WHAT HAS MULTICULTURALISM ACHIEVED IN CANADA AND WHAT ARE ITS CHALLENGES?

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INTRODUCTION

My introduction to Canada started off with an interesting experience at the famous Calgary Stampede. Having recently arrived in Canada from India, I wore a saree on this hot summer day in July and joined the crowded event when a journalist approached me and asked me where I was from. He smiled and offered to introduce me to a '*Canadian* Indian'. It was exciting to see a teepee and meet an elder, and then to see a photo of the two of us in the Calgary Herald the next morning with the caption: East meets West.

That intrigued me and got me interested in the early history of Canada: how the English and French had colonized Canada and settled here: a country that already had many indigenous groups now called First Nations, Inuit and Metis people, had since become an immigrant society. But after a century of immigration, in 1965 John Porter's influential book *The Vertical Mosaic* (1965) painted a powerful image of Canada as a vertical mosaic which demonstrated stark inequalities among social classes and hierarchy in ethnic groups with 'White, Anglo-Saxon Protestants' (WASP) at the top.

It was not until many years later when I started teaching a mandatory Multicultural Education course to pre-service teachers at McGill that I really understood the impact of the birth of Canada on Indigenous peoples, the cultural genocide that took

place and the forced residential schooling program of over 100,000 children between the 1870s and the 1990s.

It was painful for me to learn that at first, Canada's immigration policies were exclusionary and kept non-white people out: "To admit Orientals in large numbers would mean the end, the extinction of the white people. And we always have in mind the necessity of keeping this a white man's country" (The Abbotsford News,1) said the premier of B.C. when in 1914 the steamship Komagata Maru arrived in Vancouver carrying 376 Indian passengers who were barred from entering Canada.

Structural racism and systemic discrimination against non-White people (e.g., Indian, Chinese and Blacks) I found out, was enforced through laws reflecting the social norms of the time. For example, in 1911 a ban on immigration of Blacks was approved stating: "the Negro race ...is deemed unsuitable to the climate and requirements of Canada" (Anthony, 2020).

LEGISLATION: MULTICULTURALISM

My arrival in Canada coincided with another dramatic event. Unfamiliar with Canadian politics, I had arrived when the country was in the grip of "Trudeaumania" caused by an eloquent and outspoken candidate for Prime Minister who reflected many of the changing values of the time (e.g., recognition of human rights after World War II), and confidently set out his vision of what Canada should be: a just society. A portion of his statement on the just society gives an idea of his thinking on equal opportunity:

> *"The Just Society will be one in which those regions and groups which have not fully shared in the country's affluence will be given a better opportunity... On the never-ending road to perfect justice, we will, in other words, succeed in creating the most humane and compassionate society possible"* (Graham, 1998: 19-20).

This trademark phrase became the basis for his policies beginning with the Policy of Multiculturalism which Prime Minister Trudeau announced in Parliament in 1971. As a concept, multiculturalism recognized the demographic diversity of Canada. Ideologically, it was a total reversal of assimilation because it implied dissolution of British cultural domination through integration of all ethno-cultural groups into Canadian society (recommendation of the B&B Commission). And as a policy, it was an attempt to manage diversity in the country.

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However, management of diversity was seen in static terms and focused on cultural diversity and maintenance of heritage culture and language rather than on unequal opportunities in society. As a result, the majority cultures (both English and French) kept themselves out of Multicultural Policy. Whiteness was kept invisible, and the vertical mosaic maintained. But White resistance to

multicultural policy was not unusual because "(t)hey think it is not about them...race has nothing to do with them." (Jay and Jones, 2005:104). Respect for other cultures cannot be legislated and developing some knowledge of the 'other' must be taught. So, prejudice reduction programs were introduced in schools, business, and other areas. But the focus was to 'tolerate' other cultural groups rather than look at diversity broadly – as a strength which brings a diversity of ideas, richness, and dynamism to a composite culture.

Changes in immigration policies, the Multiculturalism Act of 1988, and the establishment of the Canada Race Relations Foundation Act (1991) finally changed the focus from ethnic cultural and linguistic retention towards a vision of equality of opportunity measures for all Canadians. The Employment Equity Act, 1998, amended in 2013, was additional legislation to rectify historical disadvantages experienced by women, people with disabilities, Indigenous peoples, and visible minorities. The meaning of multiculturalism in Canada had been expanded to make race relations a primary focus of Multicultural Policy. The Charter of Rights and Freedoms in the Canadian Constitution (1992) further consolidated the rights of all Canadians towards a just society.

PICTURE OF CANADA @ 50

So, what does Canada look like after 50 years of Multicultural Policy? This year, Canada was named 'Best Country in the World' by *U.S. News and World Report* (Singer, 2021). Citing data from the Migration Integration Policy Index, the article points to Canada's "world-leading laws and policies, including the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and its national policies on multiculturalism." Other reports cited in the article say Canada is a very attractive and inclusive destination and among the "friendliest places on Earth for immigrants". In 2020, Canada was 4th in the world for its "comprehensive, immigrant-friendly policies that emphasize equal rights, opportunities and security for newcomers."

