Bulletin of the *Transilvania* University of Braşov
Series IV: Philology and Cultural Studies • Vol. 7 (56) No. 2 – 2014

Existence: Identity beyond cultural constructs

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The 21st century's globalization, industrialization, and informational technology have created an unmanageable diversity of populations, phenomena, and problems. Scientists, humanists, physicians, and businessmen are working at finding answers, which are both intra-disciplinary and multidisciplinary. This paper attempts to provide a way drawn from the comparative analyses of diverse world-views with a specific reference to India's socio-cultural and linguistic perspectives regarding the existence of a whole being i.e. mind, matter and spirit and their relation to each other and to the world outside and beyond. The paper focuses on the identification of and respect for ***all-inclusive*** *existence of every life, relative as well as absolute, i.e. its nature, purpose and function that transcend time, space and linguistic and cultural definitions.*

Key-words: *identity, existence, culture, constructs, all-inclusive.*

1. Introduction

Nothing can remain private and personal in today's world of globalization, modernity, and social media. People around the world are pulled together by television, emails, cell phones, cameras, twitter, skype, and other communication systems. Willingly or not, everyone has become a global citizen with instant access to diverse cultural practices and life styles. Accumulation and consumerism have recklessly encouraged an exponential increase in the competition for ever scarcer resources: promoting a drive for name, fame and fortune. These practices are destroying the structural unity of humanity and of an all-inclusive existence. As a result, the global community from the individual to cosmic principles is in chaos. There is a pressing need to internationally define what constitutes a community, and determine ways we can make it synergetic and synthetic or unified. What will be the glue to hold the globe's diversity together in peaceful-coexistence? How do we create a system of ethics that will apply to all peoples fairly and justly?

First the paper will discuss some linguistic and socio-cultural identities and their negotiations by individuals and their societies in relation to time and space. The paper then will focus on the concept of human existence, its identification and value and the ethics of respect for all-inclusive living. Furthermore, the analysis

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will attempt to show that the concepts of value and respect, though embedded in the systems of ethics and morality of diverse cultural beliefs and worldviews, serve as the common ground principles for the survival of the multifaceted universal community. The paper will use an interdisciplinary, socio-linguistic and philosophical approach, applied to the comparative analyses of diverse world-views in seeking solutions to the problems of modernity and globalization for multifaceted global community.

Language has been defined as the system of words or signs that people use to convey thoughts and feelings to each other. It is not an abstract construction, a product created by linguists, "but is something arising out of the work, needs, ties, joys, affections, tastes, of long generations of humanity, and has its bases broad and low, close to the ground." (Whitman, cited from Fromkin, Rodman, and Hyams 2003, 444). Although language is dialectical, requiring at least two individuals for communication, no two persons speak exactly alike. Some differences are due to age, sex, speech rates, emotional state, state of health, and whether both speak the same language. It is not easy to decide whether the systematic differences between two speech communities reflect two dialects or two languages. The common criteria for defining languages are mutual unintelligibility. This definition too fails at times, for example, though Hindi and Urdu are mutually intelligible and their speakers can converse with each other, they are considered separate languages because Urdu is spoken in Pakistan and Hindi in India. On the other hand, Mandarin Chinese and Cantonese, although mutually unintelligible, have been referred to as dialects of Chinese because they are spoken within a single country and have a common writing system. Similarly, Maithili and Bhojpuri are separate languages of Bihar, they have been categorized as dialects of Hindi.

The changing linguistic definitions and concepts are due to changes in the historical development of languages in the context of their changing cultural environment. Sanskrit, the language of the sacred texts, the Vedas, has gone through four periods of evolutionary development: Early Indo-Aryan (2000-500 B.C.), Middle Indo-Aryan (Pali and Prakrit, 500 B.C.- 500 C.E.), New Indo-Aryan (*Apabhraṃśa*, 500 C.E. – 1300 C.E.), and Modern Indo-Aryan (Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati, Bengali, Bihari, Punjabi, Assamese, etc.). Thus from Sanskrit derived a number of languages, some of them went through the stages of pidgins and creoles due to language contact for trading purposes. To this Indo-Aryan language repertoire, joined languages and dialects from other three language families: Dravidian, Austro-Asiatic, and Sino-Tibetan. Hence India presents a rich diversity of 364 languages and dialects (Grierson, 2005). This also means India presents

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diverse cultures, a myriad of art forms, customs, worldviews, and core values and systems of ethics for the maintenance of order.

