



## A case for and against Managing Diversity with reference to the Indian Context.

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*"I have a dream that one day we will rise up and live out the true meaning of the creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal." I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope...."*

*(Martin Luther King, Jr.)*

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### I. Introduction:-

The assignment aims to analyse the concepts of Managing Diversity and Equal Opportunities as prevalent in UK. An effort has been made to draw parallels of these policies with the ones adopted in Indian context where caste-based discrimination affects the large majority. Caste is peculiar in that there is no biological differences either in terms of skin colour or body structure to differentiate one group from the other but the discrimination originates in descent, by one's birth into a particular caste. Apart from that it is pertinent to mention that in India diversity stems from the interplay of in numerous invasions, conquests, cultural assimilation, and fragmentation seasoned by multiple religious beliefs and very diverse physical environment that generated the ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity we witness today. The inequalities have emanated from the hierarchy of power. The oppression and discrimination have been rooted at all P, C and S levels. In this backdrop, how equality is delivered and diversity managed is a matter of paramount concern. Whether policies of equal opportunities alone hold good in the ensuring social equality to all the citizens of the country especially the lower castes which have been deprived of basic human rights and dignity for centuries or the principles of managing diversity can go a long way in assuring the dignity of the individual while safeguarding the goals of organizations – public or private is the subject of discussion here,

#### ***From equal opportunity to managing diversity – a significant move:-***

The objective which underpins UK Equal Opportunities approaches is that sex or ethnic origin should not be considered to be a relevant criterion in

their favor or to their disadvantage in appointments, rewards in job – related matters and it stresses the importance of treating people equally. The limitations of this approach, which suggests individuals can be stripped of their gender and ethnicity for the purposes of organizational decision making, have been widely recognized. One response in the UK has been Codes of Practice, from the Equal Opportunities Commission and the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE, 1983; EOC, 1985), which suggest ways not only to eliminate discrimination but also to promote equality.

Measures to achieve the latter are based on the view that in many instances it is important to recognize social group differences which may lead to some applicants or job holders being disadvantaged. This is sometimes called positive action in the UK encompassing some elements of the US affirmative action approaches.

On the other hand,

***"The basic concept of managing diversity accepts that the workforce consists of a diverse population of people. The diversity consists of visible and non – visible differences which will include factors such as sex, age, background, race, disability, personality, and work style. It is founded on the premise harnessing these differences will create a productive environment in which everybody feels valued, where their talents are being fully utilized and in which organizational goals are met." (Kandola and Fullerton, 1998:8).***

The core idea behind Managing Diversity seems to be to encourage organizations to recognize differences as Managing Diversity is about the realization of the potential of all employees.

The approach which has formed the basis for most equal opportunity initiatives is based on the view that it will probably be disadvantageous to the



cause of equality to emphasize a difference. It believes that equality is best promoted by minimizing the significance of, rather than drawing attention to, these factors within workplace policies. Another major reason why many of those who are concerned about equality pursue this approach lest an avoidable reason is given to those who feel difference puts them in disadvantageous positions or who would seek to exploit differences in ways which are detrimental to equality.

If we take social – based differences as the traditional concern of equality policies, the first approach to managing diversity could be labelled dissolving differences. It involves a series of initiatives which stress individualism as the primary focus of concern, not groups. As such, while the intention of such an approach is an environment in which everybody feels valued, social group equality is not being given any specific significance as an objective of organizational policies. Instead, diversity issues are said to include differences in communication styles, problem solving, professional experience, functional expertise, management level, training and education, and work ethics (Caudron, 1994:56). The other main approach to managing diversity could be labelled valuing socially – based differences and their significance for the perpetuation of inequality. While dissolving and valuing differences represent the dominant strands in the managing diversity, another approach, which could be called accommodating or utilizing differences, includes initiatives which are very similar to some equal opportunities approaches.

