traditions, and beliefs. Cultural diversity brings cross-cultural tolerance, understanding, and a willingness to respect differences. Diversity is against social polarization, marginalization, exclusion, etc.

7. Ethnicity

Today, politics, identity, and difference are defined mainly based on racial or ethnic terms. Ethnicity is a term that carries both racial and cultural tones; because of this, it is a complex term. The members of a particular ethnic group will share some features, such as descent from common ancestors, common traditions, customs, and practices, language, and religion. So it develops a sense of togetherness and a common identity among the members. This will be the main feature that distinguishes different cultures. The most prevalent view of multiculturalism is rooted in race and ethnicity. Ethnicity represents traditions, customs, and practices of a community.

8. Culture and Identity

Identity plays an essential role in every man's life. Identity differentiates one man from others. Cultural behavior creates a man's identity. The language, religion, values, beliefs, customs and traditions, dress code, food, etc., are all part of his culture and determine his identity. Multiculturalism is a form of identity politics. Through this, every cultural group tries to advance and promote its culture. This is why multiculturalism is a part of communitarianism⁵. This means every individual is blended into their society and culture in which they were born and brought up. Culture creates a sense of the social and historical way of thinking in one's mind. It is against the principles of universalism and mainly concentrates on the principles of particularism⁶. Universal principles explain the standard features and identify a society as a union. Particularist principles identify the distinctive features of a society. It is more about distinctiveness, especially in terms of cultural identity.

a) Language

The maintenance of a particular cultural identity has been closely linked to the upholding of their national language. Language is an element of cultural identity. Language has always been a great root in the history of that community. First, we must understand the language to understand and learn the traditions and customs of a particular culture, whether

⁴ Afro centric world means little more "emphasis on shared African origins among all 'black' people, taking pride in those origins and African history and culture or those aspects of New World, cultures seen as representing African survivals and a belief that Eurocentric bias has distorted or blocked knowledge of Africans and their cultures" (Howe, 1998: 1).

⁵ Communitarianism is often contrasted with classical liberalism, a philosophical position that holds each individual should formulate the good on their own. Communitarians examine the ways shared conceptions of the good (values) are formed, transmitted, justified, and enforced. Hence their interest in communities (and moral dialogues within them), historically transmitted values and mores, and the societal units that transmit and enforce values such the family, schools, and voluntary associations (social clubs, churches, and so forth), which are all parts of communities (Etzioni, 2003: 224).

⁶ Particularism is the belief that historical, cultural and other differences between people and societies are more important than what they have in common (Heywood 2012: 20).

dead or alive. Only then can we access the literature that says more about myths and legends, and it also helps to shape our knowledge of how the world view is different between different cultures.

b) Religion

Religion is essential to cultural values and determines a person's identity. Usually, the religious practices of a particular community turn out to be its basic customs and conventions, and they also socialize these with the next generation. Different religions in the universe show how the members of a community interpret their role, with the help of the culture of that community. When an immigrant society integrates into the culture of the dominant society, the religion of the immigrant society is also affected. In short, the study of multiculturalism also involves the study of religious diversity.

9. Minority Rights

Giving equal importance to minority cultures is the core feature of multiculturalism. Minority communities may include indigenous people and immigrant communities. In every society, we can see these two types of minority groups.

According to Will Kymlicka, there are three kinds of minority rights:

a) Self-government rights

b) Poly ethnic⁷ rights and

c) Representation rights (Kymlicka 1995: 27).

Self-government rights belong to national minorities of a country, indigenous people who share a common language, religion, a definite territory, and a region. In self-government rights, these people can enjoy political power. This power should be distributed among the Center and states through federalist policies, like a precondition for ensuring self-government rights. This will give national minorities control over some political units.

Poly ethnic rights help immigrants to maintain their own culture. This ensures that different minority groups, like ethnic groups and religious minorities, as well as immigrant communities, can retain their cultural identity. This includes exemptions and special treatments in many cases, like dress code for Muslims, animal slaughtering exemptions, etc. Special representation rights are available for some disadvantaged groups. In this, they are given some reservations to ensure their representation in some senior positions in the political and public sphere. There's discrimination, but only for the protection of these minority groups. And also, these kinds of rights are necessary to ensure the participation and promotion of minority groups and to avoid marginalization. Minority rights are considered group rights because these rights are given to groups, not individuals (Bauböck, 1996:10). This explains why multiculturalism is more about collectivism⁸. In a multicultural society, minority rights are treated as special rights. According to the nature and customs of the immigrant community, the government gives them some rights to support their religious and cultural values. For example, Muslims can have their dress code, including headscarf, burqa, etc. Also, special minority rights have been given to minority groups who are disadvantaged and live in the lower section of society. These rights seem necessary to promote and protect this minority group. But the real conflict will come when the citizens of the country feel that all this is meaningless and only minority groups can get the advantage of all these rights. It creates problems with the uniform dress codes and the democratic principle of equality being violated. In many situations, minority rights are controversial and are a reason for problems in society.

