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A Study of Cultural Pluralism and Common Political culture in India:

Dr. Deoniti Prasad Sinha

Associate Professor Department of Political Science G. D. College, Begusarai (Bihar)

Abstract

Cultural pluralism describes a condition in which minority groups participate fully in all areas of the dominant society, while maintaining their unique cultural identities. In a culturally pluralist society, different groups are tolerant of each other and coexist without major conflict, while minority groups are encouraged to retain their ancestral customs. In the real world, cultural pluralism can succeed only if the traditions and practices of the minority groups are accepted by the majority society. In some cases, this acceptance must be protected by legislation, such as civil rights laws. In addition, the minority cultures may be required to alter or even drop some of their customs which are incompatible with such laws or values of the majority culture. Today, the United States is considered a cultural “melting pot” in which indigenous and immigrant cultures live together while keeping their individual traditions alive. Many U.S. cities have areas like Chicago’s Little Italy or San Francisco’s Chinatown. In addition, many Native American tribes maintain separate governments and communities in which they practice and hand down their traditions, religions, and histories to future generations. Not isolated to the United States, cultural pluralism thrives worldwide. In India, while Hindus and Hindi-speaking people are the majority, millions of people of other ethnicities and religions live there as well. And in the Middle Eastern city of Bethlehem, Christians, Muslims, and Jews struggle to live peacefully together despite the fighting around them.

Cultural Pluralism

India is a multi-cultural and a diverse nation with a flourishing history of pluralism that has been thriving for thousands of years. Among the many faiths represented here are Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism, and Jainism. Religious pluralism in the form of the prevalence of mosques, gurudwara, Buddhist, Jain and Parsi temples and their open religious celebration often joined in by their Hindu friends is a testament to India’s religious pluralism. India has always been proud of its culturally plural society. India has a dominant North Indian, Hindu, Hindi speaking culture however cultures from the south and northeast India like the cuisines (Idli, Vada, Uttapam), dance forms Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Kathakali, Manipuri, Kuchipuri,

Odissi, Bihu), literature (Sangam literature) are not only respected in the rest of the country but gets an equal space in the cultural display on Republic Day. Pluralism cannot be forced by the government through laws, it gets incorporated in societies as they learn to accommodate and respect new cultures. India's long historical tradition of welcoming cultures that land at its shores allows for the presence of today's culturally plural society.

India does not force one unitary idea of an 'Indian identity' because there is no one definition of what it means to be an Indian. Because of its respect for cultures, India allow citizens to openly practice their culture and come up with their own definition of India. One dominant idea of India is not imposed upon others to follow.

Thus the west follows a "negative" idea of cultural pluralism i.e. it relegates culture to the private realm so one person's culture does not interfere with another person's culture and multiple cultures can coexist peacefully. However, India has a "positive" idea of cultural pluralism where it allows for full expression of culture in the public realm and instead fosters an idea of respect for different cultures. It is this culturally plural India that we take pride in and seek to protect for ages to come. Pluralism theory is well-known as a theoretical tradition used to analyse political actions in modern democratic states. This theory is mainly based upon a perspective that citizens are involved in political arenas through different interest groups, and that political power should be dispersed to secure its own legitimate interests and none of these groups will dominate the system (Miller, 1983: 735). This essay will examine both the strengths and weakness of pluralism theory. The first strength of this theory is that it clearly addresses and acknowledges the reality of diversity between different groups in the political context. Thus, it gives some space for interest groups whether large or small to compete and participate, based on their interests. This is because the government will protect them to ensure that they will get the same opportunities, even potential groups, such as the church, universities and professional associations. As a consequence, the ideal democratisation will be achieved by the distribution of political power. The interest groups all benefit (Miller, 1983: 737). The second strength of pluralism theory is that it encourages small groups to develop their tactics and strategies by maintaining their interest. The government is an umpire that guarantees the political system will work and running well. The government will try to solve problems and to mediate all conflicts between interest groups or between interest groups and the government. They, who lose, become opposing groups that will monitor and provide alternative opinions. Therefore, it leads to preventing a tyranny or sovereignty owing to the check and balance system (Self, 1985: 79; Miller, 1983: 735). However, pluralism theory also has its critics. The main criticism for this theory is that it seems to ignore the reality that there are groups which are dominant over others. The government does not play its role as a referee since the dominant group is too strong and could pressure the government, while small interest groups have less contribution and political pressure (Ellis, 1980: 398). The other weakness of pluralism theory is its difficulties in implementation. This is because the concept of political power dispersing needs good coordination. So when coordination cannot be reached, this may lead to inefficiency and may not be effective. For example, when the federal government has lack of coordination with the state governments and

