INTRODUCTION – RETHINKING EQUITY IN INDIA AND QUEBEC: TOWARDS INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES

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In this new century, the issue of relations between "ethnic" groups, defined by various markers such as language, culture or religion, is more relevant than ever. Many societies, whether or not marked by a deep historical diversity, have been transformed by the intensification and the diversification of migratory flux at the international or national level. Moreover, while many analysts predicted that ethnicity would become less salient for individuals and groups, due to globalization and the emergence of new solidarities, it is still a major explanatory variable in the persistence of inequalities. Its role as a basis for identity politics, whether within majorities or minorities, has also increased significantly.

While traditional models of citizenship are being challenged, important debates on the respective relevance of various approaches to "manage" diversity such as assimilation, integration, interculturalism or multiculturalism are thriving. These questions are of interest as much to researchers and decision-makers as to ordinary citizens. Controversies focus on the priority and the conciliation of four equally important social objectives, often complementary but sometimes conflictual: the valorization of pluralism, the actualization of equity, the respect for democratic values and the fostering of a harmonious civic space. The search for the right equilibrium in this regard cannot be based only on normative considerations, but needs a contextual analysis contrasting the extent to which these objectives are achieved in various societies, which impacts the definition of institutional arrangements, policies, programs and actions that should be put forward.

Often, such comparisons are deemed to be legitimate only when contrasting societies who share a common civilization or an equivalent level of development (e.g. western immigration countries). Nevertheless, such an epistemological position significantly limits the relevance of such endeavours, as it excludes the largest multicultural democracy of the world, India, whose experiences in the area of diversity, both positive and negative, can bear many lessons for other countries. Which is why the Centre d'études ethniques des universités montréalaises (CEETUM) and the Center for Canadian, US and Latin American Studies (CCULAS) started a collaboration to foster research and exchanges in the areas of multiculturalism, nationalism, diversity and equity, that culminated in 2008 by the signing of an official AOC, the first ever in the area of social science between an Indian and a francophone Canadian university. After organizing a conference in Delhi in 2005, on *Multiculturalism: Policy Concerns and Problem Area in Canada and India*, both institutions became convinced that more comparisons on such topics were warranted, especially within Quebec, given its specific sociological and policy context. Indeed, even if the dynamic of ethnic relations is much more complex in India and that pluralism there originated not mainly from immigration but largely through layers of historical processes, the construction of a pluralist but yet inclusive society constitutes a major challenge for both societies. They share a common hiatus between a strong legal commitment to liberalism, a high normative popularity of republicanism or nationalism, and a dominant *de facto* communautarism at the level of civil society. They have also experienced similar controversies on the place of religion in the public space, which challenged their common model of open secularism, as well as on the limits of traditional approaches of positive discrimination to radically decreased intergroup inequalities.

How can we ensure that the accommodation of cultural practices be compatible with liberalism and human rights, especially gender equality? Should we better define the limits of diversity in a context of growing religious fundamentalism? To what extent have various affirmative action programs targeting inequality been successful or just increased class differences within target groups? To what extent is the current debate around pluralism associated to an increase in inequality between ethnic, linguistic and religious groups, and to a fostering of intolerant attitudes or behaviours? What the specific role of two major institutions within democratic societies, education and the media, in this regard?

It is such questions, among others, that 20 Indian and Quebec experts from diverse backgrounds and disciplines addressed during the International Seminar "*Rethinking Equity in India and Quebec: Towards Inclusive Societies*", held in Montreal on November 7th 2011. The Seminar was supported by the Secrétariat aux Affaires intergouvernementales canadiennes (SAIC) of the Quebec Government and co-organized by the CEETUM and the CCULAS, and two new partners, the Pôle de recherche sur l'Asie du Sud (PRIAS) of the University of Montréal and the Association for Canadian Studies (ACS). It also gathered a wider invited audience of researchers, students, as well as partners from various levels of government and of community organizations interested in the subject, who actively participated to the discussion.

The Seminar aimed at three main objectives: 1) Allow selected Indian researchers and a wider group of Quebec researchers and decision-makers to get better acquainted with their respective context of ethnic relations, with a special focus on inclusion and equity; 2) Foster the identification of common research interests or policy concerns at the theoretical, empirical and practical levels; 3) Serve as the basis for the definition of further collaborative ventures as well as, in the middle run, for a common research agenda. It became quickly apparent that the exchanges and interactions between participants had produced an atmosphere inviting to further collaboration. The publication of this special issue of *Canadian Diversity* is the first step in this regard.

Nevertheless, the articles readers will find in this volume are not a mere reflection of the papers presented during the Seminar, but the results of the exchanges held during the event. Whenever possible, we encouraged Indian and Quebec contributors to co-author common articles. In many other instances, Quebec or Indian articles cover similar topics and mirror common concerns. Given the growing importance of the South Asian community in Québec, we have also solicited some experts in the field to offer their reflection on various issues concerning this group in the province. The 23 articles in this volume are grouped around four main themes whose scientific and political relevance is obvious. Five articles study the role of the governmental and non-state actors in responding to the challenge of diversity, trough policies, programs and actions. Six articles inquire about Secularism, religious diversity and ethnic relations in the two contexts. Six articles are covering the topic of the role of education and of the media in building an inclusive society. The last five articles discuss how both societies are fighting inequality. We are especially proud to have been able to convince so many people from such diverse backgrounds and disciplines to contribute to our endeavour. On the Quebec side, authors come from seven universities, public institutions or civil society associations. The Indian contribution is also impressive: with authors from eight academic, governments and private organizations from four Indian States.

We hope that this publication will allow readers from both contexts to better understand issues of equity and diversity in the other society, as well as convince them of the interest of increased collaboration in the search for solving common problems. The journal should be particularly useful in the many centers for Canadian, Quebec or Francophone Studies thriving in India and in the lesser, but growing , number of centers for Indian or South Asian Studies in Quebec Indian readers who speak or study French as well as some Quebec readers less familiar with English will also find a very substantive summary of 1000 words in French at the end of each article.

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