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## Multiculturalism and Indian Languages: A Short Understanding

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The term ‘Multiculturalism’ means different aspects to different people. This notion has been interpreted in various ways such as a descriptive notion or as policy so that there are many ‘multiculturalisms’ (Eriksen 2006). Its definitions range from extreme tolerance of unfamiliar customs and norms to blaming all immigrants for a society’s economic (unemployment) and social problems such as terrorism (*Daily Mail* 2011). “In common usage it generally refers to equal respect of all cultures in a society, thereby maintaining their cultural distinctiveness. In the political sense it refers to ideology and policies of different countries that deal with diversity in populations” (Gosh 2018).

The term “Multiculturalism” is said to have emerged in 4<sup>th</sup> decade of last century as an antidote to a form of nationalism that implied a nation’s superiority over others to favour multilevel inclusiveness, which meant respect for all sections of peoples. Its more recent use is connected with Canada’s official Multiculturalism Policy (1971), intended to be an attempt at maintaining democratic principles of justice and equality in an increasingly diverse society. Now, although widely used globally as a means of managing diversity in terms of language, ethnicity, race and religion, lack of conceptual understanding of the term has made it a hotly debated topic. Regardless, because multiculturalism upsets the status quo uniformity of homogenous national societies, the concept has become more important; especially in those societies those have differentiated multilevel socio-cultural and political diversities.

Multiculturalism entails a diversity of contesting and cooperative cultural voices that are allowed to cohere the larger community of the nation on their own terms and cohabitation. As such, it should be seen as a contrast of mono-culturalism, the impulse to impose one cultural order on all strata of society. Multicultural society thus cannot be reduced to a solitary ideological concept; instead, when the sharply contrasting cultural constructs of the national imaginary are set in dialogic relation there occurs an infinitely complicated *aporia* that cannot be resolved in the name of ideological stability or logical unity (Derrida 1982: 43-44). It must be established that socio-cultural identity is a continual play, a coming together and moving apart, of different cultures.

Multiculturalism inhabits a horizontal space, not a hierarchically stratified space. This can be explained in the light of postmodern theory. Postmodern theory, to represent view of theorized horizontal plane space, hits foundational theory, or essentialist philosophy, that supports mono-culturalism. *Francois Lyotard* defines, postmodernism as “incredulity towards metanarrative” that displaces the discourse of metanarrative or grand narrative and argues for a cultural space that is populated by little narratives (1993: 3). These narratives are ruled by their own rules and are not reliant on extra-narrational foundational rules for enunciation. Such discursive forms are not

arranged in a hierarchical order; they are allowed to flourish alongside of each other, on a horizontal space of cultural autonomy. Another term Lyotard has used is *differend*, which denotes “a case of conflict between two parties that can not be resolved for lack of a rule of judgment applicable to both arguments” (1988: xi). This is closer to what Derrida implies by *aporia*, disallowing the patterned development of a master narrative and blocking the cultural hegemony process of marginalization.

To discuss postmodern multicultural space *Gilles Deleuze* and *Felix Guattari* develop the idea of *rhizome*. A rhizome is any plant (like grass) whose root system spreads horizontally on the ground; as the plant grows outward and across it can grow to cover the whole land mass. It is a figure of non-hierarchical, structureless, open system. It is combated to the *aborescent*, the tree, which suggests the image of a root that grounds textual (and cultural) complexes in a foundational matrix in order to uphold a unified, centered and hierarchical system that characterizes the narratives of modernity (Behera 2012).

Multiculturalism may have few implications. First, it presents culture as a place of contestation and competition, in which the boundary has been engaged in dialect with the centre, setting off the free play of various elements. American critic *Wahneema Lubiano*, in her essay “*Like Being Mugged by a Metaphor: Multiculturalism and State Narratives*,” calls this experience radical multiculturalism, in which contestation is the dynamic force. Second, there may be historical multiculturalism, that aims at recovering lost historical, socio-cultural voices, as argued by *Ronald Takaki*, in his book *A Different Mirror* (1993).

The continuous deployment of the force of interconnecting existing and extinct languages and literatures through amalgamations, translation will resist the structure of domination and marginalization, foreground little narratives, and retrieve the lost historical cultural voices; it thus can serve the purposes of various forms of multiculturalism. Though multiculturalism conceives cultures as autonomous, it opens up a space for constant “negotiation” between them and even facilitates the process of hybridization. Between cultural forms there is the clearing in which interpenetration takes place. Translation operates in this clearing, in the “in-between” space, as an aid to and product of this negotiation process.

