

Available online at <http://www.ijims.com>

ISSN - (Print): 2519 – 7908 ; ISSN - (Electronic): 2348 – 0343

IF:4.335; Index Copernicus (IC) Value: 60.59; UGC Recognized -UGC Journal No.: 47192. 1st July

Advaitin Principles: As a Counselling for Multicultural Integration

Mitali Bhagabati

Research Scholar, Department of Philosophy, University of Delhi, India

Abstract

Vedanta Philosophy is recognised as one of the greatest philosophical traditions worldwide. Considering either as a religion or as a philosophy, the practise of Advaita principles can always be the guaranteed consolation to the critical issues of disintegration as the core concept of Advaita Vedanta is “non-dualism”. It cannot be the case that there is no diversity in the world. The question generally arises; can we reach any sort of consensus to solve the issue of plurality on name, caste, creed, culture? Multiculturalism is a social policy to conquer cultural and religious diversities. The aim of this paper is to analyse, how the advaitin principles of non-duality can be applied as a counselling for multicultural integration. The Multicultural approach can lead a united society annihilating diversity. So, it is significant to understand how multicultural aptitude can be developed in the mind of people in general. But to understand multiculturalism as a response to cultural diversity, one needs to revive one’s own inner divinity. Certain philosophical counselling may become helpful for such self-realisation in a person. So, an attempt is made here to study the advaitin principles as a counselling for multiculturalism.

Keywords: Advaita Vedanta, Multiculturalism, Counselling for multicultural integration, SarvamKhaluidam Brahma.

Article

Multiculturalist Understanding of Culture

Though it has been understood in different contexts, the common understanding of the term ‘culture’ is a way of living, a set of beliefs and values that is held by a particular group of people, which gives the awareness to the people of being a social species above their mere physical aspects of existence and individuality. The term ‘culture’ is derived from the Latin word ‘colere’, which means to tend to the earth and grow, or cultivation and nurture. According to Professor K.A Nilakanta Shastri, “Culture means the total accumulation of material objects, ideas, symbols, beliefs, sentiments, values, and social forms which are passed on from one generation to the another in any given society”¹. Cultures differs society to society, even in a particular society there may exist many cultures. The social situation in which multiple cultures co-exist and influence on one another is called multiculturalism. One of the understanding of the concept of culture, that is given by the ‘culturalist’ or ‘cultural relativist’ is that - it is complete, self-contained, bounded and also incommensurable to each other, that express its own locally authoritative ethical point of view. But this traditional culturalist view has the germ of monocultural tendency. Multiculturalism emerged as a response to monocultural tendency. It is an unavoidable fact that, in almost all the modern societies we find the multiplicity and diversity of cultures. For example, in The Indian society we find diversity of cultures including different caste, creed, language, gender, art, religions, technology and also ideology. The denial of multiculturalism in today’s world may lead to degeneration. Supporting multiculturalism means being more tolerant to abolish the social diversities, both physical and mental.

Multicultural Integration

To fulfil the aim of this paper it is essential to understand what multicultural integration means. ‘Integration’ is a dynamic and structured process in which each and every member participates in dialogue to attain and maintain peaceful social relation. In general, multiculturalism can be understood as a response in the context of Nation states that which has the attitude of monoculture. So, multicultural integration is a form of cultural exchange social process in which one group of people

¹Quoted in the article on ‘The future for Traditional Cultures’ by Professor K.A Nilakanta Shastri in Unesco Chronicle of May 1959.

assumes the beliefs, practices, art, and rituals of another group of people without compromising or avoiding the nature and objectives of its own culture.

Towards the end of the 20th century the concept of multiculturalism became a dominant political discourse. It stands as a dominant political ideology to overcome the failure of homogenisation of various nations. Multiculturalism promotes the diverse identities without adversely affecting the overall unity of a society. One of the leading Multiculturalists Will Kymlicka in his work 'Multicultural Citizenship' states that "a state is multicultural if its members either belong to different nations (a multination state) or have emigrated from different nations (a polyethnic state), and if this fact is an important aspect of personal identity and political life."² Will Kymlicka is basically using the term multiculturalism in a restricted sense. His emphasis is only on ethnic groups and national minorities and the disadvantaged groups like- the homosexual, transgender, poor, women etc. However, Kymlicka further opines that, "There is no universally accepted definition of multiculturalism. The complexity of phenomena of multiculturalism cannot be reduced to just a single policy or principle."³ So, the term multiculturalism has diverse perspectives and interpretations and so it has varying connotations. According to Andrew Heywood there are two forms of multiculturalism- descriptive and normative. Heywood holds that the former refers to cultural diversity whereas the latter implies a positive endorsement of such diversity.⁴

Peter McLaren in his understanding of the concept of multiculturalism broadly divided it into four kinds- conservative multiculturalism, liberal multiculturalism, left liberal multiculturalism, and critical multiculturalism.

