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**THE MAINSTREAMISATION OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY:  
THE CORPORATES, MEDIA AND SIMILARISATION OF  
PUBLICS IN INDIA**

**Abstract:** India has been known for its diverse cultures and communities. But in the contemporary economic and social setup where global cultural and economic ideologies dominate markets, media and every aspect of the social life, the paper asks if the notion of cultural diversity is intact in the contemporary India. Culture is certainly not static but what about diversity, is it transforming as well alongside as cultures around the world assimilate, as many argue? Does the profit driven market and media logic nurture diversity? In investigating cultural diversity, the paper argues that diversity is in the process of mainstreamisation as a result of similarisation of consumption of products, meanings and messages resulting in the reduction and simplification of diversity, as one is becoming the simulation of the other. It concludes that Indian society is in rapid transition from a diverse society to a post-diverse society which presents us with both unprecedented challenges and possible opportunities.

**Key words:** cultural diversity, media imperialism, globalisation, modernisation, Indian culture

## Introduction

Cultural diversity in the post-colonial India was identified as a key element for nation building process. Unity in diversity, since then, has been used as a rhetorical adage to reinforce faith in nationhood, brotherhood and peaceful coexistence. But the era of liberalisation in the 90s and globalisation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century gushed in the market forces which altered the very nature and idea of diversity more specifically cultural diversity as understood in the pre-liberalisation period. Three decades, since India opened its gates to the forces of capitalism cultural diversity deserves a fresh contemplation.

This paper explores the concept of cultural diversity in the post-independence India in the light of global economic and cultural reforms and movements such as liberalisation, globalisation, and modernisation—deeply placed in western action, thought and discourse. In that, it assesses various factors which have triggered the process of mainstreamisation in the society driven by the media messages laden with the commercial market forces.

The paper argues that the idea of cultural diversity does not fit the market and the media logic which is more profit driven and can ensure more success with lesser segmentation in the market. A culturally diverse society, in its truest sense, on the other hand, requires more effort to cater to as compared to the monoculture which by and large has similar consumerist attitudes and behaviour. From the vantage point of production and consumption, the paper notes that, the similarisation of consumption of products, meanings and messages is resulting in the reduction and simplification of diversity as one is becoming the simulation of the other. The patterns of production and consumption in the recent times have been widely used as qualitative analytical devices in media and transcultural studies for explaining both subjective and objective experiences of the contemporary world. Breckenridge and Appadurai in their works have assessed the dynamics of media consumption with respect to production and consumption of modernity in India in great detail. For Breckenridge consumption is an “activity and modality of social life”<sup>1</sup> which forms the subjective experiences of the modern life. Similarly, for Appadurai, consumption is “the work of the imagination,”<sup>2</sup> in that mass media mediates sentiments which are imagined and felt on collective levels.<sup>3</sup> Media analysis from the lens of production and consumption can be traced, as early as, in the works of Enzensberger, as for him media is not a “mere means of consumption but... a socialised means of production.”<sup>4</sup> The mass consumption, he argues, is “based not on the dictates of the false needs, but on the falsification and exploitation of quite real and legitimate ones without which the parasitic process of advertising would be ineffective.”<sup>5</sup> Jansson

adds spatial dimension in cultural production and consumption as he notes "...media research has to deal with is not just cultural mediations, but also *spatial mediations*, that is, the transformative interconnectedness between sites of production/consumption."<sup>6</sup>

Culture is "the medium through which people transform the mundane phenomenon of the material world into a world of significant symbols to which they give meaning and attach value."<sup>7</sup> For Mitchell, culture is "symbolic, active, constantly subject to change and driven through with relations of power. And in all cases culture is, perhaps, not a thing but rather an identifiable process, an analytic category, a mappable level or sphere." Das is among a few scholars who have deliberated over the concept of cultural diversity in India and for him "cultural identity of particular communities and regions"<sup>8</sup> is a chief source of cultural diversity. Das notes that India has been known for its remarkable cultural diversity owing to its multitude of ethnic origins, religions and languages but has also historically been marked by a higher degree "syncretism". Das's reading of cultural diversity in India is more of a detailed analysis of cultural syncretism which, according to him, is central to the notion of cultural condensation. His study, chiefly anthropological in nature, is independent of any contemporary debates on cultures with respect to capitalistic forces such as modernization, liberalization or globalization.

A great deal of contemporary discourse in academia, in the light of capitalist principles, argues for global cultural homogeneity and posits acculturation of cultures thesis which sits comfortably in complete contrast to the notion of cultural diversity. This paper does not aim to launch an empirical investigation into the concept of cultural diversity and neither is it an anthropological or theoretical analysis of the same. It, however, qualitatively explores the notion of cultural diversity plainly from the vantage point of production and consumption and mediation in the contemporary India. The key assumption which forms the foundation of this paper is that socio-cultural behaviours and attitudes which distinguish cultures from each other are strongly rooted in production and consumption of meanings and messages in a society, and its mediation through various sources. Success, for example, on one level, is a commodity produced, mediated and consumed collectively. What are the patterns of its production and how it changes continuously? How is it comprehended and consumed in a society, regardless of the cultural backgrounds? How does consumption of a commoditised ideology affect and shape the behaviour of a society? How does such a product which on one level is just a mere thought, acquires meaning and is mediated for consumption? How does media cheerleading make the same product coveted and trigger competition? In the age of fast-food giants and satellite televisions- the dark horses of capitalistic forces- are cultures,

even the ones in remotest territories of a nation state, really capable of being impassive to the forces of production and consumption? If not, would the influence not alter their cultural traits and dynamics which differentiate them from the others? These are some questions which the paper engages in answering through the course of ensuing discussion.