The objective here is equality as the opportunity to be acknowledged for the person one is and to be helped to make the most of one's talents and reach one's own goals. Managing Diversity is closer to existing Equal Opportunities approaches in that it sees inequality as experienced by members of groups; it is distinctive in that it argues that such differences should be acknowledged, and responded to, rather than ignored.

The analytical argument underpinning this reluctance to focus on differences is that inequality derives from a hierarchy of power. Besides, the politics of difference as opposed to the politics of equal recognition requires a shift from tolerance: ***"Tolerance is the exercise of largesse by the powerful, ultimately on behalf of the powerful. It is the generous extension of forbearance toward someone who is intrinsically objectionable or not deserving of the privileges being allowed."*** (Husband, 1994:65)

The concept of managing diversity 'premised on a recognition of diversity and differences as positive attributes of an organization' has grown out of Human Resource Management which according to Storey is: ***"A distinctive approach to employment management which seeks to achieve competitive advantage through the strategic deployment of a highly committed and capable workforce, using an array of cultural, structural and personnel techniques."*** (Storey cited in Thompson 1998:192). Hence, it becomes clearer that the key similarities hinge around the competitive edge, strategic thinking and people centered policies. In this sense *'diversity is good, good for business'*. (Volvo statement).

Hence, we see the concept of managing diversity as internally and business initiated, quality and opportunity focused with output orientation for the organization. It is proactive rather than reactive like the equal opportunities policies which are legally driven with focus on problematic differences.

#### ***Managing Diversity – a critique:-***

Is managing diversity old wine in new bottle? If so, we can expect to see many organizations changing the name of their existing Equal Opportunities policies to Managing Diversity with little accompanying change in policy substance as Guest notes: ***"this may serve the useful function of giving a jaded personnel department a new and more contemporary image. However, unless it also signals a new approach, with some substantive change behind the rhetoric, a change of title on its own is likely to prove no more than a short – term palliative"*** (Guest, 1989:48).

However, in absence of the anti – racist, anti – discriminatory analysis as well as rights-based approach, it may well stay only at the level of cultural voyeurism but as a concept 'about the realization of the potential of all employees', it seriously questions positive action and targets which are number oriented rather than output or quality oriented. It challenges deficit model of deficiency and allows the managers and service providers to be proactive as to enthuse rather than merely defend.

Some argue for a non – interventionist approach, governed by a particular liberal 'hands – off' ideology: *'things will improve in their own good time'*, *'Cream rises to the top'* etc. This school of thought sees diversity and representivity initiatives (widening the gate – way) as a potential lowering of standards. Salaman (1986) explores employees' reactions to an equal opportunity policy in the London Fire Brigade which had led to the



recruitment of women and ethnic minority men. The white firemen could not accept that the organization had previously been discriminating. Instead, they believed that, under the new policy, standards had been lowered to let in inferior applicants.

Some feel there is confusion about definitions. Some civil servants still seem to misunderstand what the concepts 'diversity' and 'equality' mean. Certainly, some people openly admit that they are confused about these concepts and approaches. Some say diversity has now taken over equality, and that equality is now outmoded and redundant.

Diversity scholars have downplayed the notion that diversity is an ethical imperative, to highlight instead the fact that diversity simply makes good business sense. Gilbert et al (1999) highlight the ethical underpinnings of diversity by reviewing three ethical principles that support successful diversity initiatives. The first principle is the Golden Rule: if you want to be treated fairly, treat others fairly. The second is the Disclosure Rule: you must be comfortable with decisions after asking whether you would mind if others became aware of them. The third is the Rights Approach, which assumes that people should have the ability to freely choose what they will do with their lives. Abiding by the first rule, successful diversity programs are inclusive and provide fair treatment to all employees. The openness needed to administer diversity programs responds to the second rule. Diversity management addresses the third rule by allowing people to reach their fullest potential in choosing opportunities according to their interests and abilities. If these diversity principles are removed, the authors argue, diversity initiatives will collapse. Hence even if the motivation to address the diversity challenge is not necessarily ethical, ethical principles must be utilized for successful implementation.