2. Culture

All people have a culture, and no individual can live without one. Culture helps us manage our daily lives because we and other people encountered attach similar meanings to same concepts and actions. According to E. B. Taylor, culture is a complex whole, which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs and other capabilities or habits acquired by members of a society (from O'Sullivan 2004, 2). O'Sullivan (2004, 2) defines culture as 'the ways people agree to be'. Over periods of time groups of people (societies) reach agreements about how they will see the world, behave, interact with each other, judge each other, and organize themselves—in other words, how they will exist. We learn the agreements—the 'rules' as part of growing up. Since language and culture are related, we learn both language and culture together. However, our 'culture' is not necessarily the same as our 'nationality' and ethnicity. Labels describing people can be problematic. Terms such as 'American', 'Australian' can refer to nationality and culture, but not to ethnicity. The term 'Indian' refers to all the three. So, the issue of identity is complex. People often engage in redefining themselves or reasserting their identity.

3. Role of language in the construction of identity

For a variety of reasons, language is one of the most powerful tools available to a human being. Language serves not only communicative and symbolic function but also marking function, i.e. identification of objects of which the world is composed of. It is a central feature of identity as all human thoughts are conceptualized through a language and all human values are pronounced and perceived through its filters. Since language is a significant factor in building one's identity, it must be preserved (Sengupta, 2009). In fact, language itself is at the very heart of what language is about, how it operates. It identifies objects, names them, and marks their functional value in relation to context.

4. *Langage* and *parole*: competence and performance

Ferdinand de Saussure, a Swiss linguist, known as the founder of structural linguistics, elevated the language system by distinguishing between *Langage* (competence, underlying universal and fundamental structure), *Langue* (of the symbols, language spoken), and *Parole* the individual speech act. Every human

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being is born with the basic competence, the universal structure of the language, to learn the language spoken by his/her group and to use it to create, or change his identity according to their biological, psychological and social needs. Saussure was opposed to the view that the function of the language was simply to identify objects and name them. "Nomenclaturism" has a long history in the western linguistic tradition (Harris 1990). One of the most famous, and the first instance of naming objects or nomenclaturism in text is found in the Bible. The book of Genesis tells the story of how God brought animals, fields and fowl to Adam so that he could name them. In short every name that Adam gave an animal was what it would be called from that day forward (Lenihan 2013).

This historical or mythical account then explains the fact that people created words for objects they had seen. The objects they did not see had no names or words to identify or describe them. Hence the lack of some words and concepts in some languages should not be taken as the mark of deficiency in those languages; for example Indians focused on the analysis of mind and hence created the concept, word, and technique of "Yoga" in the languages of India. However, in contrast, Marathi does not differentiate between 'ice' and 'snow', because snow never falls in the region where Marathi is spoken. The same reasoning applies to the creation of identities, especially for individuals. This does not mean that Marathi speakers are unable to conceptualize and create words when needed and required by both the biological and socio-cultural environment. Everybody uses the *Langage*' the innate creative power' when needed for creating or changing their identity. The person has the power to adapt to or manipulate the situation to their advantage, survival and promotion of themselves.

5. Construction of feminine identity in Marathi

Diverse disciplines, methods, and frameworks have been used for exploring sexual differentiation in language. The linguistic research shows that in Marathi and Hindi sex differences are reflected in the speech of the speaker, the addressee, and the person referred to. For example, urban Maharashtrian women as well as Hindi women use particles or interjections in different circumstances. Their choice of emphatic marker illustrates how strongly one allows oneself to feel about something; the strength of emotion conveyed in a sentence corresponds to the particle. In the same way, word order variation is not only a matter of stylistics, but also indicates the context and situation where the conversation occurs (Junghare 2004).