⁷ Polyethnicity can be found where cultural diversity arises from individual and familial immigration, which in turn leads immigrants to amalgamate into loose associations (Melançon, 2012:5).

⁸ Collectivism emphasizes embeddedness of individuals in a larger group. It encourages conformity and discourages individuals from dissenting and standing out. It makes collective action easier because individuals internalize group interests to a greater degree. This naturally looks at the relations between objects, the environment and the context and focuses less on objects themselves (Gorodnichenko and Roland 2012: 233).

10. Common Belonging and Togetherness

It is considered a two-way process. In a society, migrants will integrate into the host culture when there are mutual actions between the immigrants and natives to create a peaceful, multicultural society. The immigrant society should be willing to integrate with the host society, and from the part of the host society, they should be prepared to welcome the immigrants. So, common belonging will only apply when there is respect, mutual relations, and interactions, and sometimes adjustments will be made between different communities. Immigrants must be loyal to their host country and respect its culture, values, and traditions. The host society should feel proud of that country's ethnocultural diversity and must understand the immigrant culture.

Immigrants must ensure that they are participating in the everyday life of that host country by discharging their duties, respecting others, and not abusing other values. Not only in the social aspect but also in the political sphere, they must be loyal, like respecting the laws and rules of the host country and being productive workers. This doesn't mean that immigrants should forget their mother nation; they must be loyal and respectful to the nation that received them. This involves learning the language, history, geography, moral sensibilities, norms of behavior, etc. as well as obligations and interaction that are also needed from the host community. They must respect, tolerate, and promote the immigrant cultures and not try to discriminate against or undervalue others. Then only there will be togetherness and social cohesion.

11. Institutionalization of Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism is a term that has been used in various ways to describe the nature of cultural diversity in a society. 'Multiculturalism has two different connotations, descriptive and normative (Heywood, 2005: 315). In a descriptive sense, it is considered a diversity of culture that arises from a society where two or more cultures exist. In this kind of society, as in other cultures, people have their customs and traditions and generate a distinctive sense of collective identity. The term explains that a communal society arises from ethnic, religious, racial, and linguistic differences. The government's actions in these societies ensure the institutionalization of multiculturalism and equality of opportunity. This can be seen in education, health care, media, etc. Through this, it can be assured that formal recognition of the needs of different ethnic groups has been made. The government establishes these multicultural institutions also to give representational rights to other ethnic groups. In a descriptive sense, multiculturalism means simply a socio-demographic and socio-cultural diversity; in a normative sense, it implies approval of such diversity; in an ideological sense, it means promotion of cultural diversity, tolerance of diversity and the policies that supports both (Pakulski, 2014: 25). As a normative term multiculturalism seems more as an idealistic view which explains about that multiculturalism means joyous encouraging or promotions even celebrations of communal diversity, to show that larger society respects and is being tolerate with each other. Through this, the society achieved social cohesion.

The following policies are considered the foundation for every multicultural society to ensure the recognition of ethnocultural diversity. Multicultural policies or rights and powers which are given to immigrant communities are not the same type of rights as those for the indigenous peoples or national minorities. There are lots of differences in the rights of immigrants and national minorities. Generally, Immigrants will not seek land rights, official language status, and territorial autonomy, etc Treatment or acceptance of immigrant groups in multination states is different from one another, even though there are some standard policies like: -

- a) **Public recognition:** Ethnic minority groups or organizations have different facilities and activities in the public sphere, such as public consulting offices for ethnic groups, with the help of these ethnic organizations. These groups have various affirmations, including Constitutional, parliamentary, and judicial. Through this, multiculturalism works at the centre, regional, and local levels.
- b) **Education:** Through this, multiculturalism is included in school curricula. Special care is given to some ethnic practices, values, and beliefs in sensitive ethnic and religious groups. For non-ethnic minority children, different curricula aimed to teach them about their ancestors and their origin; through this, they can learn about their ethnic background. Funds are also given for bilingual education to support mother tongue teaching and policy liberalizations to establish schools for minority groups.
- c) **Social Services:** In the processes of retraining and restructuring and for delivering culturally sensitive practices, special care has always been ensured among social workers, public employees, police, healthcare providers, and judicial institutions.

