

Celebration of Ethnicity and Alterity for Cultural Diversity

Dr. Pitta Satyanarayana

Professor of English,
Vaagdevi College of Engineering,
Bollikunta, Warangal – 506 005, India.
pittasn@yahoo.co.in

Abstract: *Ethnicity as a group is welcome in that it imposes discipline peculiar to it for appraisal of some common qualities. The belongingness enjoyed by ethnicity is a possession worth its value. The acceptance of some tested practices comes under code of conduct if ethnicity is understood in its true perspective. But rigidity in ethnic groups is not a welcome sign. Time dictates the social dictats and so timely changes are a sine qua non. This alteration or change for good purifies the code of conduct of ethnic groups. Variety of ethnic groups have to entertain timely changes. Thus alterity of the doctrines and principles of an ethnic group will enhance its tone and performance to achieve the goals it has set for the unity and the welfare of the community of a particular ethnic order. Cultural diversity rules the world because the ethnic communities go and merge into cultures, like East Asiatic or African cultural diversities. The smaller divisions of races and sects are harmful in that there is prejudice and the humanity reaps the negative results of constant fights and never ending hatred. The Jews and Christians are always at war. The blacks and the white concepts ruined human values. Hence the need for Alterity.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The world is divided into different cultural entities for identity. They have evolved since time immemorial and one cannot undo them. But these emerge as water-tight compartments and pose danger to humanity. The parochial tendency of sects, religions, races and ethnic groups should join the main stream of the larger domain of cultures such as East and South East Asia, (including China, Japan, Indonesia and Korea) West-Asia and Africa. Indian cultural heritage is one among them against Western culture.

Sectarian societies pose danger to humanity. They develop on account of a shift from the unified nature. It so happened in the case of India in the mid 1940s. Narrowly defined identities and diversities have to be buried in communitarian politics. In the wake of the crucial circumstances, alterity should be brought in honouring the ethnicity in order to achieve unity in cultural diversity.

2. DEFINITION OF THE TERMS INVOLVED

The term ‘ethnicity’ is a technical fact belonging to a particular race. Race as a crude meaning refers to understandable group derogatory in its sense for opposition with its counterpart or other race at another place. But ethnicity contains many important factors like class, gender and age. The people of the group have common code of conduct and observance of a set of practices.

The term ‘alterity’ is the need of the hour for changes. But ethnic groups are known for their rigidity. They scarcely give room for reformation. Orthodox beliefs like ‘Sati’ have been altered based on the thought of the age. The fundamentalism at times becomes a bane. At these junctures the groups alter for intended good, some of the principles laid down as observed by the specific group. Variety is intended for welfare but not for the variety’s sake.

3. NEED FOR ETHNICITY IN THE PRESENT-DAY CIVILIZATION

Ethnic groups have their own advantages because man is a social being at first and a demon or a god next. The racial enmity that prevailed has become responsible for wars and massacre of myriads of people. The level of observation of common code of conduct among ethnic groups is essential for the growth of culture, a broader term of amalgamation of various ethnic groups.

4. NATURE OF ETHNIC GROUPS AND SOCIAL WELL BEING

Ethnic groups in general have a ready agreement when the same belief that runs through the minds of the people of a particular ethnic group. This is the consent readily available for the accomplishment of certain social ends. For example the resolutions of the ethnic group may arrive at the agreement of the improvement in their own practices. It is a good sign. It paves the way for alterity for good, to some extent.

5. CONTRIBUTION OF ETHNICITY TO CULTURE

As the horizon of understanding grows, the smaller groups of ethnicity may turn into larger groups with the necessary changes suited to the other groups and the term 'ethnicity' enlarges into 'culture'. The larger groups or communities are useful for less differences and more agreeability among its members and so the culture grows.

Certain health principles and beliefs in human relationships have been easily agreed to when they are presented by the men of great say from the particular ethnic group. This avoids propaganda by the administrative authorities and saves finances on public management.

Ethnic groups adjusted themselves to the natural resources available. For example in Muslim ethnic groups wastage of water is a taboo. The marriage relations and the adjustment of the spouses among themselves according to the belief of an ethnic group have proved to be positive bonds of peaceful co-existence. In the age of globalization the noted intellectuals pour out nostalgia only on account of ethnic bonds. If these streams are amalgamated, there will be better human relations and they promote peaceful living.

6. ALTERITY AS THE NEW 'MANTRA' FOR SOCIAL WELFARE

The irony of existence of an ethnic group is that it does not try to experiment the latest trend lest it should lose its identity. So the ethnic group is reluctant to change or alterity. Had there been alterity gaining ground, the eradication of differences would have become a reality. Thus the culture may see the light of change for good i.e., alterity. But the explosion of population and the mobility of people crossing the seas, thanks to science and technology, the welfare of humanity lies in 'alteration' among ethnic groups. To extract an example from the Mathematical genius Ramanujan's biography, his orthodoxy of bathing in the Thames in chill winter mornings subjected him to the disease of tuberculosis. So alterity is the main slogan for cultural integrity.

7. EMERGENCE OF CULTURES AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Now that the ethnic groups are dispersed on account of Information Technology and Technical Revolution which effaced the distance from the map of the world. The ethnic groups are ready for alterity. This is a good omen. The narrow ideals of a particular ethnic group have to be continued adopting them to their environment. They merge with a larger group which is liberal in outlook. In that case the divinity enters the culture, a larger group. The group can be guarded easily. Tolerance enhances and the goal of human welfare is thus achieved.