- 1) Conservative multiculturalism is considered basically to be an ideology of assimilation dominated by the racist ideals. Assimilation means the process in which an individual or a particular culture resembles to another group; which means, it becomes culturally dominated by another group.
- 2) Liberal multiculturalism maintains the existence of inequality between different cultures and suggests that rather than cultural difference inequality arises specially due to the lack of social, educational and economical facilities. It believes that in spite of giving special rights to the minorities; equal social, educational and economic opportunities should be provided in order to achieve social equality.
- 3) Left-liberal multiculturalism considers cultural difference independent of history. "It tends to disassociate asymmetry from social and historical circumstances and constructions dominated by the majority. Its main emphasis is on the personal, rather than the collective level"⁵

But criticizing the first three kinds of multiculturalism McLaren promotes the adoption of critical resistance multiculturalism. McLaren's view of critical multiculturalism aims at attaining social justice in a society. According to critical multiculturalism, the difference and conflicts that arise from the difference of race, religion, language, class or sex is because of larger social struggles over signs and members. Critical multiculturalism states that cultural differences are, "essentially unstable and shifting and can be temporarily fixed, depending on how they are articulated within particular discursive and historical struggles".⁶ So, it is always an important challenge to preserve the cultural identity and its legitimate recognition in all multicultural societies.

Amartya Sen, while discussing this term, makes a subtle distinction between multiculturalism and "plural monoculturalism". According to him, genuine multiculturalism is marked by the existence of diversity of cultures, which tend to interact and even intermingle among the people themselves. On the other hand, existence of various cultural traditions

² Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights*.

³ Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Odysseys* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) pp. 61-88.

⁴ Andrew Heywood, *Political Ideologies: An Introduction*

⁵ Peter McLaren, "White Terror and Oppositional Agency: Towards a Critical Multiculturalism," in Goldberg, n. 1, pp. 40-41.

⁶ Peter McLaren, "White Terror and Oppositional Agency: Towards a Critical Multiculturalism," in Goldberg, n. 1, p. 53

co-existing side by side, without the twain meeting, could be nothing more than plural monoculturalism.⁷ Multiculturalism includes varieties of interrelated concepts such as- identity, distinctiveness, equality, cultural diversity, pluralism and recognition. In the contemporary World there is an increase in the multiple ethnic groups with their varieties of cultures. Today's globalized world embraces all the diversities in the world, which is helping to upraise humanity as a whole. So, the demand for multicultural integration is vigorous in the contemporary world.

The Counselling for Multicultural Integration

The concept of culture is generally divided into two categories- material and mental. Apart from the material bases of a culture, the most important determinant of a particular culture is the direction of its mental life. Basically, the essence of a culture is revealed in the individual man. Humans are the beings in whom the highest excellence a particular culture is manifested. So, the concept of man and his excellence can be considered as a good way to analysis the nature and definition of a particular culture. Man with the help of his unique capacity of thinking, expressing through language and having the ability of the transmission of accumulated experience can endow himself with a cultural inheritance over and above his genetic inheritance. The supremacy of humans over other living creatures and things signifies the intellectual, conscious and deliberate control and guidance of life force over the material culture. From the very beginning of Human civilisation, humans have an urge to realise his true self. Man has a yearning for the infinite and the eternal. He immensely search for the universal dimension of his personality where he find himself non different from others, and there he shows tendrils of love to his fellow-beings. This human instinct expresses the core of humanity. This divine nature of human beings is formulated in the Upaniṣadic dictum "Sohum" – I am already divine. Unfortunately, man is ignorant to the present of divinity in himself. And it is because of this ignorance there is pluralism and diversity in the society. In the above paragraphs we have discussed the need of Multicultural approach through which we can lead a united society annihilating diversity. But to understand multiculturalism as a response to cultural diversity, one needs to revive one's own inner divinity. In this section of the paper, the attempt is made to analyse how multicultural aptitude can be developed in the mind of people in general. Certain philosophical counselling may become helpful for such self-realisation in a person. So, an exertion is made to understand the concept of multiculturalism through the Advaitin counselling.

Understanding Advaitin Principles

Plurality is a social as well as philosophical controversial issue. Many of the conflicts of the world arise due to the pluralistic aptitude. Advaita Vedānta does not deny plurality or diversity to be completely unreal. Advaita Vedānta advocates non difference; that is, while respecting the diversity we should also feel the integrated unity. The Advaita Principles assert that the solution of all problems lies in the realisation of non-difference. The ultimate objective of Advaita philosophy is to merge from plurality to non-plurality, from duality to non-duality.

