

# Multiculturalism in India: Opportunities and Challenges

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**Abstract:** Being a land of diversity, India has a philosophy of evidence, acceptance of different culture in its territory. More precisely, India is a land of multi lingual, multi religious and multi-cultural communities where they co-exist. The constitution facilitates different social groups to promote their distinct cultural identity and ethnic heritages keeping in view of making the democratic values and constitutional ideas stronger. Multiculturalism encourages the diversified cultural groups and different viewpoints providing an increased level of tolerance and perspectives to strengthen the Indian democracy which in turn can make the country more innovative and progressive. Besides, prejudice, cultural and lingual conflicts, discrimination, sectarianism are some among challenges of Indian multicultural society; should be easily avoided if people are ready to co-exist with the diversification of culture.

**Keywords:** Challenge, Culture, Democracy, India, Multiculturalism, Opportunity.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

“Sarva Dharma Sambhava”

“Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam”

“Unity in Diversity”

➤ (Unique Elements that Encourage Indian Multiculturalism)

Multiculturalism has become a very important political ideology in the contemporary world. But when talking about multiculturalism, it is first necessary to know what culture is. It is a comprehensive set of values, symbols, beliefs, behaviour, clothing codes, food, lifestyle, arts and other practices that a group of people uses in their social lives to distinguish themselves from other groups (Causadias, 2020). In contrast, multiculturalism has two definitions. Multiculturalism is sometimes used as a descriptive concept, but it can also refer to a strategy that addresses cultural diversity.

Multiculturalism generally means the co-existence of different cultures. However, the term multiculturalism does not only describe a culturally diverse society; it also refers to policies and programs aimed at preserving this cultural diversity. As a concept, multiculturalism is based on two basic principles. These two are –

- Idea of no Discrimination
- Promoting Cultural Diversity

Multiculturalism is deeply associated with ‘politics of self-identity’, ‘politics of diversity’, and ‘politics of recognition’, all of which takes into account appropriate recognition of cultural diversity as a prerequisite for revaluing marginalised identities, altering prevailing patterns of communication and representation that exclude marginalized groups (Mishra & Kumar, 2014).

## II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objectives of this paper are as follows:

- To provide a comprehensive overview of the Indian Multiculturalism.
- To articulate nature of multiculturalism in India as “unity amidst diversity”.
- To conduct a comparative analysis of its opportunities and challenges in the context of Indian multicultural society.

## III. METHODOLOGY

This paper is based upon the method of content analysis. Hence, the data has been collected from secondary sources, namely, magazines, documents, books, working papers, relevant publications, articles and internet sites etc.

#### IV. MULTICULTURALISM IN INDIA

India is an ideal model of a society that supports multiculturalism, where diverse cultures coexist. India has welcomed visitors from all across the world since prehistoric times. Some arrived as intruders, while others came as migrants and made this place their permanent home. The people who lived in India today are incredibly diverse, with varying ethnic backgrounds, traits, religions, languages, attire, cuisines, social groups, and life ideologies. India has established the groundwork for its social, economic and political growth with its remarkable diversity. India has been hailed as a successful democratic nation by numerous achievers worldwide, in part because of the requirement that has required unique measures to fit every culture. This demonstrates the success of India's multiculturalism (Saikia, 2023).

India is democratic state where society is characterized by pluralism. Democracy and Multiculturalism are complementary. Multiculturalism can survive only in a democratic society and society with true multiculturalism is democratic. The three pillars of democracy are equality, justice, and freedom. As a democratic nation, India offers equal protection under the law, equal freedom for all, and economic, social and political justice. The development of a multicultural society also depends on this setting. This is due to the fact that multiculturalism demands equal status for every social group. The main goal of multiculturalism is to provide equal justice and freedom to every social group (Borah & Saikia, 2022).