is selfishly motivated, the programs probably will not match with the national programs (Self, 1985: 83). Political bias also contributes to the inefficiency of programs. It can be shown by those, who rule some departments and often face a difficulty in distinguishing between the national interest and their own interest groups. This system also makes the process of deciding program priority and policies more complex and too long. In conclusion, pluralism theory is helpful in identifying political actions which stress the dynamics of interest groups for the ideal political system in democratic countries. However, this system is difficult to implement.

Important Components of India's Pluralism

India has evolved as a plural society. It is repository of multiplicity of cultures --a synthesis of diverse social and cultural elements. A grand synthesis of cultures, religions and languages of the people converged on this land. National unity and integrity in the country have been maintained even though there are sharp economic and social inequalities. It is this synthesis which has made India a unique mosaic of cultures. India is, in fact, a panorama of its own types without a parallel in other continents. The urge for unity in diversity has firmly ingrained in our ethos and public discourse. We can see very clearly here that people of different religions, creeds, castes, languages, cultures, lifestyle, dressing sense, faith/or not faith in God, rituals of worship, etc live together with harmony on one land of India. It is a vast and most populated country of the world where people of different religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Sikhism, Jainism, Christianity and Parsees live together but everyone believes in one theory that they are destined to live together by divinity or historical evolutionary process. People here celebrate Holi, Diwali, Eid, Christmas, Good Friday, peacefully without harming other religious people. India has retained its diversity and given a dignified place in its mainstream to a variety of people with different physical features and cultural patterns. In short, India is "the epitome of the world". Some of the important components of its pluralism include:

Race

The India received a large number of migratory races from the Western and the Eastern directions. Majority of the people of India are descendants of immigrants from across the Himalayas. This has created a variety of ethnic elements in India making it an ethnological museum such as Turko-Iranian, Indo-Aryan, Scytho-Dravidian, Aryo-Dravidian, Mongo o- Dravidian, Mongoloid and Dravidian. These seven racial types can be reduced to three basic types- the Indo-Aryan, the Mongolian and the Dravidian. In his opinion the last two types would account for the racial composition of tribal India.

Language

As per census India had as many as more than 19,500 mother tongues spoken in India.

The number of mother tongues has totalled 19,569, the report of the 2011 census said. However, 96.71 per cent population in the country have one of the 22 scheduled languages as their mother tongue.

Since mother tongues, as returned in the census, are basically the designations provided by the respondents of the linguistic mediums in which the respondents think they communicate, they need not be identical with the actual linguistic mediums, it said. For assessing the correlation between the mother tongue and designations of the census and for presenting the numerous raw returns in terms of their linguistic affiliation

to actual languages and dialects, 19,569 raw returns were subjected to thorough linguistic scrutiny, edit and rationalisation.

The 121 languages are presented in two parts — languages included in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, comprising 22 languages and languages not included in the Eighth Schedule, comprising of 99 languages plus the category “total of other languages”, which includes all other languages and mother tongues which returned less than 10,000 speakers each at the all-India level or were not identifiable on the basis of the linguistic information available.