One of the essential points we should remember while studying Advaita Vedānta, that is, according to Śaṅkara, Truth is something which is everlasting. So, the Advaita concept of Real is that it must be undecayed and eternal. Sat is that which is Real in all three dimension of time (Trikālavadhita Satyam) and Asat or unreal is that which is unreal in all three dimension of time (Trikālavadhita Asatyam). The absolute Reality is birthless, deathless and changeless; this is Brahman. Thus, it is asserted – "Brahma Satya Jagat Mithya Jivo Brahmaiva Nāpara" which means, only Brahman is Real and the world is neither real nor unreal and the individual soul is non-different to Brahman. This can be called the Summary of Advaita Vedānta. The world is neither real nor unreal; as it is perceived to be real in the Vyavahārika level of reality, but it is not regarded to be real in the Paramārthika level. So the world is not completely unreal, whatever is experience is ultimately, essentially Brahman; "brahmasvarūpo hi prapancho na prapanchasvasvarūpam brahma".

Advaita Vedānta takes its stand on the Upaniṣadic view that, "All is Brahman" (Sarvam Khalu idam Brahma). So, Śaṅkara accept the view of non duality and states that Brahman is one and only one reality; while all the things seen in this world is mere appearance of Him. According to Śaṅkara, the knowledge of Brahman or Brahman Realisation; that is, the knowledge of non dualism is the highest knowledge. The external physical world and all the beings are nothing but different

⁷ Amartya Sen, *The Uses and Abuses of Multiculturalism*.

forms and names of Brahman. So, according to the Advaitin principles the individual self is non different from Brahman. And so it is stated 'I am Brahman', "Aham Brahmasmi". The jivas are limited Brahman as they are conditioned by senses, forms, mind, body etc. Jivas are the waves and Brahman is the ocean in which all the jivas merge. The difference are made by names (Nāma) and forms (Rupas), these are called Upādhis otherwise everything is essentially Brahman. Therefore we are the same consciousness with different conditions inhabitant in different forms. So, individuality as we generally understand it is a limited condition. This limitation is desired to overcome by us, in order to taste a larger slice of life. Disappearing of individuality only means the disappearance of the limitations of the individuals. The jīvas does not merge in anything other than itself; but it emerge as the Ātman which is non different with Brahman.

The fourth sloka of the first Canto of Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad states that there are two kinds of knowledge to be acquired – the higher and the lower.

“Tasmi sa hovāca; Dve vidye veditavye iti ha sma
yatbrahmavido vadanti parā caivāparā ca”

The higher knowledge is called Parā vidyā and the lower knowledge is called Aparā vidyā. This sloka answer to the question asked by Śaunaka to Aṅgiras in the third sloka of this Canto; that is, 'Which is that thing which having been known, one becomes all-knowing?' Aṅgiras in his answer discussed about these two kinds of knowledge. Parā vidyā is that knowledge when we reach the state of non dualism; that is, the knowledge of Brahman. Aparā vidyā is the knowledge found in Vyavahārika and Pratibhāsika level but not in Paramārthika level. All the sciences and religion that teaches us duality is Aparā knowledge. Even the knowledge of Vedas is also called Aparā. So, according to Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad the knowledge of Brahman is the highest of all knowledge. The knowledge of Brahman or Brahmavidyā is eternal, multiformed, extremely subtle, all- pervasive, undiminishing and is the source of every other knowledge. The Brahma realisation of non duality can escape us from the boundaries of diversities and lead us to one united world.

Individual self is of the nature of consciousness. Individual consciousness [Ātman] is nothing but the universal consciousness or pure consciousness [Brahman]. According, to the principle of abhed in Avaita Vedanta, bhed or the concept of difference between self and brahman is adhyāsa, just an appearance. This adhyāsa is there because of Māyā [ignorance; avidyā]. The self is always free, as the very nature of self is Divinity and Eternality. We should only try to get rid of the bondage that covers the self, through true knowledge.

According to the Upaniṣadic teachings ignorance is the cause because of which individual self fails to realise its very essence. Self is not that which is outside of us, it is an ever present reality which can be realised with the removal of ignorance. As the clouds cover the sun but cannot affect it; similarly due to Māyā there arise sense of plurality among the individual consciousness and the cosmic, but as soon as the knowledge of true nature of Brahman is realised such illusions (Māyā) disappear. So, when one overcome this avidyā or ignorance there arise Brahmavidyā, "Avedpurvakāvedā".

In the passage II.ii.8 of Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad it is states that, "when that Self which is both the high and the low, is realised, the knot of the heart gets united, all doubts become solved, and all one's actions become dissipated."

“Bhidyate hṛdayagranthiśchidyante sarvasamśayāḥ;
Kṣīyante cāśya karmāṇi tasmin dṛṣṭe parāvare.”