### **The Liberalisation Period**

The Indian subcontinent has been known for its complex cultural diversity owing to the years of foreign rule, religious movements, and spiritual discoveries giving a way to a rich potpourri of social habits, festivals, and customs. Ethnic origins, religions, and languages are the major sources of cultural diversity. The total number of mother tongues returned in 1961 and 1971 censuses was around 3,000, in 1981 around 7,000 and in 1991, it was more than 10,000. Nine religious categories (Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Jainism, Sikhism, Buddhism, Judaism, Zoroastrianism and Tribal Religions) are the faiths proclaimed by Indian people.

Before the naissance of liberalisation the concept of diversity was perhaps is in its most intact form as cultures, even in the remotest areas, remained largely confounded to their territorial boundaries. Introduction of liberalisation in the 90<sup>s</sup> and globalisation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century altered the very nature of diversity as geographical boundaries both locally and globally became permeable due to the technological developments and increased public access to it. With intensification of cross-territorial movement, rising aspirations and opportunities alongside, people ventured out to be part of the race of development. As a result of intensified cross-territorial movement, cultures broke away from their 'lived spaces' resulting in spatial reconfigurations and emergence of new socio-cultural dynamics. Several experts in communications, anthropology, cultural, globalisation, and development studies have emphasised a mutually inclusive and inter-dependent relationship between spatial and cultural dynamics. Berry's acculturation process,<sup>9</sup> for example, takes place when a culture comes in external contact with atleast two autonomous cultural groups followed by subsequent changes, as without contact there is no acculturation. Berry's first rule of acculturation implies that a culture has to change places in order to come in "contact" (with the other) followed by "...conflict and adaptation". For Escobar (2001), cultures and places are mutually interrelated, he notes, "place is, of course, constituted by sedimented social structures and cultural practices... the lived body is the result of habitual cultural and social processes" (pp 143). "Personal and cultural identity is bound up with place; a topoanalysis is one exploring the creation of self-identity through place...."<sup>10</sup> Escobar's extended explanation on the relation between place and culture puts the argument in perspective:

This means recognizing that place, body, and environment integrate with each other; that places gather things, thoughts, and memories in particular configurations; and that place, more an event than a thing, is characterized by openness rather than by a unitary self-identity. From an anthropological perspective, it is important to highlight the emplacement of all cultural practices, which stems from the fact that culture is carried into places by bodies – bodies are encultured and, conversely, enact cultural practices.<sup>11</sup>

The diversity paradigm, primarily based on the cultural distinctiveness among more than a billion-plus Indians, has been through a major hotchpotch in the post-liberalisation era due to frequent spatial reconfigurations and cultural adaptations “loosening and transforming the ties of culture to place.”<sup>12</sup> Among other factors, it’s the economics of post-liberalisation boom that has worked as a key factor in spatial reconfigurations, loss of lived spaces and cultural alterations, as nothing but pure economics is the driver of culture, diversity or any such social concept in a developing society. A group of labours from Bihar and Orissa moving to Gujarat or West Bengal or South Asian labours moving to Gulf countries for better monetary propositions underscores the importance of economics in congregation of cultures in one space.<sup>13</sup>

Between the post-independence and pre-liberalisation era, it was only discovered and reinforced in social-political rhetoric that Indians are culturally diverse. However, in the post-liberalisation era both the rhetoric and intention shifted towards managing diversity much against the market-media logic. A fresh contemplation over diversity paradigm also reveals that there has been a great divide between the intellectual discourses on diversity and diversity paradigm per se. Some inadvertent attempts of bridging the divide can be seen in sporadic ritualistic process of data gatherings and their statistical interpretations on Indian diversity. A recent investigation<sup>14</sup> on diversity of Indian languages reveals that about 20% of Indian languages have become extinct, since the last survey carried out by the British Raj in the pre-independence period.

### **Diversity & Culture: The Acculturation of Diversity – The Globalisation Period**

The 21<sup>st</sup> century introduced a fresh, fierce and extended version of liberalisation labelled as globalisation which was clearly empowered with the idea of economic assimilation of the world community. Every change which liberalisation triggered in the 90<sup>s</sup> to economies, societies, culture and spatialisation witnessed a tremendous augmentation in the globalisation era. The era of globalisation has been known for the emergence of a “borderless world,” at least metaphorically speaking, characterised by the compression and alteration of the sense of both space