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5.1. Gender preferential marking

(1) a. ***ayyā****! ekdam chān* ***bara****-kā!* (Urban Marathi woman speaking)
oh much good ok-yes
'Oh, how lovely!'
b. *ekdam chān* (Marathi Man or Rural Marathi woman speaking)
much good
'It is good.'

(2) a. ***iššа****! Kuṇi pāhil* ***bara****!* (Urban Marathi woman speaking)
oh-yaa somebody see-will ok
'Hey, someone might see!'
b. *kuṇi pāhil* (Marathi Man or Rural Marathi woman speaking)
somebody see-will
'Somebody might see.'

(3) a. ***agabāī*** *kharac kā?* (Urban Marathi woman speaking)
oh-yaa really yes
'Oh dear, is it true? '
b. *kharac kā?* (Marathi Man or Rural Marathi woman speaking)
true-what
'Is it true?'

However, rural women's speech lacks such "sex preferential" markings and is closer to that of rural men as illustrated in the examples above. Namely, a rural women's speech is less marked for sex differences than urban women's speech. We can say that Indian women use different expressions and structures to preserve and assert their feminine identity (Junghare 2004).

The speech of urban Maharashtrian housewives corresponds to the argument claimed by Trudgill. According to Trudgill, women use the prestige variants more often than men because they are more status conscious. They are aware of the social significance of linguistic variables because they are less secure socially and more likely to be judged on their appearance or language use than men. Generally, women speak more correctly then men and use the variables that are closer to the prestige "standard". Men tend to be judged by their occupation and their earning, and are not under pressure to use these prestige variants. Since women may lack occupational status, they rely more on symbols of statuses, including the symbolic value of speech. Thus, urban Maharashtrian women's innovative speech style demonstrates that women are more sensitive to prestige patterns, and often use the most advanced forms even in their own casual speech (Junghare 2004).

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5.2. Problem with marking gender identity

The very idea that humanity can be separated into two homogenous groups can be challenged easily (Wagner 2011). Although there are many examples of men or women representing stereotypic male or female characteristics, one can just as easily find examples for the exact opposite. This is due to the fact that all individuals are influenced by social norms and expectations in different ways. This is why a strict dichotomy of genders, as it is suggested even by the most basic grammatical structures of many languages (consider, for example, Italian noun suffixes or German articles), has to give way to a more flexible concept of a continuum between two extremes. (Wagner 2011). Wagner supported his idea by Geert Hofstede's cultural survey (2005), which showed that some cultures, such as Japanese or Hungarian, tend to have a more strict distinction of gender roles, whereas others, such as Swedish or Norwegian, hardly distinguish between male and female members of their societies at all.

The second fundamental problem that Wagner (2011) points out is that gender inequality is influenced in a major way by the fact that people usually see one of the aforementioned dichotomous extremes as the norm. For example, women have traditionally been viewed in the "second" gender role. This can be traced back as far as the Book of Genesis. In many situations, women's language is seen as a derivative of men's language rather than a dialect of equal status. In many European languages, the feminine form is only used when there are all females in the group. If one man is present the male form is used instead. The perception that the male dialect is the standard dialect is not an inherent truth. It is a social construct that has been formed over time due to the dominance of men in society. In fact, the very idea of male language being the standard language variant only supports the oppression of female members of society, because language can have a powerful impact on social issues, as the well-known Sapir-Whorf hypothesis states (Cameron 1992, 134). To stop this vicious circle, people must understand that although gender-specific dialects may be different, there is never an objective hierarchy between any language variations.

Finally, the third misconception to successfully overcome gender inequality is the concept that everyone has one single manner of speaking. Although every individual has a unique repertoire of language patterns and vocabulary, the way they engage in a conversation is never solely based on their internal characteristics, but rather on a wide variety of situational-based factors. This is why a woman can be expected to use more stereotypically male language patterns in a work setting, and use more female structures in an informal setting (Edwards 2009, 137).