Both Equal Opportunities and diversity management approaches must find solutions to the same types of problems: how can individuals be assessed "fairly" and how can structures and cultures that work to favor some and disadvantage others be changed. Its objective to avoid making assumptions about people based on their sex or race may be laudable. However, in a context where there is widespread evidence that people do make such (negative) assumptions, there needs to be a strategy for making this a reality.

Equal opportunities and Managing Diversity are not opposite to each other but form a continuum as certain US studies have indicated that the success of affirmative action has brought forth

interest in managing diversity. In the present scenario where the boundaries of the world have shrunk due to globalization, equality and diversity need to be seen as interdependent for them to be successful. If managing diversity initiatives are seen as an extension of the equal opportunities albeit conceived of as being driven by organizations themselves rather than by legislation. The new approaches are far more likely to bring progress towards greater equality than if they are introduced as a way of trying to disguise a concern to overcome discrimination at both the inter – personal and structural levels.

#### ***The delivery of equality in India – the land of diversity:-***

Having to write the Racial Origin and Country of Origin in Recruitment Monitoring Forms of the organizations working actively to eradicate discrimination and promote equal opportunities here in UK chagrins me as much as did the mention of 'Which caste do you belong to' in forms for admission or recruitment in India.

The inequality and discrimination has been derived from a hierarchy of power displayed in the caste paradigm in Indian social system devised hundreds of years ago on the functional basis: priests or *brahmins* formed the higher class and provided intellectual and spiritual guidance to the society; warriors and the aristocracy or *kshatriyas* formed the second layer, ruling and protecting others; merchants and landowners or *vaishyas* composed the third layer and took care of commerce and agriculture; *shudras* were artisans and servants who performed all manual labor necessary in the society. The untouchables performed the menial functions.

Thatcherian xenophobia and fear was directed towards 'strangers' but in India, for centuries, the so – called lower class people had been treated as strangers craving to carve niche for themselves so that they could be judged by the content of their character rather than the credentials of the caste on which they had little control to have been born in. They had been subjected to exploitation, deprivation, discrimination, and social hatred till things started changing for the better after independence. Vide Article 17 of the constitution, "Untouchability" is abolished. And according to provisions of Article 15, discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth is prohibited whereas Article 16 states: "**No citizen on the grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, descent, place of birth, residence or nay of them, be ineligible for, or discriminated against in**



respect of, any employment or office under the State".

It ensures: 'Equality of opportunity' in matters of public employment' subject to the following clauses that the State may make any provision for the reservation of appointments or posts in favor of any backward class of citizens which, in the opinion of the State, is not adequately represented in the services under the State. ([http://www.oefre.unibe.ch/law/ic1/in00000\\_h.html](http://www.oefre.unibe.ch/law/ic1/in00000_h.html)).

After protracted discussions in the Constituent Assembly, assimilation on terms of equality was offered to caste and class based minorities in the Constitution, but it was felt that to achieve this it would be necessary to recognize caste in the Constitution as a cause of inequalities and as a basis for affirmative action. At the same time, recognition and protection was offered to religious, cultural and linguistic minorities. Equal respect, fairness and non-discrimination were to be the guiding principles of state policies towards minorities and no wall of separation was envisaged between state and religious activities. *'Where the politics of universal dignity fought for forms of non – discrimination that were quite 'blind' to the ways in which citizens differ, the politics of difference often redefines non – discrimination as requiring that we make these distinctions the basis of differential treatment.'* (Taylor, 1992:32). It cannot be taken for granted that the problems of minority protection and diversity management can be solved only by following a politics of difference and granting more minority rights. A politics of difference which is not backed up by a commitment to equal basic rights and citizenship could be used to repress, rather than protect, minorities.