and time. As Escobar notes, “new spatial concepts and metaphors of mobility- deterritorialization, displacement, diaspora, migration, traveling, border-crossings, nomadology, etc.- have made us aware of the fact that the principal dynamics of culture and economy have been significantly altered by unprecedented global processes.”<sup>15</sup> The fluidic borders in the globalisation era have resulted in formation of a ‘unified socio-spatial sphere’ which allows for cultures to come together only to engage in a mutual tension and series of negotiations leading to harmonic (not always though) transformations and adaptations. The unified socio-spatial sphere, with reference to globalisation, I suggest, is a geographical real place marked with borders, though mere ritualistic in nature, but on an ideological and imaginary plane is characterised by atopia, where supra-territorial meanings, messages and ideas converge to dictate the norms of the spatial and cultural reconfigurations. A situation where space (if permeable by globally produced meanings and messages) no longer contain or define cultures but the production and consumption of meanings, messages and ideas by individuals collectively define their cultural citizenships. Globalisation scholars have paid a great deal of attention to socio-cultural dynamics with reference to spatiality which is evident in the discourses on globalisation which has introduced, and been increasingly plugged with, a host of cultural neologism such as “transculturality,” cosmopolitanization,<sup>16</sup> supra-territoriality, cosmopolitan cultural cocktail. Ulrich Beck in his seminal essay on “Enemies of the Cosmopolitan Society,” emphasises on the aspect of “transculturality” in the age of globalisation which implies a certain type of relationship between the “own” and the “foreign” (culture). Beck notes that the chief characteristic of globalization is the time-space compression, de-territorialisation, de-nationalization where individuals and communities, regardless of their spatial locations, increasingly possess shared-collective-memories, identities, risks and responsibilities leading to what many, including Beck, have called glocalisation. Glocal today has come to define the inherently interdependent relationship between local and global as they “...do not exist as cultural polarities but as combined and mutually implicating principles.”<sup>17</sup> Global warming is not a British or American reality but is increasingly an Indian reality; even for a community called *Agariyas* living in *Khara Ghoda*, a remote location in the Rann of Kutch. The *Agariya*'s may not have any clue about their glocal participation but their very dependence on crude oil for salt production makes them a glocal citizen by default. The process of globalization, in the post-liberalization era, has augmented the minimalisation of diversity as it (globalization) thrives on transcending pre-existing economic, cultural, political barriers, both on geographical and ideological plane, in that movement from inter to intra, pre to post, super to supra have become

defining terms of marking the paradigm shift. In the last one decade, the very idea of globalization, for the way it has been marketed and sold, has manifold added to the cultural fluidity further adding to, as many argue, cultural homogenization. For instance Hall argues that, "one effect of time-space compression is the tendency towards cultural homogenisation- the tendency for the world, in effect to become one place, not just spatially and temporally, but culturally: the syndrome which one theorist has termed as 'McDonaldisation' of the globe."<sup>18</sup> Both an inevitable and forced process cultural homogenisation only marks the death of many cultural traits within a culture and new adaptations. A remote tribal village in Jaunsar, Eastern Himalayas, is a case in point where youth choose to wear western clothes and *dhabas* serve hakka noodles as against the local food which requires an overnight order to be placed. Call it a case of acculturation, glocalisation or transculturality but the transition of Jaunsari tribal culture advancing along the growing aspirations sold by the television all and sundry is hard to overlook. While Jaunsari community has all the rights to keep up with changing times and enjoy every luxury, comfort and cuisine as their counterparts in urban areas, the example only underscores how even the remotest pockets of India are working against the diversity paradigm. Against this one could argue that globalisation and liberalization, by all intent and means, are structures inherently antagonistic to diversity.

In the next few sections, I will reflect on how 21<sup>st</sup> century ideas, markets and media undermine diversity paradigm and will establish how they have together devised and marked the beginning of a post-diverse society, turning a new leaf on the diversity paradigm.

### **Media and the Market Forces**

Communication channels in any society are inherent to triggering changes in the social and cultural structures. For Van Dijk, these communication channels function to create "ideological constructs" which prove decisive in instituting structural changes in markets, societies and cultures, and that "...require production and reproduction through public text and talk, which in our modern times are largely generated or mediated by the mass media."<sup>19</sup> Today several "standard" prescriptions on how to live, work, become successful, the construction of self and the social, formulas of economic well being and multitude of globally produced ideologies find place in the media space repeatedly and jostle within the collective cultural space for acceptance and eventual replacement with the existing ideas and practices. The legitimisation of some ideas over the others in the media space creates a standard norm of what is the "right and globally collectively accepted" ideology which one should, regardless of the cultural background, align himself with. The forces of media play a crucial

role in instituting transcultural(ism)<sup>20</sup> conditions by giving more credence to the dominant culture and in effect establishing cultural superstructure of a sort which is all powerful and encompassing in nature, and which has a strong attraction of the manifest and the potential to subvert the non-powerful by tenderly pushing it into the realm of dominant<sup>21</sup> cultural practices, thereby causing what Du Gay calls “cultural dislocations” in that local life is inherently dislocated can only be defined in relationship to global.<sup>22</sup> The impact of global ideology produced in some part of the West and told to a community in remote location in India cannot be underestimated. Stuart Hall’s description of “Cultural Revolution and culture’s centrality” in everyday life and its mediation is of particular significance here. Hall notes:

Think of the proliferation of social meanings and messages which pervade our mental universes; the way in which our information about -the images of- other peoples other worlds, other ways of life, different from our own have become widely accessible; the transformation of the visual universe of the urban environments- in the post colonial city (Kingston, Bombay, Kuala Lumpur) as much as in the Western metropolis- by the mediated image; the bombardment of the most humdrum aspect of our daily routines by messages, instruction, invitations and seductions’ the extension especially in the developed or the “media rich” parts of the world, of human capacities and practicalities- to shop, view, spend, choose, save, socialise- at a distance virtually through the new “soft” lifestyle cultural technologies. The phrase culture’s centrality signals the way culture creeps into every nook and crevice of contemporary social life, creating a proliferation of secondary environments, *mediating everything*. It is present in the disembodied voices and images which address us from the screens on our local petrol station forecourt. It is the key element in the way in which the domestic environment is harnessed, through consumption to worldwide trends and fashions. It is brought home to us through the sports and fan magazines on the racks inside, which often market a deep attachment to place and locality through the culture of contemporary football.<sup>23</sup>

Hall’s description underscores the production and consumption of standardised cultural meanings and messages loaded with ‘credibility’ and authority constructed in the realm of media in the form of signs, symbols, messages, didactic in nature, meant for mass consumption, legitimised and mediated convincingly right to our doorsteps. Hall further contends that

...growth of great transnational communication giants such as CNN, Time Warner and News International tends to favour the transmission of a set of standardised cultural products using

standardised western technologies to every corner of the globe, eroding local particularities and differences and producing in their place a homogenised, westernised “world culture”... Thus, there certainly are many negative consequences- so far without solution- in terms of the cultural exports of the technologically overdeveloped “West,” weakening and undermining the capacities of older nation states and the emerging societies to define their own ways of life and the place and direction of their development.<sup>24</sup>

The standardization of the messages and meanings mediated from cosmopolitans to the remotest locations of the country by the locally positioned media channels, often in tune with the global media views and trends, weaves communities and individuals with a single thread of ideas removing distinctions in what is meant for urban, rural, one set of community or the entire nation’s consumption.

Commenting on the burgeoning media industry in India and its impact on shaping of the public culture, Breckenridge notes:

The central thrusts of...news magazines appears to be the bringing together of gossip, politics, cinema, sport, and investigative journalism within the same purview. At the same time, there is a multiplication or specialized magazines directed at particular tastes, interests, and fashions. Equally important, magazines both support and extend the empire of advertising. As in other parts of the worlds, advertising links to median of changes in the marketplace and constitutes a critical vehicle or shaping of public taste more generally... Magazines also provide a lively forum for the expression of reader views and thus constitute an agency for interaction between the small town and rural audiences of many of these magazines and their more cosmopolitan publishers, writers and reporters. It is in and through the pages of these magazines that Indians of a variety of classes and regions are learning where and how they can gain access to knowledge of the emergent lifestyles.<sup>25</sup>

With such a systematic mechanism in place eroding the cultural differences (which essentially defines cultural diversity) and reducing them into just nuances, it is hard to argue in favour of cultural diversity and any attempt in so doing would just be plain naivety. The media and corporate sector in developing countries operating along the western capitalistic principles<sup>26</sup> primarily serve the elites in a society,<sup>27</sup> intensify the process of cultural homogenisation by fuelling in aspirations, altering the patterns of thinking, commoditising elitist way of living and creating a mainstream of beauty, comfort, and luxurious lifestyle as a way of life. This eventually leads to the concretisation of symbolic realm of a successful life decorated in the media discourses and supplied with a prescription for achieving it.

## Modernity and Liquefaction of Diversity

Appadurai and Breckenridge's works with reference to modernity underscore the power of images and ideologies produced globally and consumed locally through the culture industry, and in transforming experiences of modernity in the remotest locals of the globalised world. As Breckenridge contends, "modernity is now everywhere, it is simultaneously everywhere, and it is interactively everywhere...it is also in the series of somewheres (India)."<sup>28</sup> But for her, these modernities are "prismatic" and thus not uniform in nature. From the vantage point of consumption "an activity and modality of social life,"<sup>29</sup> Breckenridge deliberates on the production and consumption of modernity in India through images, ideologies; consumption of cultural commodities, and discourses in constituting the experience of everyday modern life. She notes "prismatic modernities are local, but they are also fundamentally interactive with other such structures, which are taken together constitute not a network or localities...but a global structure for the continuous (and potentially infinite) flow of images and ideologies through particular sites."<sup>30</sup> The meaning of local, for Breckenridge, is transformed by the media, more particularly electronic media, which constructs an "imagined world" by negotiating, renegotiating, creating the meanings and images of "complex distance, self, other and social transformations that extend to the remotest societies of the world."<sup>31</sup> For Appadurai (1996), the act of construction by the electronic media, goes as far as constructing the "imagined selves and the imagined worlds."<sup>32</sup> The construction of imagination and the "work of imagination," primarily fed by the transnationalistic and localized forces such as "media and migration," influence and dictate both the consumption and production of modernity in the remotest localities of the globalised world. Edward Soja, a noted culture geographer, works on modernisation of post colonies is worth noting here. Soja's modernisation, with reference to underdeveloped nation states, is the composite impact of changes which take place on psychological, social, cultural, economic, and political levels giving birth to what he calls "transitional societies" - transition from traditional to more modern forms of social, economic, and political organisation and behaviour.<sup>33</sup> He argues that modernisation in developing societies is driven by "social mobilisation" which "promotes the weakening of traditional forms of organisation and behaviour and provides avenues for alternative means of regrouping and restructuring of transitional society within a modern framework."<sup>34</sup> Another key feature which drives modernity in traditional societies and works in conjunction of "social mobilisation" is "social communication grid" which, according to Soja, lies in any communicational process which broadens the information field of an individual. Soja's transitional societies are further marked by the

