

A CRITICAL INTRODUCTION OF MULTICULTURALISM

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Multiculturalism is an ideology advocating that society could consist of, or at least allow and include, distinct cultural groups, with equal status. Multiculturalism contrasts with the monoculturalism, which was historically the norm in the nation state. The term multiculturalism is almost always applied to distinct cultures of immigrant groups in developed countries, not to the presence of indigenous peoples. Multiculturalism began as an official policy in English-speaking countries, starting in Canada in 1971. It was quickly adopted by most member states in the European Union, as official policy, and as a social consensus among the elite. In recent years several European states, notably the Netherlands and Denmark, right-of-centre governments have reversed the national policy consensus, and returned to an official monoculturalism. A similar reversal is the subject of debate in the United Kingdom and Germany among others.

Multiculturalism is best understood neither as a political doctrine with a programmatic content nor as a philosophical school with a distinct theory of man's place in the world but as a perspective on or a way of viewing human life. Its central insights are three each of which is sometimes misinterpreted by its advocates and needs to be carefully reformulated if it is to carry conviction. First human beings are culturally embedded in the sense that they grow up and live within a culturally structured world and organize their lives and social relations in terms of a culturally derived system of meaning and significance. Second, different cultures represent different systems of meaning and visions of the good life. Third, every culture is internally plural and reflects a continuing conversation between its different traditions and strands of thought. This does not mean that it is devoid of coherence and identity, but that its identity is plural, fluid and open. Cultures grow out of conscious and unconscious interactions with each other, define their identity in terms of what they take to be their significant other and are at least partially multicultural in their origin and constitution. A multiculturalist's perspective is composed of the creative interplay of three important and complementary insights namely the cultural embeddedness of human beings, the inescapability and desirability of cultural plurality and the plural and multicultural constitution of each culture.

The early 1970s marked the emergence of the multicultural movement at first in Canada and Australia and then in the U.S.A., U.K., Germany and elsewhere. It has now begun to dominate the political agenda of even France, the strongest bastion of the nation state, which takes no official note of its citizen's ethnicity, culture and religion and does not record these in its decennial census. Theorists of multiculturalism make a distinction between inclusion and assimilation. The idea of uniform citizenship seeks to assimilate diverse populations by prescribing uniform or identical rules and practices. It is therefore a non-homogenizing and non-assimilative mode of inclusion.

Multiculturalism is being viewed by theorists as opening new ways of literary representation in the 21st century. During the past quarter century the realization has come that there exist other faces of reality, at times quite contrary to the old writings of white mythographers. It is precisely a new sense of a full, diversifying and ever proliferating identities that has brought the sign "Multiculturalism grew out of the social and political movements of the 1960s. It acquired currency as a curriculum reform movement on the campuses in America. Gates says that "*multiculturalism is concerned with the representation, not of difference as such, but of cultural identities*"¹. Critiquing multiculturalism from a radical point of view, the theorist E. San Juan, Jr, decries the "*cult of ethnicity and the fetish of pluralism*"².

According to Hazel Carby the idea that culture denotes antagonistic relations of domination and subordination undermines the pluralistic notion of compatibility inherent in multiculturalism she analyzes :

The paradigm of multiculturalism actually excludes the concept of dominant and subordinate cultures either indigenous or migrant and fails to recognize that the existence of racism relates to the possession and exercise of politico-economic control and authority and also to forms of resistance to the power of dominant social groups³.

Susan Stewart argues,

our conception of nature, our organization of the senses, our structures of Kinship, our notions of public and private space and time, our use of symbols, all are subjected not only to generational and temporal transformations but also to constant interplay of traditions⁴.

According to Gates

"This hypothesis leads to the supposition that one exists as a cultural atom that one's identity exists anterior to one's engagement in the field of the political. This means that in this field one arrives already constituted, already culturally whole and political influence has no role in creating or contouring one's cultural or ethnic identity"⁵.

Multiculturalism a post - Second world war phenomenon, that touched the Anglo Saxon world, basically contested the coercive assimilation' strategy of governments to form a monocultural societies in countries of cultural diversities it has been accepted as a government policy in countries like Canada or Great Britain, though in the U.S.A. "*it has remained in the realm of pedagogical and social theory*"⁶.