The constitutional ethos of India demonstrates that multiculturalism is recognized in India. Although not as explicitly mentioned in the constitution of India as in the constitutions of Canada or Australia, many provisions of the constitution of India encourage the value of multiculturalism in India (Mallick, 2013). The preamble of the Indian Constitution, the Fundamental Rights, various Schedules and so on all reflect the multicultural character of India, either directly or indirectly. For example- Article 25 guarantees every Indian citizen the right to profess, practice, and preach any religion he/she chooses. Article 26 gives Indians the right to establish religious institutions. The constitution of India protects the culture of minorities under Articles 29 and 30 (Parasar & Tiwari, 2007). The various Schedules of the Indian Constitution also reflect the multicultural character of India. The 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Schedules can be mentioned in this regard. The 5<sup>th</sup> Schedule provides for the establishment of various commissions for the development of tribal people living in different parts of India. The 6<sup>th</sup> Schedule provides for the formation of Zila Parishads or Autonomous Councils in order to support the tribal communities residing in the north-eastern states of India. Through these councils, the ethnic groups can maintain their language and culture (Siamkhum, 2015). In addition, the Supreme Court of India has made a number of statements supporting our nation's multiculturalism and the spirit of the constitution (Parasar & Tiwari, 2007). So, we can say that each culture in India has individual traits,

similar to the elements in a salad bowl that contribute to its overall composition.

#### V. FUTURE PROSPECTS & OPPORTUNITIES

India's multicultural fabric rooted in its history and diversity and continues to offer unique opportunities for progress and contributing to social harmony, innovation, and global recognition in the 21st century. However, the current dynamic global and domestic challenges demand innovative strategies to preserve the India's multicultural ethos to ensure inclusive growth. It should be mentioned that since India is a democratic country, the future potential of multiculturalism is noteworthy. This is because as a democratic country, India has given equal dignity to all people irrespective of caste, religion, race and language, whether in practice or constitutionally. While India has faced various challenges in this regard, it is true that India has maintained its cultural diversity since ancient times and will not escape this mentality in the future.

There are many different languages and dialects spoken in India; 22 languages of them are recognized by the 8<sup>th</sup> schedule of the Indian Constitution while the remaining languages are protected by state laws. Political decentralization really encourages local people to take appropriate action to protect their regional traditions by giving them the chance to run for office. In other words, it strengthens India's multiculturalism by promoting the reconciliation process of spatial culture & political decentralization (Singh, 2020). As the population of India is increasing day by day, the hopes, aspirations, needs of people in every aspects and cultural variety of this country are also increasing. Therefore, it is imperative that the Government of India takes more vigilant and impartial steps in this regard. By doing this, Indian multiculturalism can be maintained.

The India's model of coexistence can serve as an example of inclusive development by fostering mutual respect and collaboration in the age of global polarization. It can be judged as the best model to reduce social conflicts and enhance national solidarity to strengthen the fabric of Indian Democracy (Chatterjee, 2019). It has enough opportunity to develop policies that are more inclusive for marginalized groups, ensuring equitable distribution of resources and representation in governance to focus on tribal welfare, linguistic preservation, and religious tolerance which can reenergising its multicultural nature. Moreover, the fabric of Indian multiculturalism have also enough possibility to foster the commercialization of traditional arts, crafts, cinema and integrating local cultures into mainstream markets can generate employment and promote economic growth (Mukherjee, 2021). Besides, the Indian multicultural education provides opportunities to foster respect for cultural diversity and equips students with the skills for global needs.

India's multicultural identity can also be considered as the asset in global diplomacy for using unique soft power. Initiatives such as cultural exchanges, festivals, and heritage

tourism strengthen India's position on the global stage as a promoter of peace and pluralism to influence the global community (Nair, 2021).

So we can say that, India is a vast nation with a wide range of religious traditions and cultural practices. There are differences in the languages spoken in different parts of the nation. They also had a propensity to wear different clothes in different areas. Furthermore, the external appearance varies from one part of the nation to the next. India is a diverse country, but what unites us Indians is our feeling of unity and connection to one another despite our many different cultures and customs. In this context India is a great example of “Unity in Diversity” (Shairgojri & Mir, 2022).

## VI. CHALLENGES TO OVERCOME

As every discipline has both positive and negative aspects, the concept of multiculturalism is also challenged. In India multiculturalism can cause problems for minorities. The maintenance of minority groups will increase the exploitation of vulnerable members of these groups (Borah, 2022). As in many other countries, the primary obstacle to multiculturalism in India has instead been the inability of policymakers to provide normative-ideological justifications for multicultural rights, primarily due to an unduly constrained interpretation of what constitutes necessary for national unity (Bajpai, 2015).