pressure of communications which brought about the “downfall of traditional societies.” The global forces such as Liberalisation and Globalisation which led to the dilution of geographical and territorial distinctions resulted in free flow of modernity as a commoditised cultural good meant for mass consumption. The incessant flow of globally mediated information, images, and ideologies managed by the culture industry feeds into the construction of an individual’s imagination transforming local where he continually seeks to locate and relocate himself. This process spirals at the collective level as locally placed societies get placed into the web of global, modernity forming what Beck calls “globality cosmopolitanism” means: “*rooted* cosmopolitanism, having ‘roots’ and ‘wings’ at the same time.”<sup>35</sup> Elaborating on “globality cosmopolitanism,” Beck rejects the dominant opposition between the local and global, as they are inherently interrelated. Breckenridge’s “prismatic modernities,” Appadurai’s “work of imagination,” Soja’s notion of modernity in “transitional societies” and Beck’s “globality cosmopolitanism” largely operate on a psychological and behavioural plane, are controlled by images and communication which may not be uniform in nature but may not be so diverse either. The diversity of culture greatly relies on diversity of information, imagery and communication and its relative production and consumption, and there is no dearth of studies which underline the sheer lack of diversity of information or communication in the age of media conglomeratisation.<sup>36</sup>

The early discourse on Modernity and Modernisation as a post colonial western project laid the priorities, possible heuristical extents, its meaning and application for both, the west and the third world, in opposition, and in conjunction to each other. Marshall Berman, one of the noted thinkers on modernity, sees modernity an all-encompassing phenomena:

To be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises us adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world- and, at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are. Modern environments and experiences cut across all boundaries of geography and ethnicity, of class and nationality, of religion and ideology: in this sense, modernity can be said to unite all mankind.<sup>37</sup>

Berman, in series of arguments, notes that the world in unison is experiencing modernism as a commonly shared experience which influences everyday lives of individuals creating a “shared world culture” incorporated in the “models of modernisation which the post war American social scientists, often working under lavish government foundations and subsidies, developed for export to the Third World.”<sup>38</sup> An extension of Berman’s argument comes from Mirsepassi’s reading and analysis of Iranian experience of modernization. He notes:

The project of modernization becomes one of “development,” or “catching up” with, and homogenizing into, the economically, politically and culturally modern West. A major support to these projects is a group of theories presenting modernization as a rational and universal social project, superior to any other societal model in history.<sup>39</sup>

One interpretation of Mirsepassi’s argument here is the lack of the third world’s ability to create an alternative societal model alike or superior to modernisation which, with utmost precision and through series of discourses, was popularised to pursue the post colonial interests, of economic dominance and superiority, of single culture and intellectual influence as against others, of knowledge and information, and of order and regulation in the third world. Berman quotes Octavio Paz in underscoring the need which the west felt- both in interest of the west and the non-west to export modernism to the third world:

...the third world immediately needs the imaginative and critical energy of modernism. Without it the revolt of Third World has degenerated into different varieties of frenzied Caesarism, or languishes beneath the stranglehold of bureaucracies that are both cynical and fuzzy minded.<sup>40</sup>

### **Similarising Consumption: Products, Meanings and Messages**

Mcluhan’s global village is becoming increasingly smaller, thanks to the all powerful technology which has irrevocably altered the sense of time and space across the globe. Increased cross territorial movements both locally and globally have led to the loss of relevance of geographical distinctions making ideas, messages, and meanings and the patterns of consumption and production move freely through cultures, borders and territories, local to regional and international, the self and the other. This is a scenario in which the physical and imagined distinctions have “de-territorialised or de-nationalised” creating a scope for “place polygamy,”<sup>41</sup> and what I call ideological polygamy, by comfort and choice, in which an individual is not divided between this-and-that but is both this-and-that creating a similarised creed of collective who are mainstreamly diverse. A good deal of research on cultural imperialism already suggests that global corporations like McDonalds, Walmart, News Corporation, Walt Disney have triggered and altered the behaviours and attitudes of consumers towards globally culturally produced messages, meanings, goods and services all and sundry as their activities in the developing world are not just economic but are as much cultural in nature. Ritzer’s McDonaldisation presents a point in case on how American fast food chain has come to define ‘homogeneity’ on a global scale “...streamlined along a set of rational, efficient and impersonal principles.”<sup>42</sup> A strong arm

of West's soft power, McDonalds, has become an ideological and cultural phenomenon epitomising sense of modernity for the developing societies and popularising standardisation, massification and commodification of culturally produced goods. Hence, its operations go far beyond a global fast food giant to, what Ritzer noted as, McDonalised society and culture. The consumption is not of just the product sold at McDonalds but the concept, the idea, the meanings reconciled together to appeal to collective with much acceptance and without much critical analysis creating a critical mass of global citizens who by default subscribe to the global culture which is essentially homogenous in nature characterised by minority of ideas, meanings and messages as they fit together and work analogously to define the inherent nature of globality, and are controlled by the stakeholders of globalisation. This is a situation when locally positioned individual, even if remotely associated with the forces of globalisation, is ideologically globalised or is assimilated in what Beck calls "banal cosmopolitanism" which circumvents and undermines everyday nationalism by integrating individuals in a "globalised cycles of production and consumption."<sup>43</sup> He notes:

...we experience ourselves integrated into global processes and phenomena. It (banal cosmopolitanism) certainly starts with pop and rave (youth cultures will be brilliant examples), goes on with television and the Internet, but includes also very definitely food (as John Tomlinson has shown). Who today can still feed himself locally or nationally? The product labels may still try to make us believe it, but from yoghurt, to meat and fruit, to say nothing of the globalized hotchpotch of sausage meat, as consumers we are irredeemably locked into globalized cycles of production and consumption. Food and drink of all countries unite - that has long ago become trite reality.<sup>44</sup>

Beck's banal cosmopolitanism can be seen flourishing in the realm of new media as well. The 21st century is characterised by the increasing desire for conformism. The new media especially the Social Networking Sites like Facebook, Orkut and Youtube have introduced a tradition of conformism characterised by the massification of acceptance. If I like what you like, liked by hundred others, then we all happen to like one idea which massifies the idea and we all become alike. The concern here is not of conformism but the desire for conformity, for being liked and accepted on a large scale; yet another strong symptom of similarisation wherein all think alike and offer assurances to each other for their likeness. Conformity which at the bottom of it denotes acceptance has, undeniably, been part of the human nature - of being liked, accepted, appreciated, loved and connected. The mainstream media never did offer the possibility for common individuals to-be-heard as it controlled and

maintained a closed domain of production and consumption with rigid rules on who can produce and who will consume. Inasmuch, the mainstream media was always and continues to be bankrupt of any possibility of feedback- an essential element of communication process- in turn demolishing the very process which it epitomises i.e. communication. It is, what Baudrillard calls, a form of non-communication and the media, as he argues, "fabricates non-communication."<sup>45</sup> If one concedes to Baudrillardian assault on media, then what we are left with is a "superstructure of communication sham" (my emphasis) in which the act of communication takes place on the face of inverted scholarship of communications which, since its inception, has breathlessly claimed that communication is incomplete without feedback.

But new media brought an end to this process of non-communication which gave individuals the power to give feedback to one and many with little or no restrictions, hear others and have their voices heard, and pursue the needs of human nature, the true realisation of communicational freedom. Conformism has its seeds somewhere in ability to give feedback to one another where information producer is also the information consumer like an artist on Youtube who puts up his video to be appreciated and in turn watches and appreciates others. The endless sermonic one-liners put up by Facebook users urging for their friends to hit the "like" tab. The more you are liked, the more you feel accepted and the more it assures you of being in tune with the way others think. The underlying idea here is the feeling of not being an alien who stands out because of his thoughts or looks which are deeply rooted in the both production-consumption patterns on a mass scale.

The very platform of internet on which the SNS sites perform including various other communicational networks such as mobile technology are strictly one dimensional in nature, in that there is no alternative to their usage and existence. Either you have them or shun them. But again, consumption of technology in text, discourse and action, has self-elevated to a daily necessity, and has-been-elevated to an ideological necessity in the pretext of technical literacy. The consumption of technology is not just a replacement of old school tools and ideas but is a form of, what I call, "systematic communicational infrastructure paradigm shift" which works as an undercurrent to trigger social, cultural physical and psychological changes with significant impact on its users individually and collectively. As Beck notes, "more television, but also the mobile phone and the Internet, become part of the fittings of homes, the more the sociological categories of time, space, place, proximity and distance change their meaning."<sup>46</sup> To put it in McLuhanian terms, it's both a medium and a message at the same time. It has introduced its own parlance to the realm of human communication that an internet user in

remotest corner of India, China or Canada for that matter now uses Google synonymous to search and commenting synonymous to tweeting. McLuhan (1964) in his work "Understanding Media" expressed his sheer faith in the power of computers in unifying the world into one entity. He noted:

The Computer, in short, promises by technology a Pentecostal condition of universal understanding and unity. The next logical step would seem to be ... to bypass languages in favour of general cosmic consciousness...<sup>47</sup>

In the contemporary world, technology has pervaded our lives to an extent that even if one chooses to not use technology, perhaps the only opposition to technology, an individual both due to physical and ideological necessity succumbs to its usage and thus "automatically transformed into a citizen of the world."<sup>48</sup> As Beck holds,

More succinctly, one might say: whoever has access to the Internet is automatically transformed into a citizen of the world. ¶...in order for markets to function, now and in the future, computers and all kinds of communications and information technologies must reshape the economic landscape.<sup>49</sup>

The standard logic of commercial capitalist market doesn't recognise diversity, as its primary aim is maximising profits which can be better assured by less investment and mass production. The more diverse the consumers are the more they are likely to have varying standards of consumption behaviour which will essentialise for the production to be diverse. The economic landscapes of the profit driven market lacks the ability and will to accommodate diversity, and works to eliminate distinctions which typify diversity. For example, a television channel producing an entertainment series in 20 languages may be seen as an act of serving diverse audience but due to the commonality of the production process, the cultural images, messages and other similar dynamics the essence of diversity is lost.

