Essay

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Multiculturalism vs. Interculturalism

A society is said to be multicultural when it contains people who belong from various ethnicities and cultures but share the same space. However, these diverse communities do not engage or interact with people outside their community. They follow their rituals and customs accordingly and no sharing of cultural knowledge can be seen. On the other hand, in an intercultural society, various ethnic and cultural groups exchange their cultural knowledge among them in a shared community. This practice creates mutual respect and understanding of different cultures and ethnicities in a society, and provides ample opportunities for these groups to grow together as a community (Katz, 2019).

In a multicultural society, the cultural rights and ethnic identities of a minority group are considered by respecting their diverse practices, however, in this kind of society, the dominant culture is positioned as a central culture. Through recognizing the rights of the other cultural group, the dominant group compensates for any loss or attack directed at the minority group by the dominant group. However, the cultural practices and ethnicity of this group are considered normative and the minority group is often forced to assimilate in the majority group (Joppke, 2018).

Moreover, multiculturalism faces the opposition of liberal democracy because, from a liberal democratic perspective, all groups within a collective society should be treated equally regardless of their population numbers, ethnicities and cultural differences. In strictly multicultural societies, the authorities believe in equality but practically they do not cater to the needs of the minority groups. The multicultural theorists have distinguished this approach “from above” and “from below”, making it a minority-driven movement. According to Murphy (2012), there are seven types of multicultural policies and they include policies:

1. That allow the inclusion of minority groups in the decision-making process.
2. That issue a formal apology about the past injustices done to the minority groups based on their cultural differences.
3. That solve the land disputes and redistribute them.
4. Take measures to preserve the diverse culture and languages.
5. That give the minorities relief from some legislation process.
6. That assist the minorities in making separate schools for their community members.
7. Freedom from any autonomous activity.

These principles vary from country to country but generally are the most debated ones. Moreover, multiculturalism transforms into critical multiculturalism when the minority group celebrates those differences that are negatively portrayed by the host majority. For instance, African Americans take pride in their Black cultural values despite facing racial prejudices in a liberal American state.

Multiculturalism impacts the education standards for the minorities as well, for instance, the twisting of historical facts and the Eurocentric approach of reaching the academia results in their cultural erosion. However, minority groups work exclusively to protect their history and narrate their shared cultural experiences in the literary or philosophical canons. They still view themselves as a part of shared cultural experience and through their contributions, they show a desire to live alongside the majority cultural group.

Multicultural approach faces multiple criticisms from the theorists and liberals across the globe due to two main reasons. The primary reason for this criticism is the central positioning of one dominant culture over the other and the secondary reason states that this approach weakens the ideology of equality for all. It also leads to unhealthy competition between two groups where the dominant group forces the other group to assimilate. On the other hand, the other group is denied the right to preserve and practice their cultural values (Stokke, 2016). Multiculturalism is also linked with “identity politics” because of unequal cultural distributions and normative behaviours set by the majority cultural group. It also results in their cultural oppression and collective community experience is next to impossible in a multicultural society. Moreover, the concept of nationhood cannot be formed in its literal meaning in such a society (Wieviorka, 2016).

In contrast to this approach, the Intercultural approach offers an experience of a shared community to every minority or majority group equally. This approach also creates equal opportunities and recognition for everyone in society. In the contemporary era of transnational politics, this approach has gained much popularity as compared to the multicultural approach. In this approach, diversity and equality go side by side and by recognizing other cultures on equal terms, the assimilation cannot be done forcefully. Interculturalists discourage the idea of "parallel" living as it maintains the barriers of race and ethnicity (Antonsich, 2015). This approach supports the idea of breaking the barriers and removing prejudices for the collective good of the community. This idea serves as a motivation for transnational migrations in the contemporary era, for instance, Canadian society is highly adaptable from an immigrant's point of view, and earlier this state was based on a multicultural model too. When it had to adopt the Anglophonic and Francophone cultures, these cultures faced a lot of differences and cultural clashes until it led to the implementation of an Interculturalist model, in Canada and its federation. The Quebec intercultural model in Canada was formed to overcome the cultural conflict and preserve the linguistic and cultural rights of the French-speaking majority. As a result, the majority was then asked to avoid the "moral-conflict" and welcome the newcomers or migrants from other parts of the world (Meer and Modod, 2012). Through these models, Canada overcame its internal multicultural fiasco and is now a welcoming land for diverse cultures and experiences.