India is possibly the most diverse country in the world in fields of culture, ethnicity, language, religion, caste and class differences but the term multicultural may have not been used in India in terms of policy and it is only since the 1990s that the concept has been taken up by scholars. However, since the ages socio-political and cultural co-existence of the communities in larger Indian sub-continent made the languages nearer and overlapping to each other. Languages through their verbal communication and literary expressions have made them the true representatives and avenues of spreading universe of multiculturalism.

India directly does not have a national language. However, Hindi (Devanagiri script) and English are the official languages of the Union (or Central) Government, and there are 22 languages that have been given “official regional language” status although the country is home to hundreds of languages and dialects. India is a federal union of 28 states, and eight union territories (which are directly ruled by the Union Government) based on ethno-linguistic or ethno-religious groups. Each of these

territorial units has linguistic, multicultural and multi-religious minorities. Ancient language Sanskrit has its vibrant direct and indirect multilevel impacts on many other Indian languages since early ages.

Indian literatures are expressions of the vital plurality and productive diversity of our nation. States and united territories in India have no well-defined cultural boundaries; they cross each other's frontiers. Most of the cases, languages are not confined to the geographical boundaries of particular states; languages include many variations and dialects and share a number of features. States have a mixed population speaking different languages. When members of these communities communicate with each other, they often have to speak different mixed varieties of languages, so people inside their state as well as outside are constantly engaged in translation. India, thus, is a land of "translating consciousness" (Devy 1993: 135). This reality shows true essence of Indian society's multicultural dimensions.

A literary tendency in a particular language can go beyond the restrictions of the given language to establish social, cultural, political, historical, thematic, linguistic and rhetorical connections with literatures in other Indian languages. Every language through their dialects, oral histories and standardized literary works can socio-politically, culturally and historically influence the other co-existing and newly developing languages. This role has been played very positively by early languages like Sanskrit, Pali etc. This process helps to assimilating religious belief systems and making of harmonious socio-religious communities. Early translations of Sanskrit literatures, religious and philosophical scriptures and most importantly eternal Hindu Mythologies in other regional languages help to promote and bind differential regional cultures and communities. The Bhakti Poetry movement at one time spread across the regional and linguistic barriers of the country. There were poets, philosophers and writers who spoke and wrote in many languages and readers who understand and enjoyed literatures in more than one language. This type of multilingualism has increased within present population because of spread of education technical accesses. In middle aged India Persian and Urdu languages played vital positive roles to promote multiculturalism through multilingual activities and practices. In colonial Period speedy, radical, coercive educational and administrative use of English as official language brought various avenues to the Indian people to understand western socio-political and cultural system and communicate to other cultures within and outside Indian Sub-continent.

In a succinct discussion the impact and role of languages in promotion, maintenance and continuity in multiculturalism in diversified but united Indian Society can be expressed. In a scripture or text there can be multilingual situations, or polyphony, or the use of many languages. For example in antiquity the plays of Kalidas Sanskrit, Prakrit, and Magadhi were used with ease and naturalness and the audience could comprehend and enjoy the linguistic shifts within a single work. "*Literary creations have been appropriated and transformed into new incarnations in geographically and temporarily distant spaces. Texts have been transcreated, translated, adapted, imitated, and sometimes, interpreted and circulated in new literary constructs*(Behera 2012)."

Since the decline of Sanskrit as the essential language of creative expression the languages of various regions of India emerged as the mediums of knowledge, and literature. Knowledge that until then

had been confined to a few individuals was widened, to be made accessible to ordinary people. From this time translation have played a significant role in the diversification and spreading of knowledge and also in the development and enrichment of Indian languages and literatures. Numerous Sanskrit texts were translated into regional languages, and took different interpretations and forms. Sanskrit texts also inspired other languages to create new possibilities of creativity. The linguistic and cultural heterogeneity of Indian society as both a reality and the norm was recognized and established. In this phase south Indian languages became more accessible to other parts of the country. Amalgamation of southern, northern and north-eastern languages brought greater opportunities for multiculturalism through Interconnectivity and translations amongst languages. Introduction of English as official and communicative language has also increased speed of this process of multiculturalism in greater Indian Society. In the period translation helps expose Indian writers writing in one language to the styles, techniques and experimentations in the literatures of other languages, so that they can use these creatively in their own writings (Behera 2012).

However, it is arguable that in modern and postmodern period colonial hangover and rapid growth of globalization in communication significantly amplified hegemonic usages of English as solely important language of developing countries chiefly of ‘Commonwealth’. Indian scenario may not be different. So ongoing and further studies may make clear to that how in ongoing and future conditions the process of multiculturalism will be guided by interconnectivity of rich Indian Languages.

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