The number of scheduled languages was 22 at the time of presentation of the 2001. The same 22 languages are maintained in 2011 census also. The non-scheduled languages are 99 in 2011 against 100 in 2001. The decrease in the number is due to exclusion of Simte and Persian, which were not returned in sufficient numbers as 2011, and inclusion of Mao, which has returned more than 10,000 speakers at the all-India level at 2011 census.

There are total 270 identifiable mother tongues which have returned 10,000 or more speakers each at the all-India level, comprising 123 mother tongues grouped under the scheduled languages and 147 mother tongues grouped under the non-scheduled languages.

The Eighth Schedule of the Constitution consists of the following 22 languages –Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Konkani, Malayalam, Manipuri, Marathi, Nepali, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu, Bodo, Santhali, Maithili and Dogri.

Of these languages, 14 were initially included in the Constitution. Sindhi language was added in 1967. Thereafter three more languages viz., Konkani, Manipuri and Nepali were included in 1992. Subsequently, Bodo, Dogri, Maithili and Santhali

Religion:

The main religions in the Indian state of Bihar are Hinduism (practiced by 82.7% of the population) and Islam (16.9%) as of 2011. Other religions are practiced by small minorities. Places in Bihar have important historical and cultural associations with Buddhism, Sikhism and Jainism along with Hinduism.

India Demographics

Hinduism is the most common religion in India, accounting for about 79.80% of the population. Islam is the second-largest religion at 14.23% of the population. Other major religious groups in India are Christians (2.3%), Sikhs (1.72%), Buddhists (0.70%), Jains (0.37%) other religion 0.66% not stated 0.24%. The religions with lesser following are Jains, and Buddhist etc. While Hindus and Muslims are found in almost all parts of India, the remaining minority religions have their pockets of concentration. Christians have their strongholds in the three Southern States of Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Meghalaya. Sikhs are concentrated

largely in Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, parts of Rajasthan, Buddhist in Maharashtra and Jains are mainly spread over Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Gujarat, and also found in most urban centres in India.

Caste:

Population according to castes in Bihar are 5.7% are Brahmins, 4.7% are Bhumihar, 5.2% are Rajputs, 14.4% are Yadav, 4% are Kurmi, 8% are Kushwaha, 17% are Muslims, 2% are Kayastha, 6% are Baniya, 3% are Teli, 2% are Mushahar and 4% are Dusadh.

India is also land of Caste or Jati, the people of endogamous status group practicing a specific traditional occupation. There are more than 3,000 Jatis in India. These are hierarchically graded in different ways in different regions. Practice of caste system is not confined to Hindus alone. We find castes among the Muslims, Christians, Sikhs as well as other communities. There is hierarchy of Shaikh, Saiyed, Mughal, Pathan among the Muslims. Furthermore, there are castes like Teli (oil pressure). Dhobi (washerman), Darzi (tailor) etc. among the Muslims. Similarly, caste consciousness among the Christians in India is not unknown. Since a vast majority of Christians in India were converted from Hindu fold, the converts have carried the caste system into Christianity. Among the Sikhs again we have so many castes including Jat Sikh, Arora, Khatri, Ramgarhia, Saini, Kamboj, Mahton, Chhimba, Mohyal and Majahabi Sikh etc.

Culture:

Indian culture is known as the way of life and to live life. **Indian culture** is a philosophy and encourages languages, religions, dance music, food, and architecture with varying features within the country. Indian cultural is a mixture of many cultural systems and make a diversified country. India has an amazing cultural diversity throughout the country. The North, South, East and Northeast, the West have their own distinct cultures and almost every state has carved its own cultural niche. This cultural richness is unparalleled in the world.

Festivals:

India is a country that is divided among various provinces, cultures, and languages but united by its festivals. Each state of India celebrates at least one festival from where the reason to celebrate might have originated from historically. Being a part of the **festivals in India** brings you closer to understand the rich tradition that they have been following for generations.

India is the only country that has numerous festivals based on its religion, Community, and state, and all the festivals in India are celebrated with so much excitement and energy like every day is a new celebration in India. You will enjoy every part of India during your festive excursion.