It explains, what happens when one person realise the non duality with Brahman. He then sees himself both as the cause and as the effect of everything. This destroys one's small ego. As he now thinks he is the doer and also the enjoyer. But when we identify ourselves with the body and the mind we naturally become subjected to all the limitations of the body and the mind. We then become a victim of hope and despair because of such wrong identification. Thus we develop many eccentricities. This happens as we do not know who we really are. When we realise ourselves as the cosmic self, the self of all, we are no longer dominated by the sense of duality.

According to Advaita Vedanta once a person realise the unity of all beings then all differences, including the difference between one Jiva and another will vanish. It does not mean that he has refused to act or remain wholly inactive. But it means that he will do the right thing in asponaneous manner by overcoming the obstacles that moral life generally involves. There will be a rise from moral implication to the super moral level. He will then effortlessly do good works for others and promotes their welfare. All his actions will be full of love and compassion and not just with sympathy and condescension. Such action is purely voluntary, which will arise out of love and compassion and not in obedience to any

command or out of deference to any obligation. This is a state where he will overcome narrow love and all kinds of hatred creating universal love with the vision of the unity of all beings (Sarvātmabhāva). And so there will no conflicts in the societies which will lead us to multicultural integration. Thus, the Advaitin principles of abhed can act as a counselling to form a multicultural society. Such philosophical counselling can positively contribute to multicultural discourse both in terms of thoughts and action.

Conclusion

Self centeredness is one of the basic human nature that creates almost all central controversial issues in humanities. Disintegration can also be considered as a result of such individualistic thought. But from Advaita view point we can realise that we are not just different individual beings but also cosmic beings. We contribute to the organic whole besides being a simple individual. We live in the cosmic harmony as well as in our own independent individual boundaries. The cosmic harmony also includes socio-political, cultural, religious, and also environmental harmony with all other living, organic things. So everything is interrelated, but we cannot measure them as they are very subtle. And there is always a state of harmony within everything in the system. Here arise the needs of a journey from the narrow sense of consciousness to the cosmic sense of consciousness to uphold integration in the true sense. If my attempt to interpret Advaitin Principles as the counselling for multicultural integration is well apprehended in the above paragraphs, it will hopefully become understandable how the practice of Advaitin Principles can be well adopted as a positive and constructive multicultural approach which can enrich the thinking process to overcome the present day cultural, religious, political, environmental cleavages and conflicts. Advaitin way of living is the gateway to world peace, so it can be correctly defined as beyond multiculturalism.

References

- Benhabib S. The claims of culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2002.
- Bernice. L. Multiculturalism and Diversity- A Social Psychological Perspective. Wiley Blackwell Publication.2010.
- Crowder, George. Theories of Multiculturalism: An Introduction.65 Bridge Street, Cambridge CB2 1UR, UK.Polity Press, 2013.
- Iyer.M.K. Venkatarama. Avaita Vedanta: According to Śaṅkarā. Asian Publication House.1964.
- Munḍaka Upaniṣad – with the commentary of Śaṅkarācārya, Translated by Swami Gambhirananda.
- Osborne. P. Philosophy in Cultural Theory.Routledge Publication.2000.
- Paul Kelly. (ed). Multiculturalism Reconsidered. Blackwell Publishing Company. 2002.
- Rajendra K. Jain.(ed). Multiculturalism in India and Europe.Delhi. Aakar Books Publication.,2014
- Ramamurty, A.Advaita – a conceptual analysis, (Contemporary Researches in Hindu Philosophy and Religion, no. 5) D.K Print World (P) Ltd. 1996.pp 1-72
- Sharma.H.D. Sri SamkaraBhaysyaBrahmasutraCatuhsutri. Pune Poona Oriental Book Agency, 1940,Oriental Series no, 70.
- Siby K. Joseph.Gandhi Religion and Multiculturalism: An Appraisal. (adapted from the original article which appeared in Gandhi Marg, January-March 2012, vol.33, Number 4.
- Singer, P. One World: The Ethics of Globalization. New Haven: Yale University Press. 2002.
- Swami Gambhirananda (Tr.), BrahmasutraBhasya of Samkaracarya,Calcutta, Advaita Ashrama, 1993.
- Swami Ranganathananda. The Essence of Indian Culture.Advaita Ashrama Publication Department, 1965.
- The Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad; with the commentary of Sankarācārya; translated by SwāmiMādhavānanda; withan introduction by Mahāmahopādhyāya. Prof. S. Kuppuswāmiśāstri, M.A., I.E.S., Vīdyā-vācaspati, Darśana-kalānidhi, Kulapati; Advaita Ashrama (publication department) 5 Delhi Entally Road, Kolkata 700014.
- The Message of the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad , an exposition of the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad in the light of modern thought and modern needs By Swami Ranganathananda; Advaita Ashrama (pub. dept.) 5 Delhi Entally Road, Kolkata 700014.