Keeping in view this spirit, the policy of reservation has been adopted recognizing the differences especially in wake of the age long repression and oppression of the so – called lower castes by the higher castes. In 1991, the Mandal Commission report was accepted which has furthered reservation in jobs and higher education institutions. The Constitutional Review Committee, set up by the Parliament in India, in its report in June, 2002 states:

*"There is a misconception that the problems of Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes, and the Backward Castes are marginal. In*

*reality these are part of the central and core problems of the country. That these categories of the people constitute 3/4<sup>th</sup> of the population of the country and almost the entire physical labour of the country is drawn from them. It is the failure to tackle their problems so as to remove their disabilities and secure their full potential for national development that lies at the root of the many weaknesses faced by the post – independence India to this day"* (<http://uk.geocities.com/internationaldalitsolidarity/cerd>).

There has been fierce criticism of the reservation policy by certain *status quo* faithful on specifically the principle of 'meritocracy'. **"No society that has shunned merit has succeeded in solving its problems and it is ironic that.....we have become, perhaps, the only nation in the world where people fight to be called backward rather than forward."** (Narayanan Murthy, 2001).

As Managing Director of the Sugar Mills in Haryana in India, I used to feel on horns of dilemma during the process of selections for the technical posts in the mills. The rules, procedures and policies would require strict adherence to the reservation norms whereas the interest of the mills necessitated sound technical knowledge and expertise which sometimes the applicants falling in quota category failed to display. Legally, my hands used to be tied. But as a manager of an organization I ensured extensive training and exposure to practical work to the selected candidates prior to use of his expertise in the interest of the mills.

According to another opinion: **'Reserving a certain percentage of seats in higher education and jobs in the high ranks of the government is not going to solve the problems of the so called 'back ward caste' population..... Present reservation policy has brought a climate of militancy between people belonging to different castes'**. (Utkarsh Kansal in <http://www.india-reform.org/articles/reservation.html>).

Granting recognition to minority groups without addressing other social and political causes of hostility in society and without emphasizing the need for democratization could possibly increase, rather than reduce, hostility and segmentation in



society. While there can be no easy formula to solve the problems of society, states like India would need to pursue simultaneously a range of objectives which would include freedom and equality, as well as respect for the contributions of minorities to a shared national culture.

In UK, according to Modernizing Government White Paper, March 1999 "The public service must be part of, and not apart from, the society it serves. It should reflect the full diversity of society. At present it does not..... Addressing this is a top priority. The Government wants a public service which values the differences that people bring to it. It must not only reflect the full diversity of society but also be strengthened by that diversity. In this context, the civil services in India have been since independence the finest example of managing diversity reflecting the full diversity of society. The officers of the Indian Administrative Service and Policy Services are selected by a common examination system and after thorough training for two years, they can be posted anywhere in the country. The same is also true of the Armed Forces which uses the caste terminology, too such as Gorkha, Sikh, Jat regiments.

The point about Indian diversity is that you can be many things and one thing. You can be a good Muslim, a good Keralite and a good Indian all at once. Where Freudians note the distinctions that arise out of "the narcissism of minor differences", in India we celebrate the commonality of major differences. According to Shashi Tharoor. **"If America is a melting – pot, then to me India is a thali, a selection of sumptuous dishes in different bowls. Each tastes different, and does not necessarily mix with the next, but they belong together on the same plate, and they complement each other in making the meal a satisfying repast. For me, what is precious about India is the idea that a nation may endure differences of caste, creed, color, culture, cuisine, costume and custom, and still rally around a democratic consensus."** [http://www.geocities.com/indianfas/india/to\\_the\\_end.htm](http://www.geocities.com/indianfas/india/to_the_end.htm)

And he refers to 'Malayali Miracle' as in Kerala, none of the things that have been serious disabilities in the rest of the world seem to matter: being a woman, being of low caste, being poor, and so on.