8. CULTURAL DIVERSITY AS A CONCEPT

Unless we bring in alterity among the cultures of different types, there will be no salvation of the common run of mortals. Diversification is not dangerous when a certain amount of alterity is attained. The existing political system in India is nourishing the ethnic groups though it boasts of unity. It is with a view to gain vote-banks for elections, that the political parties encourage ethnic groups. Instead, there should be amalgamation of ethnic groups. The reformative spirit has to be developed understanding the true concept of ethnic groups.

Growing injustice meted out to the depressed classes formed the idea of fighting for identity has gained ground, thanks to the ideas propagated by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. The proportional representation based on population of ethnic groups, is the cause for the fight of identity and development. The ethnic groups are going to be perpetuated with no will to bring about reforms. Had not Raja Ram Mohan Roy taken initiative the Sati would have been the pious duty of the ethnic groups. So is the case with widow marriages. The reformative spirit is tantamount to

nothing in ethnic groups. This is an example of not understanding the concept of ethnicity. False beliefs should be decayed in order to cope with the changing circumstances.

9. UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN EVERY TWO CULTURES

India is popular for her unity in diversity. Yet, we the Indians are not in a position to understand the validity of Western culture and we think that ours alone is the country which has landscape invested with gods and goddesses. The Himalayan snow (but not the snow elsewhere on the hills) seems to have spirituality in the looks of the Indians while every inch of land or sky is pervaded by God Almighty according to universal idea of a religion. We must be in a position to see the Lord of the Himalayas in the snow hills of Lake Tahoe of America. Such an understanding between every two cultures is the need of the hour.

10. TOLERANCE AS THE ALTERITY OF IMMEDIATE CONCERN

In the remote past, the ethnic groups were dwelling far and wide apart and so there was less susceptibility of the impact of one sect upon the other. Science and Technology has brought in interdependence. So we are not expected to hate others emerging from dissimilar ethnic group. Tolerance, the secret of every religious sermon, should be made to realize for the welfare of the world.

11. RELIGION AND HUMAN GOALS OF LIFE

Almost all the countries of the world are economically affordable enough to divert their attention towards human goal of life. Human goal is nothing but the union of one's self with the superhuman self that is attainable in our life. If we just leave the plane of orthodoxy of a particular religion, the goal is universal. This idea can be attributed to yoga but not a certain religion. Yoga is a therapy and it is a therapy for attaining clean mind that is the union with Universal Spirit. So the nomenclature of a religion should disappear altogether.

12. THE MESSAGE OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ON RELIGION

Having learnt all about Hinduism Swami Vivekananda crossed the seas and reached American and European countries. He is dear to the Hindus who according to their orthodoxy even to-day repeat the adage that one loses one's religion and is not fit for the rites followed by the Hindu Dharma, the moment one crosses the seas. The necessity of empowerment of educated youth had neglected the ethnic principle in accordance with the reformatory zeal of Swami Vivekananda.

13. MANIFESTATION FROM WESTERN CULTURE

The western culture on the other hand is wedded to materialism of comfort for the soul here and now. But human relations have to be developed through this diversity. Science will bring order in the study of man and material. Service motto is common both in the eastern and western cultures. The virtue of unity in diversity will enable the cultures grow and promote human values. Diversity in that aspect is better than the seemingly impossible unity among all cultures. Ethnicity can be celebrated in that manner.

I quote Ms. U. Sreekha of Dr. Ranga Rajan Engineering College Avadi Chennai's views from her paper presented on Canadian literature at a 3-day International Conference on Diversity in New Literature entitled 'Belief in the Myth of Canadian Multiculturalism.'

"The second generation youth who go to ethnically diverse schools and live in low-income neighborhoods strongly believe in the ideology of Canadian multiculturalism. They do so because their friends and neighbours, with their varied skin colours, languages and accents religions and countries of origin represent a multicultural Canada to them. They notice the proliferation of 'ethnic' symbols in their surroundings and believe that their existence signifies an inclusive society".

"They hear their parents' narratives of gratitude to Canada for providing their security, equity or access to free health care and school education and consider themselves forerunners to have been born here."

14. YOGA AS THE WAY OF LIFE

Let there be beliefs but the ultimate way of life should be based on Yoga, the union of souls with the Greater Soul. In other words at a cultural stage religion disappears and the goal is remembered. The goal of life is yoga alone but not the ethnicity. Cultural diversity can exist but alterity should be put into practice. Change is the spice of life of culture. A dead culture cannot promote world peace.

15. CONCLUSION

Beliefs of ethnic groups grow into culture proper. But there is amity between every two cultures. Alterity is the other side of culture. Culture grows through reform. Cultural diversity is not as dangerous as fundamentalism. Ethnic groups should merge together with common human goal of immersion of one's soul in the All Pervading Soul. The global interdependent economic relations will make the dream a reality.

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AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY



Dr. P. Satyanarayana (born 1943) is a Professor of English, He was awarded Editor's Choice Award from International Library of Poetry www.poetry.com for his poem 'Time, Peace' published in 'The Collected Whispers' 2008. He submitted his thesis on Bridge Course for undergraduates in General English and acquired Ph. D from Kakatiya University, Warangal, Andhra Pradesh, India. Having obtained M.A degree in Education besides a P. G. Diploma in English from English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad and yet another from Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi in Distance Education and a Master's Degree in Hindi from Osmania University, Hyderabad he got several research papers published on cultural and language issues of import . He is the author of five (5) books in English grammar and Writing Skills so far beside a score of books in Telugu till date.