Any process which would entail process of production has an array of well-planned unnatural and regulated forces working together to achieve a desired product intended to serve a particular interest of the both producer and consumer. Diversity, on the other hand, can and only exists in un-deliberate, inadvertent, unforced, unregulated, unplanned discourses, actions, practices and processes which take their natural course outside the realm of production and consumption. Hence, if diversity today exists and thrives anywhere, then in the poorer sections of the society, who continue to live outside the realm of production and consumption, have not been able to become part of the world citizenry by going online, lack any cognisance and effect of globalisation, global

warming, economic meltdown, India's superpower aspirations, the future flying cars or flat screen televisions for that matter. They are neither seen as potential consumers by the production-driven-profit-oriented market forces nor they can, yet, afford to become one, and hence been unknowingly and effectively have remained diverse. As Breckenridge argues:

India's burgeoning public sphere is neither entirely benign nor entirely democratic. Like other forms of politics, it involves the marginalization of those who cannot afford to pay the price of entry into this world and those who prefer to remain outside it.<sup>50</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Globally, there exist a good deal of scholarship on the concept of cultural diversity, more specifically from the purview of recent phenomena such as globalisation, liberalisation and modernisation, but not much has been written about India's cultural diversity, and almost negligible discourse has emerged from the Indian side, at least in the recent past. In this paper, I have, to some extent, attempted to test the notion of cultural diversity against the recent socio-economic transformations led by liberalisation and globalisation. In that, I hold that cultural diversity in India is undergoing rapid transformation along the lines of production and consumption of media messages which are increasingly becoming similar. Without engaging into any quantitative measurements, I posit that, cultural diversity is increasingly minimalising as dominant cultural traits, social meanings and messages increasingly upheld and defined in the realm of media, find mass acceptance. I further argue that media and market, due to their commercial nature, do not understand and cannot cater to a culturally diverse audience.

This paper, however, does not assert that cultural diversity in India has succumbed to homogenisation, and that we need to buy into the social homogenisation notion widely prevalent in the academic discourses. However, on the face of evident rapid changes which are merging cultures into each other rapidly, it is also important not to believe otherwise that cultural diversity in India is intact. Against this, my paper posits the notion of post-diverse society which sits somewhere in between the cynicism of homogenisation and euphoria of cultural diversity. The notion of post-diverse society, as I suggest, is not that of simplistic dichotomy of diversity and monoculturality; it's somewhere in between; a shift in scenario from several-to-few cultures which are not dominant by default but are omnipresent and are reinforced in the media text and talk. It's a scenario in which diversity is maintained and manipulated in the realm of, and is subject to political and commercial management; is regulated by the powerful actors who control the communicational channels of the

society. This is a scenario where the notion of cultural diversity exists in political and media discourses and imaginary plane fed with nostalgia, and which may not be in tune with the contemporary ground realities. As noted elsewhere in this paper, either during the period of globalization, the topic of holistic diversity in the India has received little attention in intellectual discourse of any significant order. Hence, its existence, non-existence, minimalisation or transition for that matter has remained elusive through the successive decades of pre-post liberalization and globalization. The post-diverse society, yet hypothetical in nature, is further subject to debate and deliberations on the intellectual turf of the same societies which are subject to cultural transitions. More rigorous studies by culturists, philosophers, media and globalization scholars need to be conducted to investigate the nature of cultural diversity in India which continues to remain the experimental ground for western phenomena and ideologies. Fresh measurement variables such as cultural syncretism, space-time compression, lived spaces and spatial factors must be operationalised and further incorporated to understand the cultural transformations which the old societies are increasingly exposed to.

#### **Notes:**

<sup>1</sup> Arjun Appadurai and C.A. Breckenridge (ed.), "Public Modernity in India," in *Consuming Modernity: Public Culture in a South Asian World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 5.

<sup>2</sup> A. Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 4.

<sup>3</sup> Idem, 8.

<sup>4</sup> Hans Magnus Enzensberger et al., *Critical Essays* (New York: Continuum, 1982), 56.

<sup>5</sup> Idem, 60.

<sup>6</sup> A. Jansson, "For a Geography of Communication," paper from ACSIS national research conference for cultural studies, Norrköping. June 13-15, 2005, available at [www.ep.liu.se/ecp/015/040/ecp015040.pdf](http://www.ep.liu.se/ecp/015/040/ecp015040.pdf), 5.

<sup>7</sup> D. Cosgrove and P. Jackson, "New Directions in Cultural Geography," in *Area* 19 (1987): 95-101.

<sup>8</sup> N. K. Das, "Cultural Diversity, Religious Syncretism and People of India: An Anthropological Interpretation," *Bangladesh e-Journal of Sociology* 3, no. 2 (July 2006): 1.