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6. Marking of status identities in Indo-Aryan languages

In multilingual and multicultural societies, which are highly stratified, such as those of India and Nepal, the linguistic variants reflect their cultural norms. The contact of any two speakers of a language will result in the establishment of a relationship based on the relative or perceived 'power' of the two individuals. The dominant speaker has the power to utilize available linguistic repertoires to create perceived equality or maintain dominance, while the subordinate must adhere to the established relationship that the superior sets up. This dominance is determined by a number of factors: age, social class, gender, and ethnicity, all these factors in to how individuals use language with each other. In Indian languages – Hindi, Marathi and Nepali – there are a number of honorific forms, and titles, which are utilized in day-to-day discourse (Junghare and Batteen, 2007).

6.1. Linguistic suffixes as reflective of social factors

There also exist some socio-linguistic suffixes in Indo-Aryan languages which an addressor attaches to an addressee's name in certain situations to indicate attitude towards the addressee or the social relationship between speakers (Junghare and Batteen, 2007). For example, in Marathi, *rāv*and *panta* are honorific suffixes attached to men's names. The suffix *rāv*, derived from the Sanskrit word *rājā* 'king', is generally attached to names of men belonging to the Kshatriya (ruler's) caste; *panta* is attached to names of Brahmins.

Caste does play a role in determining the honorific form chosen by the speaker. The laboring (*Shudra*) caste, which is stereotyped to be menial workers, has lower honorific forms associated with their members, while the highest Brahmin caste has the highest honorific forms associated with their members. The laboring (*Shudra*) caste contains the only addressees with the informal *tū* form, the fewest *tumhi*forms, and no *āpaṇ* forms. The table 1 below (from Junghare and Batteen, 2007) illustrates the ratio of Intimate/Informal, Familiar and Formal/Polite pronouns in the caste system.

Table 1. The use of intimate, familiar and polite pronouns

Castes	Intimate/Informal *tū*	Familiar *tumhi*	Formal/Polite *āpan*
Brahmin 'Preacher'	0	6	4
Kṣatriya 'Ruler'	0	5	6
Vaiśya 'Merchant'	0	7	5
Shudra 'laborer'	3	6	3

Source: Junghare and Batten 2007

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The ruling class/caste and the merchant/business caste use more formal/polite pronouns as opposed to the highest and the lowest castes, Brahmins and the Shudras, respectively. The usage of the polite/formal pronouns relates primarily to the occupational needs of the castes since the caste system is based on the division of labor. Both the ruling caste's and the merchant caste's use of the polite pronouns is grounded in the ethics of mutual respect. More importantly, this language pragmatism has helped royal and businessmen maintain their class identity and accompanying privileges. The continued creation of the new and newer identities for economic and socio-psychological and physical benefits can be found today in different categories of passengers for airlines – Gold Elite, Silver Elite, Business class, Sky priority, etc.

6.2. Problems with hierarchy

Hierarchy is a system or organization in which people or groups are ranked one above the other according to status or authority. This inherently creates problems of non-equality, giving rise to various concepts. At a socio-political level it allows stratification of a society based upon whatever criteria are used. This power is further used and abused in male dominated patriarchic societies.

7. Diasporic identity: intersection of gender and ethnicity

Today's highly changing, diverse and technological world makes it extremely difficult to establish any solid sense of identity (Fong, 2002). Construction of an identity can be especially challenging for immigrant adolescents because of the various cultural values between school and home, and the discordant expectations they face in daily life. Values and conditions in the host country often challenge the values of their country of origin. New values immigrant adolescents are taught in school may include the importance of personal freedom and independence. These values are likely to conflict with the hierarchical relations that often characterized parent-child relations in many immigrant families. Immigrant adolescents often lack adequate English-language proficiency, familiarity with American culture in school, and suffer from prejudice and discrimination (Hom 2004). They have to confront different parental expectations of gender-related roles, resulting in the renegotiation of these roles.

Consistence in adolescents' developmental context tends to result in positive developmental outcomes. Research has found that when immigrant students have smooth transitions in crossing the boundaries, they have a tendency to do well in school. However, when their different worlds collide with each other, making it difficult to cross the boundaries, students tend to do poorly in school (Qin, 2009; referred in Huang 2011). With these inconsistencies, negotiating these inconsistent expectations plays an important role in immigrant adolescent development.