The multiculturalists oppose assimilation, since assimilation means an attempt to destroy. The cultural distinctiveness of the different ethnic communities in order to force them to adopt the cultural norms of the mainstream. In these days of "ethnogenesis", it is no wonder, therefore that 'coercive assimilation' has been replaced with cultural pluralism, more specifically with multiculturalism. In the U.S.A. for instance, the idea of the "melting pot" has been replaced with that of a "salad - bowl" - the former a metaphor for 'assimilation' and the latter for 'integration'. Multiculturalism then is a philosophy that emphasizes cultural pluralism. Multiculturalism, not only speaks of differences in cultures, but also emphasizes the need to respect those differences, and thereby to acknowledge the equality of all cultures.

In theory the multiculturalists have talked about 'respecting' differences but they have not talked, about 'knowing' and 'experiencing' other cultures. Multiculturalism, as is best evident in the metaphor of the 'salad-bowl', emphasizes the existence of different cultures without underlining the need of interaction among them. In a multicultural society, because of the

ghettos', each culture remains separated from the other, and so though in theory multiculturalists talk about respecting other cultures. *'The Danger of words'*. Definitions of Concepts most used in Anti racist work defines Multiculturalism as *Multiculturalism means the existence or the promotion or the existence of different cultures alongside each other, normally in one country*⁷. Many people use this concept when they speak of an anti - racist future but multiculturalism can also mean the mental isolation of cultures. Some racists believe in a kind of multiculturalism that is close to the 'apartheid' - system that existed in South Africa where different cultures were separated in a cruel and unjust way.

Multicultural diversity is a result of centuries of 'migration. In the present century we have been witnessing a rapid increase in migration across the globe. These migrations create new displacements, new diasporas with migration and settlement abroad disspread cultures come in contact. Thinking, through multiplicity, pluralism, hybridity and heterogeneity, requires reconceptualization of differences to construct a new identity is a multicultural society to imagine a nation a new one has to transcend the limits of space, barriers of race and language, and rise above history and past, Multiculturalism is a painful process of social change.

Multiculturalism faces another challenge from the Eurocentric world. *Expressions like 'mosaic of culture', 'boutique culturalism' and even 'melting pot theory' seem to be empty metaphors that cannot do justice to the complexity of cultural crossing and profusion*⁸. A heterogeneous country has to be cohesive and its cohesion, can only be based on mutual respect and the extent to which they can negotiate and accommodate with one another.

*"Multiculturalism is from many cultures", as John Kibler says, "This could mean one culture + second culture + third culture + ---- or many cultures within a culture, i.e. Subculture + Subculture + ---- or combination of both"*⁹. For Luso, *"Multiculturalism can be best explained by reference to its three most prominent paradigms, i.e. Collectivism, Egalitarianism and Diversity"*¹⁰. In short, multiculturalism is a negotiation between two or more cultures within the country and beyond it.

The word 'multiculturalism' connotes either some mode of transnational interrelationships between the cultures of two or more countries the world comprises different nationalities, ethnicity, races, cultures and genders, yet they are mixed intermingled and hybridised. Thus, 'Multiculturalism' can be seen as having referentiality, however ambitious or ambiguous, to transnational association between the cultures of two or more nations. E.D.Hirsch in his Dictionary of Cultural Literacy (1994) explicitly defines the term 'Multiculturalism' *"as the view that the various cultures in a society merit equal respect and scholarly interest and specified its locus as the United States in the 1970's, 1980's and, 1990's"*¹¹.

The American concept of multiculturalism is the assimilationist view of 'the melting pot', in which diverse groups such as African, Native, Latinola, Asian, gay, lesbian, working class, minority religious groups immigrants were supposed to be assimilated into a new nation and to develop a new identity of commonality this is called "American Mainstream" or "American National Culture" in which each individual labelled a minority, a participant in a subculture or non-mainstream, should try to blend. In contrast, those who view the United States as a 'salad bowl' recognize that individual culture contributes to the making of the American culture.

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