The focus on offering minorities cultural rights in India creates opportunities for conservative understanding of identity politics and emphasizes how multiculturalism takes precedence over feminist issues. Several aspects of identity politics are based on religion and caste. Identity politics has given rise to society of “us and them”. Repeated incidences of terrorist attacks have widened the gap between Hindus and Muslims. Discrimination has also become more prevalent in other areas. In India, multiculturalism prioritizes the welfare of specific groups over the welfare of the entire population compromising the common good in favour of a minority interest. It generates difficulties amongst people from various backgrounds. In Indian communities, multiculturalism could give rise to extremist movements. It produces stress between various social groupings that are members of various castes, cultures and faiths (Kavitha, 2017)

Undoubtedly, multiculturalism accepts all the cultures in equal measure, yet each time the residents are under duress, and they possess the worry that they would become extinct from their culture as a result of the multicultural societies (Borah & Saikia, 2022). Rejecting dominant policies and placing too much focus on “diversity” can frequently result in the marginalization and deprivation of certain minority groups. People who choose to study their own language and culture instead of conforming to the ‘mainstream’ culture inevitably come to the realization that they are unfit for any kind of business, trade, or work in society. It is important to keep in mind that the ‘dominant’ culture is not necessarily the ‘mainstream’ culture.

Mainstream culture; inspired by a blend of technological needs and corporate environments, mainstream culture is the exchange of diverse cultures and new technology. Some foreign effects might even be present. In India for instance, British control is reflected in the English language, calendar, clothing, way of life, etc (Nega, 2020).

While it is commonly acknowledged that minorities in a given region should have the same rights as any other minority in the nation –state, the reality on the ground typically tells a different tale. A considerable number of minority languages in India lack the status of 2<sup>nd</sup> language, and in certain instances, the recognition of these languages has been revoked. Though they allude to the political construction of diversity, these issues may appear to be practical ones requiring the disregard for agreed-upon policies (Kymlicka, 2005). While Indian multiculturalism holds immense potential, challenges such as identity politics, cultural homogenization, unequal representation and socio-economic inequalities must be addressed. Strengthening institutional frameworks, promoting tolerance through education and media, and ensuring equitable representation of all communities are critical steps.

## VII. MONOCULTURAL IMPACT POSES CHALLENGE TO THE INDIAN MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY

The strength of the India's vibrant multicultural society lies in its diversity in language, religion, traditions, and customs, has periodically encountered monocultural influences that challenge its pluralistic fabric. Monoculturalism, the advocacy or imposition of a single cultural norm, can have profound effects on a multicultural society like India, often influencing its social, political, and rich cultural heritage and creating tensions within its multicultural framework.

Monocultural tendencies in India manifest in various ways. Efforts to promote Hindi as the sole national language often overshadow the linguistic diversity of India; have faced resistance, particularly from non-Hindi-speaking communities. States like Tamil Nadu have historically resisted such moves, advocating for the preservation of regional languages. This reflects a monocultural tendency that clashes with India's linguistic diversity, which includes 22 officially recognized languages, listed in the Eight Schedule of the Constitution and hundreds of dialects (Pandey, 2017).

Likewise, the efforts of religious monoculturalism as seen in today's electoral politics favour one religion, often at the expense of others. It undermines India's secular ethos, which is based on the equal respect and coexistence of all religious beliefs (Chatterjee, 2019). Apart from that educational content under the shadow of monocultural approach occasionally reflects a narrative emphasizing the history and contributions of the dominant group while underrepresenting minorities. This neglects the understanding of India's diverse heritage.

Monoculturalism has both immediate and long-term impacts on India's multicultural society. Indigenous and regional cultures and heritages may face the threat of extinction when overshadowed by a dominant culture. To mitigate these adverse effects of monoculturalism and to retain the beauty of India's vibrant multicultural flavour, India must prioritize inclusive and equitable policies like promoting linguistic diversity, encouraging religious pluralism, inclusive education reflecting the contributions and histories of all cultural groups to foster mutual understanding and respect.

### VIII. CONCLUSION

Finally, it can be said that although there are some challenges to multiculturalism in India, India is still a wonderful example of the successful implementation of the concept of multiculturalism. India is renowned for its robust democracy and harmony in diversity. This is so because Indian multiculturalism values diversity and upholds democracy by providing each community with unique opportunities and equal standing. The 21st century offers India unprecedented opportunities to harness its multicultural ethos as a driver of social harmony, socio-economic progress and global influence. By embracing diversity, promoting inclusivity, and fostering intercultural understanding, India can strengthen its multicultural democratic identity with a sustainable model for development and coexistence and set an example for the whole world. Just like a garden full of different colour flowers in the garden has its own characteristics, the coexistence of people of different races, castes, languages and religions makes India unique.

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