Communication and freedom of expression is another distinctive feature of this approach as it provides avenues for open communication to happen naturally. It also derives a sense of community and belongingness within the community. Taylor (1989), views this phenomenon based on inherent identity formation in a society instead of labelling people with an identity of an outsider. Identity is either formed by recognition or misrecognition, where recognition develops a positive sense of identity and misrecognition implicates negative experiences such as oppression. Thus the socio-cultural sense of self-esteem rises not only from the sense of personal identity but from identity formation in a group.

Interculturalism also promotes a sense of nationhood, social unity and national identity whereas multiculturalism only promotes the idea of keeping diverse cultures in a setting where they do not actively participate. On the other hand, interculturalism serves as motivation to promote mutual cohesion and integration. It also focuses on the idea of unity and avoids the asymmetrical definition of a society which creates cultural differences (Levey, 2012).

In an intercultural society, minority rights are equally treated as those of a majority group and it believes more on censorship to protect the rights of minority groups. Whereas, multiculturalism advocates liberal practices where only the majority group can have freedom of expression and only they can set the normative behaviour in society. Through intercultural policy narrative, the state can maintain a positive narrative through its leadership and mass media. For instance, in France, the anti-Islamic sentiments are showcasing the state as a multicultural country where only majority rights are preserved and the concept of the veil is taken as deviant behaviour.

 Multiculturalism is an approach which can no longer be validated in the contemporary age because of transnationalism and cultural exchange practices. Its concept of isolating different cultures and the stress for assimilation creates a unicentral and unequivocal point of view regarding the minority culture. The multicultural approach can create a sense of nationalism but only for the dominant culture, it can by no means develop a sense of nationhood. If viewed from the economic perspective, this approach brings recession because the common goal of various cultural groups is not alike. Moreover, the element of diversity is not appreciated in a multicultural environment because of strict cultural codes and normative practices (Taylor, 2012). Furthermore, it does not welcome immigrants and keep them separate from the dominant cultural group thus resulting in a non-inclusive society. Whereas, on the other hand, Interculturalism is a contemporary modal for building effective communities that share and grow together with the help of cultural diversity. Diversity and equality are not interchangeable terms, they have to be applied at the same time, and an intercultural society is both diverse and equal.

Culture plays a defining role in both the approaches, it can be defined as a fluid concept and not a solid set of rules to follow. It contains over changing lifestyle, thoughts and social perception of a society in which a person lives. Moreover, it also forms a person's perception of his identity, behaviour, language and cognition. Cultural identity is then formed based on a person's race, ethnicity and cultural believes, co-culture defines outsiders who do not belong to a person's culture and ethnicity. This, for instance, includes non-white people or homosexuals. However, the dominance of cultural identity depends on the majority of people belonging to a sudden culture and the kind of conversations they hold regarding their culture.

Similarly, in an intercultural society, minority culture is not denied its right to recognition, identity and culture. People belonging from different ethnicities, live together in a society and are inclusive of each other. This society breaks cultural prejudices and promotes freedom of expression for every member of society equally. It provides communities with an inherent sense of identity and belongingness. It also provides better prospects for the immigrants to come and settle in such communities. These communities flourish both economically and politically as their goal is directed towards the sense of nationhood and social cohesion (Taylor, 2013).

In the context of all the above discussion and viewing the differences between both the approaches, the best-suited approach for an Australian society is interculturalism. Australia is a diverse country and it can flourish even better by implementing the intercultural models because earlier the stereotype of “white Australians” was prevalent in the society. This approach can make diverse cultural experiences even more beneficial and goal-oriented. The inclusion of immigrants and ending white supremacy are still some of the debatable issues in Australia that end without any agreement or disagreement. The practice of passively tolerating the Other and creating the Us and Them boundaries is not a solution (Barret, 2013).

Interculturalism is inclusive of all cultures and promotes freedom of expression and freedom of want, it also discourages the old practices of anti-migration, anti-cultural and racial supremacy. Moreover, multiculturalism does not account for the rights of second-generation migrants and their rights are not advocated.

An intercultural society removes the supremacy and restructures the social hierarchy for its better development. However, in a few decades, in some parts of the country, the practice of listening and appreciating the other culture is developing slowly and gradually. In Australia, minorities are also given opportunities and are equally invited to integrate with the majority culture, however, it also asks the majority cultural groups to start open communication with the other group (James, 2009).

Australian curriculum already has a space in academia for diverse cultural discussions and students can study in various community-based schools to study their culture and heritage. The example of Ballarat city also shows that intercultural model can also be integrated successfully in the whole country. This country adopted a multicultural approach earlier as compared to the other countries, however, interculturalism should be adopted and implanted in its truest sense.

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