Canada has also been portrayed as a country of welcome to refugees particularly during crisis situations and in 2019 ranked first among 26 countries once again, as the world leader in the resettlement of refugees (UNHCR, n.d.). Canadian people were awarded the Nansen prize by UNHCR in 1986 although it has a history of exclusion of certain refugee groups during its past (Ghosh et al., 2019). In 2021, the government announced that it would take 20,000 most vulnerable refugees from Afghanistan due to the crisis created by the departure of U.S. troops. Even when immigration levels fell sharply, during the pandemic year 2020 Canada admitted 184,000 new permanent residents (Statista, 2021).

The 2016 Census (Statistics Canada, 2017a) shows Canada has 35,151,728 million people with a declining fertility rate, greying and ethnically diverse population: 22.3 percent visible minorities, 4.9 percent of Aboriginal identity, with people of European descent at 72.9 percent.

Canada continues to rank first among the OECD countries in the proportion of college and university graduates (54: 36.7 percent OECD average) in the 25-64 age group (Statistics Canada, 2017b). In 2016, First Nations people, Métis and Inuit all had made gains in postsecondary education at every level: 18.7 percent in 2006 to 23.0 percent in 2016

in college diploma. In 2018, 70 percent of 20-year-old immigrants who came to Canada before the age of 15 were in postsecondary education as compared to 56 percent of the Canadian population in that age group. Patterson et al. (2019) point out that employment growth over the previous five years "has been entirely accounted for by landed immigrants".

THE LIVED EXPERIENCE

These statistics hide the type, level and conditions of employment, access to housing and well-being among various ethno-cultural groups. The Coronavirus has put a spotlight on the structural inequities in Canada. The economically disadvantaged have been affected most: it is only possible to "shelter-at-home" when one has a home. Furthermore, in this emergency, physical distancing is requiring us to develop new ways of living and communicating which involve new technologies. Poorer households have limited or no access to the Internet and equipment.

Vulnerability of racial groups implies structural racism. While race does not have scientific validity, the social concept affects the daily lived experiences of racialized people, their future and following generations. Constance Backhouse (1999) to Robyn Maynard (2017) among others have documented racism in the Canadian justice system and in state-sanctioned violence against people of colour. The 2016 Census indicates growing racial disparities in Canada: 20.8 percent people of colour are low-income compared to 12.2 percent of non-racialized people. The wage gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people was 33 percent; the wage gap between White and non-white continued to be wide despite equal pay legislations. The 'colour code' persists intergenerationally for visible minorities (OCASI, 2019).

> **"These government sponsored, missionary run schools are responsible not only for destroying the lives of so many children over a century, but the lingering effects impact future generations."**

This year (2021) Canadians were shocked at the discovery of unmarked gravesites of hundreds believed to be mainly Indigenous children near former residential school sites in Manitoba, British Columbia, and Saskatchewan. The appalling realization that these government sponsored, missionary run schools are responsible not only for destroying the lives of so many children over a century, but the lingering effects impact future generations of Indigenous peoples have affected all. The Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 recommendations in 2015 aimed at redressing the legacy of residential schools. Only an urgent and genuine desire to reconcile the denial of human dignity written in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which a Canadian, John Humphrey helped write, could lead to an inclusive and just society.

"We need to acknowledge that our history includes darker moments... Canadians look back on these transgressions with regret and shame – as we should. But our history was also filled with many positive moments...These positive changes can never right historical wrongs. But they can serve to remind us...

(that) The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice" (Trudeau, 2015).

Multiculturalism is 50 years later, still a controversial concept. People have different understandings of multiculturalism: retention of ethnic cultures, creation of ethnic enclaves, dangerous because it promotes "essentialism" which objectifies culture, identity and practices of ethno-cultural groups (Kymlicka, 2015). I tend to put the emphasis on equal opportunity notwithstanding differences in culture or country of origin implying a focus on racism and discrimination, but it also the right to be different.

Has the vertical mosaic that John Porter described in 1965 become flatter? Certainly, with increasing diversity in population, Canadian society is more complex than in the 1960s. Despite many years of multicultural policies, the vertical mosaic has not really changed.

Many gains have been made and while the pandemic has highlighted the rifts that exist it has also created a space and an opportunity for a new normal to develop a "fusion of horizons" (Gadamer, 1989: 317) for a composite culture or "third space". Dominant groups have been less concerned with changing their own attitudes towards minority groups, thus maintaining the hierarchy, and often not even aware of the privileges they have but which others, particularly vulnerable groups do not (McIntosh, 2003). The BLM movement and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission have, along with the pandemic, provided a clear picture of the challenges to multiculturalism in Canada, a policy which the majority of Canadians support.

"Legislation is not enough since a multicultural perspective involves humanistic values."

Multiculturalism is a paradigm shift in ideology because it involves a change in power relations: from assimilation or homogeneity, which is at one end of the spectrum, to heterogeneity and a fusion of many cultures at the other end (Ghosh, 2018). It is a radically new way of thinking, a worldview. Legislation is not enough since a multicultural perspective involves humanistic values. Multiculturalism is a work in progress because it is not a static concept. The world is changing, and multiculturalism cannot be defined: it is always in the making, it is "never-ending".

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