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One way of maintaining a sense of identity is to define oneself based on ethnic characteristics. For an immigrant adolescent, ethnic identity is often connected to gender identity (Qin, 2009). Research findings show that minority adolescent girls are more likely to develop strong ties to their ethnic culture; whereas boys are more likely to develop "an awareness of obstacles in seeking equality with the dominant society" (Qin 2009, 40; cited in Huang, 2011). Much research has been conducted to understand the ethnic identity formation of immigrant adolescents. However, relatively few studies have examined the intersection of gender and ethnic identity (Qin, 2009).

7.1. Identity theory

In his identity theory, Erikson (1979) proposed that males and females go through similar processes of identity development characterized by increasing separation and individuation. Adolescents try to integrate various aspects of themselves, such as social and intellectual, into a unified sense of identity. The environment in which a child lives is crucial to providing growth, adjustment, a source of self-awareness and identity. Success in this constructed identity leads to a developed sense of fidelity regarding themselves. Failure means they will remain confused about who they are and what they can become (Sternberg and Williams 2010; cited from Huang 2011). In contrast to Erikson, Miller (2006) believes that girls identify with female caretakers and develop a sense of emotional connection during adolescent stage. Their sense of self depends more on their significant relationships than those of boys. Conversely, for boys, the development of the self is a process of psychological separation from others. During adolescence, boys attempt to focus on an independent identity more than girls. In addition, the process of identity construction may be longer for females than for males due to the multiple demands they face in different contexts (Qin, 2009, Huang 2011).

7.2. Testing the theory

Research on immigrant families from various ethno-cultural groups indicates that there is likely to be greater restrictiveness and monitoring of daughters' rather than sons' behaviour. This is both generally in the domain of peer relationship and particularly in heterosexual relationships (Dion and Dion, 2001). Indeed, research on Chinese immigrant adolescents found similar results.

In her research, Huang (2011) pointed out that immigrant girls of Chinese ethnicity tended to be influenced more by their ethnic culture and heritage in their identity formation. Chinese girls reported being supervised more closely by their parents than boys. In their negotiations of identities, girls also tended to internalize the traditional Chinese notion of being a "good Chinese girl" and the great majority resisted the image of being a "popular girl" at school. In contrast, boys appeared less likely than girls to maintain the Chinese language and connection to their native culture. Boys used less Chinese in their daily life and maintained their Chinese

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language skills at a lower level than the girls. They were also more likely to feel more pressure from peers to form identities against a "nerdy Chinese boy" stereotype and to conform to "popular boy" images by participating in nonacademic activities such as sports and video games (Qin 2009 and Huang 2011).

Chinese adolescents' identity construction cannot be assumed to be the norm. Different cultures may lead to different process of identity formation and negotiation. Thus, the comparison among immigrant adolescents with different cultural background may need future research to explore.

8. Identity: multiplicity, fragmentation, and hybridity

(a) Languages and identities are embedded within the relations of power.
In India, English dominates other languages, is more legitimate, and provides greater access to symbolic resources. Similarly, Hindi compared to other regional languages of India provides access to power. Hence the speakers of minority languages are subject to unequal power relations and often unable to achieve the 'right to speak' and 'impose reception' (Bourdieu 1991, cited from Junghare 2009).

(b) Diverse and fluctuating identities
Earlier studies dealt with a single aspect of identity—most commonly ethnicity or gender. Poststructuralist inquiry highlights the fact that identities are constructed at the interstices of axes, such as age, race, class, ethnicity, gender, generation, sexual orientation, geopolitical locale, institutional affiliation, and social status, whereby each aspect of identity redefines and modifies all others. Since individuals often shift and adjust ways in which they identify and position themselves in distinct contexts, identities are best understood when approached on individual levels. This leads to each individual's formation of his/her identity and the equality that he/she feels among the community or the communities. New discourses of gender, sexuality, class or ethnicity may bring with them new identity options, just as other options may be fading into the background. Identities are susceptible to fashion and individuals and institutions reform themselves according to identity options that dominate at certain times and places (Junghare 2009).