<sup>9</sup> J. W. Berry, "Acculturation as varieties of adaptation," in *Acculturation: Theory, models and some new findings*, edited by A. M. Padilla, 9-25 (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1980).

<sup>10</sup> A. Escobar, "Culture Sits in Places: Reflections on Globalism and Subaltern Strategies of Localization," in *Political Geography* 20, no. 2 (2001): 144.

<sup>11</sup> Idem.

<sup>12</sup> Ulrich Beck, "The Cosmopolitan Society and its Enemies," in *Theory, Culture & Society* 19, no. 1-2, (2002): 31.

<sup>13</sup> For more on this see Nayan Chanda, *Bound Together: How Traders, Preachers, Adventurers and Warriors Shaped Globalization* (Yale University Press, 2007).

<sup>14</sup> David, R. (2012, January 15). 310 languages are near extinction. *The Times of India*, p. 8.

<sup>15</sup> Escobar, "Culture Sits in Places" 141.

<sup>16</sup> Cosmopolitanization for Beck is a frame of reference for empirical exploration for globalization *from within*, globalization *internalized*. It is a kind of class analysis after class analysis, which takes on board globalization. See Beck, "The Cosmopolitan Society" 26.

<sup>17</sup> Beck, "The Cosmopolitan Society" 17.

<sup>18</sup> Stuart Hall, "The Centrality of Culture: Notes on the Cultural Revolutions of Our Time," in *Media and Cultural Regulation*, edited by Kenneth Thompson (Sage Publications: Open University, London; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Milton Keynes, 1997), 211.

<sup>19</sup> T. A. Van Dijk, "The Mass Media today. Discourses of domination or diversity?" in *Javnost/The Public*, (Ljubljana) 2, no. 2 (1995): 28

<sup>20</sup> "...transculturalism, in its earliest stage as a synthesis of two phases occurring simultaneously, one being a deculturalization of the past with a métissage with the present. This reinventing of new common culture is therefore based on the meeting and the intermingling of the different peoples and cultures." (D. Cucciolett, "Multiculturalism or Transculturalism: Towards a Cosmopolitan Citizenship," in *London Journal of Canadian Studies* 17 (2002): 8)

<sup>21</sup> Degree of power, for O'Connor, decides the dominance of one (culture/individual) over the other. In that, she notes, that dominance can be noted by considering "who holds the balance of power of financial resources, top positions in mass media, schools, universities, and government".

<sup>22</sup> Du Gay in Hall, "The Centrality of Culture" 210.

<sup>23</sup> Hall, "The Centrality of Culture" 215.

<sup>24</sup> Idem, 211.

<sup>25</sup> Breckenridge, "Public Modernity in India" 7-8.

<sup>26</sup> Regardless of the fundamental socio-cultural and socio-economic differences between the India and the West, the Indian development paradigm is built largely on the Western definition of development and economic growth which by default favours the rich over the poor and glorifies the higher to be revered and honoured. Economics, according to Mirsepassi, are at the "root of culture and politics, and economic transformations are critical to development" (*Intellectual Discourse and the Politics of Modernization: Negotiating Modernity in Iran* [Cambridge: New York, 2000], 6).

<sup>27</sup> Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of Mass Media* (New York, 1988) and T. A. Van Dijk, "The Mass Media Today."

<sup>28</sup> Breckenridge, "Public Modernity in India" 2.

- <sup>29</sup> Idem, 5.
- <sup>30</sup> Idem, 15.
- <sup>31</sup> Idem.
- <sup>32</sup> A. Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 3.
- <sup>33</sup> Edward W. Soja, *The Geography of Modernization of Kenya: A Spatial Analysis of Social, Economic and Political Change* (Syracuse University, 1968), 1.
- <sup>34</sup> Idem, 3.
- <sup>35</sup> Beck, "The Cosmopolitan Society" 19.
- <sup>36</sup> For a detailed deliberation on this see D. K. Thussu, "Localizing the Global: Zee TV in India," in *Electronic Empires- Global Media and Local Resistance*, edited by Daya Kisan Thussu (Arnold, 1998), 273-94 and *International Communication: Continuity and Change* (Arnold, 2000). Likewise, see Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*.
- <sup>37</sup> M. Berman, *All that is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), 15.
- <sup>38</sup> Idem, 26.
- <sup>39</sup> Mirsepassi, *Intellectual Discourse*, 6.
- <sup>40</sup> M. Berman, *All that is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), 126.
- <sup>41</sup> Beck, "The Cosmopolitan Society" 24.
- <sup>42</sup> G. Ritzer, "The 'McDonaldization' of Society," in *Journal of American Culture* 6 (1983): 370.
- <sup>43</sup> Beck, "The Cosmopolitan Society" 28.
- <sup>44</sup> Idem.
- <sup>45</sup> Jean Baudrillard, "Requiem for the Media," in *The New Media Reader* (2003), 278.
- <sup>46</sup> Beck, "The Cosmopolitan Society" 31.
- <sup>47</sup> Berman, *All that is Solid*, 26.
- <sup>48</sup> Beck, "The Cosmopolitan Society" 39.
- <sup>49</sup> Idem.
- <sup>50</sup> Breckenridge, "Public Modernity in India" 10.

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