**"After Independence, the underprivileged have been, if not exactly privileged, certainly been looked upon more kindly by the state. Democracy has worked – the extent to which there is awareness of caste is an indication of this – people have been forced into awareness, partly because of the thorough – going reform instituted by affirmative action laws in India, which have been more successful than the much narrower reforms attempted in the US. People who wield power in India today could not have dreamt of such power thirty years ago. That is an example of how democracy has transformed the country. "**  
**Tharoor,**  
**Shashi:**  
[http://www.geocities.com/indianfas/india/to\\_the\\_end/htm](http://www.geocities.com/indianfas/india/to_the_end/htm)

The number of pro-diversity initiatives looks impressive and the current level of support and investment in such programmes is encouraging. However, this only gives us a partial picture of current reality; the situation is not as clear as it might first appear. All these are laudable strategic and policy intentions and initiatives. However, questions remain: how well have they been implemented and what has been the impact (intended and unintended) of the various initiatives? The former President of India observed in his millennium Republic Day address to the nation:

**"Untouchability has been abolished by law but the shades of it remain in the ingrained attitudes nurtured by the caste system. Though the provisions of reservation in educational institutions and public services follow from our constitution these provisions remain unfulfilled through bureaucratic and administrative deformation or by narrow interpretations of these special provisions. It seems in the social realm some kind of counter – revolution is taking place in India. It is forgotten that these benefits are provided not in a way of charity but as human rights and as social justice to a section of society who constitute a big chunk of our population, who actually contribute to agriculture, industry and service as landless laborers, factory and municipal workers".**  
<http://uk.geocities.com/internationaldalitsolidarity/cerd/ncdhr2002>



## II. Conclusion:-

On closer look, features of radical diversity model are conspicuously present in India as constitutionally, the deficit model of difference stands challenged with due recognition and valuing of differences and politics of difference. It has been recognized beyond any shadow of doubt that discrimination is a violation of human rights and constitutional provisions carry clear – cut message of anti – discrimination which is implemented with both rigor and vigor through education, sanctions and clarity of purpose involving institutional reform rather than a lip – service to the equality principles or superficial changes. Moreover, systematic efforts are afoot to provide educational, training opportunities to the backward communities and the minorities so that they can compete.

The diversity management India does take into consideration the ethical dimension of diversity in accordance with the sacred aims envisaged in the Preamble of the constitution: Which highlights its commitment to constitute India into a 'Sovereign, Socialist, Secular, Democratic, Republic and to secure to all its citizens:- Justice, social, economic and political; Liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; Equality of status and of opportunity; and to promote among them all Fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the nation'. [http://www.indianchild.com/constitution\\_of\\_india.htm](http://www.indianchild.com/constitution_of_india.htm)

**True, Indian democracy has been successful but there is yet a long way to go as far as change in the attitudes of the individuals is concerned towards the so – called lower castes. Clearly, the leadership role is a vital part of any successful change programmer and none more so than in the diversity arena for 'molding public opinion, bringing new blood with new ideas and initiative.... that broaden the possibility of change". (Allen Schick, quoted in Government of the Future).**

The political ideology, to intervene or not to intervene, clearly influences the extent to which diversity and equality initiatives exist, thrive or are killed off in their infancy. And this ideology that, according to Thompson, like the 'glue' keeps oppression in place, acts as the vehicle of 'cultural

transmission' between the personal, cultural, and structural levels of oppression. **"If structure and institutions are created and recreated by everyday practice then they are vulnerable to major change in practice."** (Connell, 1987 cited in Thompson 1998:27). In India the C and S level changes are gradually paving way for the P level attitudinal transitions. It is indicative of not just 'small wins' as means of bringing about positive change but a virtual revolution taking place. Diversity Management initiatives are positive steps, driven by whatever reasons, in the direction of making of the world which is not broken into 'narrow domestic walls', where concern is for the human kind and the world where everyone can live **with 'head held high and mind without fear. '(RN Tagore).**

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