The recognition of the emerging nature of identity, and of identity fragmentation, de-centering, multiplicity, and shifts, often times exacerbated by transnational migration, led poststructuralist philosophers to a position of hybridity as the 'third space' that enables the appearance of new and alternative options (Bhabha 1990, 55; cited from Junghare 2009).The use of a sociolect located outside of the prescriptive norms of Standard English, allows the diasporic youth to construct an alternative 'universe of discourse,' one in which they can negotiate identities distinct from those imposed on them by the hegemonic and assimilationist discourses of the main-stream culture. The example of the third place in the Indian context would be Indian-American diasporic experience, in which Indian-American youths create hybrid identities negotiated both locally within the spaces of the Indian-American worlds, and transnationally, in an Indian world (Junghare 2009).

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This perspective privileges a dynamic view of identities, with individuals continuously involved in production of selves, positioning of others, revision of identity narratives, and creation of new ones which valorize new modes of being and belonging. In sum, identities can be viewed as social, discursive, and narrative options offered by a particular society in a specific time and place to which individuals and groups of individuals appeal in an attempt to self-name, to self-characterize, and to claim social spaces and social prerogative.

(c) Politics of identity negotiation

Language has always been seen as one of the fundamental components of a culture. Edwards (2009, 205f.) lists a variety of quotes by thinkers from Wilhelm von Humboldt to Eamon de Valera that illustrate how strongly the ties between cultural and linguistic heritage on the one side and geographic nationalism on the other side are perceived. In fact, language can be a most powerful tool for the creation and establishment of nations. Standardized languages and *linguae francae* have been used in many regions to allow for mutual understanding in a culturally diverse country or empire. Colonialist powers, on the other hand, used to actively suppress minority native languages in favor of the colonial mother tongue in order to prevent potential unrest or revolutions. In this modern age of globalization, the question of language and nationality has once again become an important issue, as national boundaries are more fluent than ever before. All of these phenomena share the potential danger of disorientation caused by weak or non-existing ties between one's native language and the region in which one is living (Wagner 2011).

9. "-isms" in modern society

When movements against racism started to develop in the first half of the 20th century, they set an important example. Soon, many other groups would take on a fight against social inequalities in a similar way. From the 1970's feminist and GLBT movements against sexism, to the modern concerns towards ageism, people around the globe started to think about social injustice and how it could be overcome. Nevertheless, the various "isms" of our society are still very much an issue, as certain traditional concepts and values are grounded so deeply in human societies that it takes a long time to change them. These diverse problems are far too complex for an instant solution. However, there seems to be a general belief that these should be overcome in order to establish equality among our diverse societies.

In order to identify oneself, it is always necessary to distinguish oneself from others. Therefore, the idea of a dichotomy between the "self" and the "other" has influenced human mindsets throughout history. This very idea does not seem to be problematic per se, and in fact it is quite necessary to accommodate the limits of the human brain. However, problems arise as soon as one self is granted more value than any other. This creates the notion that behaviour which differs from the norm is at the very least suspicious, but most often dangerous for society. It is obvious that in order to reach equality, one has to first overcome this discriminating notion. This

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is not to say, however, that the process of *othering* should be abolished as a whole. On the contrary, it is an important part of one's personality to distinguish oneself from other members of the society. The important point is that one should be open enough to accept, respect and appreciate not only one's own beliefs and values, but also others'. The key lies in accepting equality within diversity (Wagner 2011).

This philosophy first and foremost has to be established in education. Young people are usually more open towards others, since traditional social norms are not yet firmly grounded in their minds. Young people also have the enormous power of shaping future societies. This is important because social change takes a long time. There are manifold ways in which the concept of equality within diversity can be implemented in the classroom. An obvious strategy would be to promote ethnic and cultural diversity within the student body. The contact with people from other cultures from an early age helps a child to develop a deeper understanding of cultural differences and their values. Within this context, the idea of bilingual and bicultural education has to be mentioned. Obviously, it is especially important for children with an immigrant background to understand both their native culture and the culture of their environment in order to create an identity. Other young people could also benefit from a teaching method that juxtaposes two (or more) cultural systems on an equal basis. This leads into a third way of implementing the philosophy of equality within diversity in an educational setting, namely heritage learning. This method is particularly relevant for the United States of America. It appears to be especially valuable, as history provides a sheer endless pool of knowledge that must not be neglected.