Major religious Festivals in India include Holi, Raksha Bandhan, Diwali, Krishna Janamastami, Durga-Puja, Dussehra, Maha Shivaratri, Eid-ul-Fitr, Eid-ul-zuha, Christmas, Easter, Buddha Purnima, Mahavir Jayanti,

etc. Seasonal and Harvesting festivals that are celebrated in India includes Basant Panchami, Pongal, Makar Sankranti, Lohri, Onam, Baisakhi, Bhogali bihu, etc.

Cuisine:

The cuisine in India is classified into three major categories. Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. Sattva stands for balance, Rajas for Passion and Tamas for indulgence. Food is consumed according to the lifestyle of a person. India is known for its love for food and for its diverse multi cuisine. The cooking style varies from region to region. Major Indian foods include South Indian, Punjabi, Mughali, Bengali, Kashmiri, Rajasthani and Gujarati.

Art forms:

Religions, mythology and classical literature form the basis of most of the performing arts in India which goes back to thousands of years. Some of the world-famous dance forms that originated and evolved in India include Bharatnatyam, Kathak, Kathakali, Kuchipudi, Manipuri, Mohiniattam and Odissi. Indian dance too has diverse folk dance forms such as Bhangra of Punjab, Yakshagana of Karnataka, Bihu of Assam and Chhau of Jharkhand. Music also plays a very important role in the lives of Indians. Indian architecture has evolved through various ages in different regions of the country. Sculpture and architecture in India dates back to the Indus valley civilization.

Common Political Culture

Political culture in India is not merely a reflection of community life-style. It is also the link between historical experiences of politics and model identities, on the one hand, and the needs of new political forms, on the other. Defined thus, it becomes not only an emergent national idiom, but also a cultural vector that is gradually entering the community's life-style as a legitimate force of social change.

There are four historical stages in the development of the culture of Indian politics. The contemporary political culture also consists of four strands, each with its own psychological problems of adaptation and their typical cultural expressions. These strands are related, on the one hand, to the four corresponding historical stages and, on the other, to different levels of personality functioning in the model Indian. Within this framework, a new approach can be taken to the analysis of the major themes and symbols in Indian politics. It is possible, for example, to decompose some of the major themes into their stage-specific contents which, again, can be related to the larger adaptive problems faced by the community at different historical phases.

Political culture: in political science, a set of shared views and normative judgments held by a population regarding its political system. The notion of political culture does not refer to attitudes toward specific actors, such as a president or prime minister, but rather denotes how people view the political system as a whole and their belief in its legitimacy. American political scientist Lucian Pye defined political culture as the composite of basic values, feelings, and knowledge that underlie the political process. Hence, the building blocks of political culture are the beliefs, opinions, and emotions of the citizens toward their form of government.

Political culture has been studied most intensively in the context of established Western democracies. The classic study of political culture is *The Civic Culture* (1963) by American political scientists Gabriel Almond and Sydney Verba. Based on surveys conducted in the United States, Britain, West Germany, Italy, and Mexico, this landmark investigation sought to identify the political culture within which a liberal democracy is most likely to develop and consolidate. Almond and Verba's argument is based on a distinction between three pure types of political culture: parochial, subject, and participant. In a parochial political culture, citizens are only indistinctly aware of the existence of central government. In a subject political culture, citizens see themselves not as participants in the political process but as subjects of the government. In a participant political culture, citizens believe both that they can contribute to the system and that they are affected by it. Almond and Verba's work attracted the attention of generations of scholars who replicated the findings, criticized the conceptualizations, and refined the theory.

