

Multiculturalism's Ticky-Tacky: Third World Scholars in the First World.

He drew a circle that shut me out -
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout;
But Love and I had the wit to win:
We drew a circle that took him in!

There is a destiny that makes us brothers,
No one goes his way alone;
All that we send into the lives of others,
Comes back into our own.

Outwitted by Edwin Markham

Poems sell utopias. We wish to belong within a charmed circle which is the *polis* for we are *zoon politikon*. None should go “his way alone” and unless we are always inclusive, like the Biblical idea of what one sows one shall reap (Galatians 6:7), “All that we send into the lives of others, / [will] Come back into our own.” To be hospitable is to care for the self. Thus accepting the truth and need for multiculturalism will make us “brothers” and is not fraternité an ideal which we all should bow down to? But “brotherhood” means relinquishing the freedom of being Steppenwolf? Multiculturalism is based on the idea of the common good. The study of literature is a cautionary tale against the sacrifice of the individual's *jouissance* for the sake of the common good¹. The multitudes implied in multiculturalism signal the death knell for individual autonomy and self-actualisation since the “essence of independence

¹ See Charles Dickens' *Hard Times*, Manju Kapur's *A Married Woman* for instances about the primacy of the desires of the individual over collective and received wisdom.

has been to think and act according to standards from *within*, not *without*: to follow one's own path, not that of the crowd" (Thatcher 23). Multiculturalism implies a society where everyone accepts a certain way of life as normative, all differences give way to a homogenous gaiety:

And the people in the houses
All went to the university,
Where they were put in boxes
And they came out all the same,
And there's doctors and lawyers,
And business executives,
And they're all made out of ticky tacky
And they all look just the same.

And they all play on the golf course
And drink their martinis dry,
And they all have pretty children
And the children go to school,
And the children go to summer camp
And then to the university,
Where they are put in boxes
And they come out all the same. (*Little Boxes*, Malvina Reynolds)

In a multicultural society everyone behaves and looks just "the same". The ideological machinery, the "boxes" into which all ethnic communities will be put in will make them all cultural zombies. A fearsome literary representation of the joy (sic) of being "all the same" can be found in *The Stepfordwives* (1972) by Ira Levin.

Multiculturalism is the current politically correct ideological position to occupy but it "is, almost by definition, conceptually conflicted and ideologically driven-conflicts and rifts papered over, but also paradoxically articulated, by its own exoticising manoeuvres" (Huggan 154). Multiculturalism is a therapeutic strategy of the Modern Nation State to bring "subject populations into conformity with a multicultural society. Such a society does not arise unbidden but to a large extent is molded by government policies toward particular minorities

and through the promotion of Third World immigration as an instrument of internal change... The therapeutic state undertakes the building of a multicultural society, pledged to "diversity", by treating citizens "as objects of socialization. Some will be pumped up to feel good about whoever they are, while others will be required to forfeit, disavow, or disparage their inherited identities" (Gottfried 14-15). Third world intellectuals have created a machinery which celebrates multiculturalism and in the process have pumped themselves up to feel good while erasing the value of the traditional and the classical. This erasure is not confined to First World academia but as will be pointed out later in this essay, in their own nations too. But before this let us interrogate the ideologic-multicultural as a recurrent trope spanning the entire humanities and the social sciences globally. Multiculturalism derives from Aristotelian understandings of political friendship, the *politike philia*, which in turn derives from Plato's discussions on love. Later the Jewish scholar Emanuel Lévinas appropriated this concept of the *politike philia* to his own understanding of the Hospitable Other. But what has escaped scrutiny is that the whole project of multiculturalism along with neo-cosmopolitanism is a Judaic project. The stalwarts of this project are all Jews --- Michel Foucault, Jacque Derrida, Martha Nussbaum and Judith Butler. They are essentially Jews glossing the *Torah* and their understanding of the Other is not the Self/Other dichotomy posited by Edward Said, but by the Other they meant the unbeliever of the *Torah*, that is, themselves. By being multicultural these Jewish scholars make a case for their unbelief co-existing with the believing community of the Jews.

Through powerful (mis)readings and a haste to become entrenched within the First World as intellectuals at par with white intellectuals, Indian scholars have misunderstood the multiculturalism project as a desirable and syncretic project. This is the result of forgetting that heteroglossia and human volition informed by contingencies does not lead to cultural ghettos but rather creates communities of faith, language and cultural

stability. Cultural assimilation which is the apparent aim of those speaking for multiculturalism often forget that multiculturalism leads to dystopic consequences and the loss of all ethnic, religious and cultural identity. How is it possible for someone who believes in the primacy of a Semitic God to *commune*², in the strictest religious sense of the word, with someone who practises Advaita Vedanta or for both these groups to journey at the level of the *pneuma* with those who do not believe in transcendence? Jacques Derrida's "star friendship" (Derrida 296-9) which is the basis for all multiculturalism is an impossibility. Multiculturalism as a lived position may function to annihilate differences. Multiculturalism within the eschatology of religions is also a chimera. The Judaeo-Christian Parousia is not the gathering of all peoples, but only of the elect amongst the Judaeo-Christian faith community. Profession of one faith precludes profession of another faith. To each faith community, the patrimony of that faith community's revealed truths are sacred. Therefore multicultural collective life-journeys are impossible for various faith communities. It is needless to write of the faith communities structured around linguistic parameters since these linguistic communities have the same traits as their religious counterparts.

One of the most disturbing aspects of the term multiculturalism is the concept of the cultural. What constitutes culture?