- d) Public materials: The government's information is printed in multiple languages. Then only people from other language groups can understand and respond to contemporary problems.
- e) Law: In these societies, cultural exceptions in laws and rules have been given to different groups to support and promote their culture. For example, individuals from Sikh groups are allowed to wear turbans instead of helmets while riding two-wheelers. People from some religious minority groups are allowed to take oaths on their religious sacred books like the Qur'an, the Bhagavad Gita, etc, instead of the Bible. Recognition of marriages and divorces based on the traditions and customs of different ethnic groups is also allowed. There is protection from actions such as discrimination and prejudice.
- f) Religious accommodation: Allowing prayer places for some religious groups in public areas and exceptions to dress codes in offices, schools, and other official places. Support and permission are needed to create worship places like churches, temples, and mosques. These people are also permitted to have cemeteries, a funeral place, and an allowance for worship during work hours.
- g) Food: Allowances have been given to slaughter animals to perform specific rituals; provisions have been made to ban foods in public institutions according to religious beliefs (halal, kosher, vegetarian).
- h) Broadcasting and media: Public media will be subject to some restrictions in a multicultural society. They are not allowed to publish or broadcast anything that abuses other cultures. The media should take care of issues like ethnic representation and other sensitive matters as per the rules of public media or media licensing of each country. The minority groups are allowed to own their media to prevent discrimination or to avoid stereotypes.
- i) Allowing dual citizenship.
- j) Funding for ethnic groups to ensure support for their cultural activities. This is to promote music, arts, and other cultural forms from minority cultures (Kymlicka and Banting 2006: 56).
- k) Affirmative actions for disadvantaged immigrant groups.
- l) Programmes should encourage minority immigrant groups to improve their participation in scientific and research fields.

The following are the policies often implemented to deal with or to protect and promote the identity and culture of indigenous peoples,

- a) Recognition of land rights/title
- b) recognition of self-government rights
- c) upholding historic treaties and/or signing new treaties
- d) recognition of cultural rights to language, hunting/fishing, and sacred sites
- e) recognition of customary law
- f) guarantees of representation/consultation in the central government
- g) Constitutional or legislative affirmation of the distinct status of indigenous peoples
- h) support/ratification for international instruments on indigenous rights
- i) Affirmative action (Kymlicka 2010: 36 also Banting et al. 2006: 62).

The groups like Quebecois in Canada, Basques and Catalans in Spain, Germans in South Tyrol, Walloons and Flemish in Belgium, Swedish in Finland, Welsh and Scots in Britain, etc, enjoy some kinds of special rights or multicultural citizenship (Kymlicka 2010: 36).

- a) Regional or national official language status;
- b) Federal or quasi-federal territorial autonomy;
- c) Assurances of representation in the national administration or on the Constitutional Courts
- d) Public support for minority language media, schools, and colleges
- e) Legislative or constitutional support for multinationalism
- f) In accordance with international personalities, such as permitting the sub state region to sign treaties, serve on international bodies, or field an Olympic team (Vertovec and Wessendorf, 2010: 37, Kymlicka and Banting, 2006: 60).

12. CONCLUSION

Culture is an influential or inseparable part of all human beings. When different cultures come into contact, new or fusion cultures are generated. Sometimes people get attracted to other cultures and start practicing them. Everyone has their views and ideas about their values, beliefs, and way of life, so wherever they go, they will follow the same. Some facts prove that Multiculturalism has been there and recognized even in the times of ancient empires. Multiculturalism

had high expectations in almost all Western democracies. But it always failed to fulfill these expectations. In many places, it changed its dimensions dangerously and altered its meaning both officially and unofficially. The concept's significance disappeared in contact with conflicts and violence in many multicultural societies. In the last couple of decades, there have been several heated arguments raised in different parts of the world on multiculturalism about terrorism and Islamophobia. Multicultural policies will succeed only if the host society has been diverse for centuries; otherwise, there must be some treaties between the immigrants and natives regarding their mutual interactions and co-existence.

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