The introduction and promotion of different methods makes cultural relativism a main principle in the classroom, the idea of a subordinate, dangerous other might be overcome in future generations. This, again, would be a major step towards the abolition of all social "-isms", which are still a major problem of human society (Wagner 2011).

Hierarchical problems can be resolved if every existence is thought to have evolved from the same source under different conditions (Junghare 2011). Every existence is unique in its purpose, function and contribution to "all-inclusive," and interdependent life. This philosophy is explicit in the String Theory or the M-theory according to which all lives originated from countless non-perceivable strings. Different species evolved under different conditions. The evolution of "all" beings from the energy strings is diagrammed in figure 1. This is comparable to the Hindu theory of *Brahman*, the Ultimate/ the Absolute Reality from which every being is evolved. Both the origin and the derivative evolutes are then sacred with the highest value of divinity. The concept that every life is divine permits common people to value any existence to whatever level they wish. Please see the reflection of this concept in figure 1.

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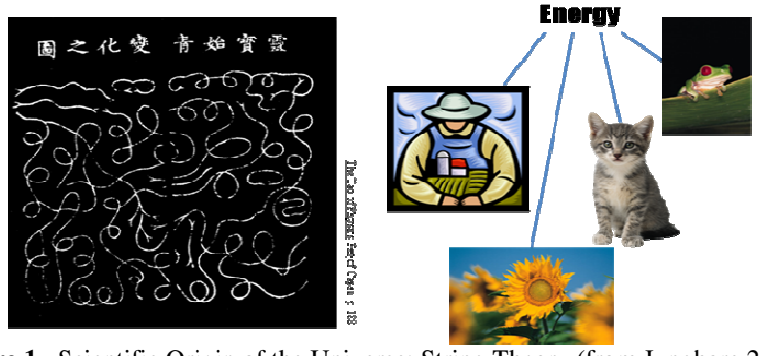


Figure 1. Scientific Origin of the Universe: String Theory (from Junghare 2011).

10. The nature of the global community: diverse and evolving

The dictionary definition of a global community is the people or nations of the world who are economically, socially, and politically interdependent. Since the people of the world are diverse in body, mind, and conduct, the very nature of the global community is multicultural, multilingual, and multiethnic.

This multidimensional community is comprised of individuals of extremely diverse value systems. What then connects diverse humans from diverse cultures? The answer is humanity or human dignity. To guard this dignity, every individual in every society struggles to survive on several levels—socio-political-religious, physical (body), mental (mind) and spiritual (essential/existential). The difficulty with socio-religious morals or ideals is they become historical, inoperable or dogmatic in an evolving world and making adherence to them difficult.

11. How to handle the problems of the modern community?

How can we fix the conflicts and problems of modern society? How can we build a more sustainable, equitable and democratic world?

We need an empowered, connected and durable movement of citizens who foster core or basic or intrinsic values--self-acceptance, care for others, and concern for the natural world. By acknowledging the importance of these values, and the "frames" that embody and express them; by examining how our actions help to strengthen or weaken them; and by working together to cultivate them, we can create a more compassionate society, and a better world (*Common Cause*, 2011). This concept requires strong, ethical and determined leaders, teachers, and guides who will value and respect diversity of opinions and invite common people's participation in the socio-political processes for finding solutions.

The power of social convention, attitude and prejudice systemically translates difference into deficiency. It is the psychology of the group that must be changed, for example the speakers of standard Hindi consider Maithili, Bhojpuri, and Magahi as substandard or deficient or not properly developed. Similarly, standard Marathi

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speakers consider Nagpuri, Varhadi, and Konkani inferior forms of speech. The attitudes of looking at dialects are transposed on their speakers along with the construction of their identities as speakers of Maithili or speakers of Bhojpuri, etc. Some of the so called 'tribal' languages of India have vast amounts of folk-literature and yet they are considered to be 'tribal' because they lack a written literature. The factual reality is that these groups have developed skills in performing arts, such as singing, dancing, weaving, painting, drumming, etc. in which the literary societies have less comparable skills.