"The dominant European linguistic convention equates 'culture' largely with the idea of 'civilization': they are regarded as synonymous. Both ideas may be used interchangeably with integrity in opposition to notions of that which is vulgar, backward, ignorant or retrogressive. Within the German intellectual tradition, to which we shall be repeatedly drawn, a different and particular sense of culture emerged that was to assume a dominant place in our everyday understandings.

² See Pierce, Joanne M. "Communion (Liturgical)." *An Introductory Dictionary of Theology and Religious Studies*. Ed. Orlando O. Espín and James B. Nickoloff. 2007. Print.

This was the romantic, elitist view, that culture specified the pinnacle of human achievement. Culture, in this sense, came to specify that which is remarkable in human creative achievement. Rather than encapsulating all human symbolic representation, German *Kultur* pointed us exclusively to levels of excellence in fine art, literature, music and individual personal perfection. The main body, or in this formulation, the residue of what we have previously meant as culture, was to be understood in terms of the concept of Zivilisation.” (Jenks 9)

Therefore culture itself is a divisive element: it denotes difference and works against the concept of being syncretic. The multiplicity in multicultural is a pointer to the real differences between people, but the ‘cultural’ is a pointer to irreducible differences between communities and more importantly, between individuals. All people are cultural products, but some are more cultured than others. Thus the term multiculturalism hides within itself roots of divisiveness and intellectual snobbery. As had been pointed out above, the multicultural as a recurrent trope within the humanities and the social sciences functions to subvert the very notion of cultural equality and the acceptant of the Other. The term ‘multiculturalism’ functions to subsume cultural differences and creates moral relativism, hiding

“Behind the mask of a benign celebration of diversity lies a deeply corrosive rejection of all general norms, rules, or truths. This rejection of general norms, both those dealing with knowledge and those dealing with morals, derives from multiculturalism’s insistence that there are many essentially closed systems of perception, feeling, thought, and evaluation—each associated with some racially, ethnically, or sexually defined group. Thus, multiculturalism quite explicitly and appropriately sees itself as rejecting the Enlightenment belief in standards of reason, evidence, and objectivity, and principles of justice and freedom that apply to all human beings...In addition to its moral relativism, multiculturalism also

proclaims (as the one great Objective Truth) that all truth, objectivity, and evidence are also relative. Each culture has its own truth, objectivity, and standards of reason and evidence. Thus, whatever beliefs any culture emits, they are validated by the fact of their emission.” (Mack n.p.)

Therefore, religious communities or those who subscribe to natural laws qua justice cannot agree with moral relativism. Within Kantian categorical imperatives some actions are morally reprehensible and some are not. Should a paedophile be allowed to culturally assimilate within mainstream society? Should members of the Islamic State who crucify children³ be ever accommodated within mainstream society? Should members of *khap* panchayats be assimilated within mainstream India? Riots and ethnic cleansings rise when there is external pressure to assimilate. Assimilation is a process whereby each cultural unit has to give up some of its own identity to make space for the Other’s cultural identity. This pressure to reciprocate and in the process lose self-identity is the tipping point for the beginning of pogroms.

And Indian intellectuals abroad have become victims of the chimera of multiculturalism. One of the reasons for their strong advocacy of multiculturalism is their own liminal state in the white world. Indians do not fit in anywhere --- the Blacks do not care for them, the Latinos do not want them and the Chinese have their own communities, where does that leave the sensitive Indian scholar in the First World? Of course, these academicians have to sing paeans to multiculturalism. They do not realise the potential for the annihilation of individual autonomy inherent within the lofty ideals of multiculturalism.

Indian scholars abroad have stunted the growth of Indian academics through their ready espousal of the tenets of multiculturalism. They have regurgitated essentially Continental

³ See, for instance, http://www.catholic.org/news/international/middle_east/story.php?id=56481, accessed 8.10.2014 at 3.33 pm.

ideas and passed them off as their own⁴. The most well-known of them living today is Gayatri Spivak who in her entire corpus has celebrated the multicultural. She has introduced the psychoanalytical turn within the study of the social sciences in India --- her being influenced by Derrida has infected everything within the humanities and the social sciences with an urge towards the *refoulement* of desire. The twentieth century has been the goriest century known to man; when the project of multiculturalism has been known to fail repeatedly yet for their own survival the likes of Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Spivak have demanded that the multicultural ethos be actualised. The irony of the project within academia is that these intellectuals went hoary supporting multiculturalism all the while decrying white hegemony. White Christians are no longer culturally relevant but the countries they have built remain seductive enough for our smart-brigade. The traditional understanding of multiculturalism as a discourse which “treats cultures as if they have essential, traditional natures that are unified and unchanging” is untenable since such a treatment “makes invisible the power relations which are at work interculturally” (Cornwell & Stoddard 516) , should give way to studies in interculturalism (Cornwell & Stoddard 518). Interculturalism does not come with the ideological baggage of multiculturalism. Multiculturalism is a body of work touting the values of the third world intellectual in the first world while interculturalism is a term which does not deny the reality of different cultures and celebrates heteroglossia and dialogism.

⁴ All those names which are cited *ad nauseam* within liberal arts' scholarship in India; Ranajit Guha, Gayatri Spivak and Dipesh Chakrabarty have nothing new to say --- Guha borrowed from Marx and Gramsci, Spivak from Freud through to Derrida and Chakrabarty learnt from the British historians. All three of them framed their ideas not from their own Indian patrimony but from Continental thinkers.

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