

"Melting Pot"?



fashion. It has lost its gender restriction and young boys and girls (and sometimes even their parents...) can be seen flaunting multicoloured, tie-dyed, printed, painted (and at times pulverized) *fatuas* on top of jeans or pants. The ultimate is the *fatua* made out of the rainbow coloured *gamcha*, thanks to Bibi Russell. Someone was heard to remark the other day that they saw a foreign fashion show where all the models had *gamchas* wound around their head. Our farmers and rickshaw drivers can now be seen as trendsetters and the pioneers of this fashion. There were times, so my granny told me, when T-shirts were frowned upon not because they were too casual, but because they were seen as a depiction of Western culture. But nowadays, all wardrobes are considered incomplete without at least a few of these.



The "Human Development Report" by UNDP (2004) has efficiently summed up the contradiction of globalisation in the following words. "For many people this new diversity is exciting, even empowering, but for some it is disquieting and disempowering. They fear that their country is becoming fragmented, their values lost as growing numbers of immigrants bring new customs and international trade and modern communications media invade every corner of the world, displacing local culture." (p85)

The report outlines four principles which underlie multiculturalism in globalisation. The first principle makes an important distinction between preserving tradition and protecting cultural liberty. "Preserving tradition can help to keep the options open, but people

should not be bound in an immutable box called "a culture". The report emphasises the difference between tradition and freedom of choice. Tradition and cultural conservatism can restrict people's options for adopting a different lifestyle. "There is much to cherish in traditional values and practices and much that is consonant with universal values of human rights. But there is also much that is challenged by universal ethics, such as inheritance laws that are biased against women, or decision-making procedures that are not participatory and democratic." (p89) The report continues with issues at a more international scale, "anti-immigrant groups often defend national identities in the name of tradition. This narrows their choices as well by shutting countries off from the socio-economic benefits of immigration, which brings new skills and workers to an economy." (p89)

The second principle is that diversity promotes cultural liberty. Again, it is to do with choice. "Much of the fear of a

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loss of national identity and culture comes from the belief that cultural diversity inevitably leads to conflict or to failed development." (p89) According to the report this is not true. "It is not diversity that inevitably leads to conflict but the suppression of cultural identity and social, political and economic exclusion on the basis of