12. Beyond the world of relative reality

(a) Problematic nature of reality

In a world of relative reality, societies live by the principles of prescriptive and descriptive ethics, which have been constructed through languages that fall short of the description of the working of the universe. For various phenomena we have neither the linguistic mechanism (i.e. vocabulary) nor the intellect to express what we experience. Socio-cultural norms have become systems of ethics of right or wrong. Actions, whether societal or individual, become right for some and not right for others. This is due to the diverse nature of people, their needs, their cultural upbringing, modern ideologies and creation and negotiations of identities in the context of fast changing environment in relation to time and space – linear and space related evolution.

(b) Need to transcend the ethnic identities: in mind, language, and action

In this world of diverse linguistic cultures and communities, it has become necessary to transcend human made constructs of identities and be directed by meta-ethics. All life and what it is made of must be valued and respected. Diverse cultures need to acknowledge the rightful existence of multiple opposing forces and provide a moral path for transcending this worldly reality. Human dignity and the dignity of all existence are inextricably bound in the ethics of this moral path. Cultures need to work together to further the ethical treatment and respect for all of humanity, nay all life in this world and beyond.

13. Ways to effect a change

(a) Formation of the universal system of ethics: protective umbrella for the globe

It is possible to develop a universal system of ethics. Although it may not be sufficient for every individual or situation, it may apply to the majority by appealing to a common basic conscience. A universal principle the "dignity of universal existence", through education, can raise the bar of non-violence in word, thought and action. Unless everyone is taught to value all of creation, there cannot be peace at any level in the globe/universe.

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(b) Teaching of meta-ethics for the health of all

The identity of dignity, value and respect are global issues. They relate to every existence that needs to be identified and promulgated in order to establish and maintain an operationally valid world-culture. **Dignity** is the self worth that an individual or group inherently has and is identifiable externally to that group by others. **Value** is the weight that this self worth has both to the individual or group and also is identified by outside individuals and groups. **Respect** is recognizing the values of differences that various individuals or groups contain. The theoretical recognition of these three values are not enough. In practice individuals and organizations create numerous socio-linguistic constructs and restrictions. They can interpret and re-interpret any of these concepts for selfish ends. Ideologies, rules and policies can be established, but these policies can merely be for show, without any intention to use them other than to point as "guiding principles" that actually guide no one. It is necessary to promote at a basic level the understanding of the true nature of the evolutionary self (one's own and of others), to recognize the value of all-inclusive existence; to assess one's situational needs and curtail them with the disciplinary mind with the eye on the welfare of others; to help develop virtuous characters through the teachings of universal ethics, values and respect and through the promotion of the concepts of interdependency, compassion and forgiveness.

The change can be effected through education, changing socio-cultural-political-religious constructs and creating new ones. Finally, it is imperative to understand that every existence struggles for dignified life, wanting to be valued and respected by others. Hence it is necessary to teach ethics of dignity, authenticity, value and respect through the creation or production of new ideologies, new literature, and their promotion through new educational programs to bring much needed change.

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Indira Y. Junghare is a Professor of Linguistics with an MA and PhD from the University of Texas. Her teaching and research fields include sociolinguistics, South Asian linguistics (Marathi, Hindi, Pali and Sanskrit), Indian literature (classical, modern and regional), and philosophies and religions (Hinduism and Buddhism). She is a recipient of numerous awards: CLA Distinguished Teacher, Outstanding Faculty, Gordon L. Starr Award, University of Minnesota Outstanding Community Service Award, and Asian-Pacific Minnesotans – Leadership Award. In 2013, she successfully completed the development of the Diversity-Ethics-Peace a multi-disciplinary study program by creating and teaching curriculum, and performing avant-garde research which she began in 2005 – which received the 2006 Tony Diggs Award for Innovation – and acclaim in scholarly communities, both nationally and internationally.

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