Almond and Verba's core idea was that democracy will prove most stable in societies where subject and parochial attitudes provide ballast to an essentially participant culture. This mix is known as civic culture. In this ideal combination, the citizens are sufficiently active in politics to express their preferences to rulers but not so involved as to refuse to accept decisions with which they disagree. Thus, the civic culture resolves the tension within democracy between popular control and effective governance. In Almond and Verba's study, Britain and, to a lesser extent, the United States came closest to this ideal. In both countries, the citizens felt that they could influence the government. Following the pioneering footsteps of *The Civic Culture*, American political scientist Robert Putnam argued that civic community, based on high levels of political interest, social equality, interpersonal trust, and voluntary association, leads to higher probabilities of effective governance and democracy.

Political culture is the property of a collectivity—for example, a country, region, class, or party. While most studies of political culture concentrated on national cultures, some studies focused on territorially defined units at the subnational level, such as the political cultures of American states, Canadian provinces, or Italian regions. Other studies analyzed the cultural attributes of social groups such as the political elite, the working class, and the like.

Lucian W. Pye, the great political scientist, and comparative politics writes that “political culture is the set of attitudes, beliefs and sentiments of that give orders and meaning to a political process and that provide the underlying assumptions and rules that govern behaviour in the political system. India is a land of diversities with equally powerful strands of unity. Political discourse here has evolved through different routes in different regions/states. There is tremendous and sharp political diversity in the national and state politics. Still all political fora agrees to a single constitutional system, have faith in the common political system and trust in common political structures. The country has one National Flag, National Bird, National Flower, National Tree, National Anthem, National River, National Aquatic Animal, State Emblem, National Calendar, National Animal, National Song, National Fruit, Currency Symbol etc.

It is argued that India's cultural plurality brings in greater tolerance among different groups, resulting in less prejudice and discrimination toward each other. Cultural pluralism also exposes the public and policymakers to multiple perspectives, which can improve critical thinking on decisions related to leading issues. Cultural

pluralism helps preserve the unique traditions, identities and languages of the many cultures within one society. However, a counter argument to that is given that cultural pluralism threatens to divide the country into more isolated units and, if pursued vigorously, could produce a more entrenched “ghetto mentality.” Members of certain cultural groups become so sensitized to prejudice that they become self-righteously intolerant of any type of criticism. They contend that cultural pluralism could threaten India’s ancient values and goals and threaten the preservation of its cultural history. Plural Societies bring with them competing claims or entitlements – each of which can be justified and defended. Such societies, by their very nature, are challenging to govern.

Cultural pluralism, however, is a symbol of India’s national identity embedded in the broader context of Indian civilization. This pluralism forms the basic structure of our society, it is a dynamic and creative vision of Indian civilization. An important characteristic of this pluralism is its ever evolving synthesis which makes India as a nation in the making and not as a closed system or a finished product. As Jawaharlal Nehru said in one of his statements that ‘Indianness is a matter of feeling, A dream, A vision, and an emotion’. Cultural pluralism as part of our national identity is in tandem with the notion of inclusive growth and development.

Threats to India’s cultural pluralism are from the forces who project India as ‘one nation, one people and one culture’ expressed in variety of ways. To suggest that all the Indians irrespective of their historical, geographical and cultural moorings must adopt one culture threatens our spirit of coexistence and unity in diversity. To become a state the people need to have a common politico-legal system and to become a nation requisite is a shared value system not necessarily by having one language, one culture or even one religion. No society in the world is completely homogenous and there are divisions on different bases which sometimes are opposed to each other resulting in conflicts, protests, riots and violence. Many in plural societies hold such strong beliefs that their desire to convert others to their way of thinking can lead them to commit violent actions such as vandalism or even terrorism. This fanaticism and extremism is a real danger to cultural pluralism of India.

Such sectarian tendencies are a potential threat to the sovereignty, democracy, integrity, and in short the very existence of India. This is a restrictive, and negative response to the process of modern nation building. In a multi-cultural society like India mutually incompatible, and antagonistic viewpoints may be there but those conflicts have to be resolved through political, social, and cultural discourse, through cooperation, accommodation, and conflict resolution. Any group, individual or organisation indulging in contrary to this is doing disservice to our exercise of nation building and is damaging the Idea of India we envision for rest of 21st century.

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