Use of Technology to assert Identity: Towards a Theory of Expanding Circles of Identity

Naresh Kumar Agarwal

Department of Information Systems, School of Computing, National University of Singapore, Singapore

E-mail: nareshag@gmail.com

Abstract

The question of 'identity' is a complex one. It concerns who we are, and who we identify ourselves to be. The importance and sensitivity of identity is highlighted by the fact that while it gives one a sense of belonging, a narrow and skewed interpretation of one's identity can lead (in its extreme form) to acts of hatred, violence and terrorism. With the connectivity and ease of use brought about by the Internet and ICTs, people are findings new ways to connect and form circles of identity. Through examples from communities in social networks and internet forums on voting for reality shows, this paper shows how people are using these media to assert their sense of identity. The primary contribution is an explication of the properties of the 'circle of identity,' leading to a theory of expanding circles of identity. Here, the circle of identity is seen as a circle of duality. It unites and divides - all at one go. The theory of expanding circles of identity recommends individuals to expand the circle of identity to one level higher while interacting with another individual – to a level that includes that other individual within the circle rather than exclude the individual. The theory aims to help streamline the identity thought in order to bring about cohesiveness and inclusiveness.

Keywords

Identity, Stereotyping, Use of Technology to Assert Identity, Theory of Expanding Circles of Identity

1. Introduction

This paper is not part of the discipline where I'm doing my PhD, which happens to be Information Systems – a field which falls somewhere in between Information Technology and Business. I have chosen to write on this, because this is an issue I feel deeply about, and concerns major and minor developments in the increasingly globalized world we live in today. On implementation, it also has potential towards greater harmony and peace in the world. Having said that, there are a few points to keep in mind before reading this paper:

- This is not a typical research paper, where there is a literature review, a study (empirical or theoretical), followed by findings and discussion
- I do not belong to the field of social and political sciences, where the subject of Identity is studied in greater detail
- Rather, it can be thought of as an essay based on my thoughts and experiences (the Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen, in his book 'The Argumentative Indian' [1] talks about the Indian Identity and presents a collection of essays). However, it is more than an essay as I seek to make a theoretical contribution.
- I don't delve too deeply into prior literature on identity. This is done deliberately to avoid getting influenced by the thoughts of prior researchers in this area (not before I finish laying down my theory). This reason also compelled me to put down Sen's book after reading a few pages.
- This paper can also be considered a work-in-progress. In later versions of the paper, I hope to draw

from the works of other researchers on Identity, and present how they complement my work here. It would also be an exercise to determine if what I say is anything different from what has been said before, and if there is a contribution to be made. The fact that this conference is, for, and by doctoral students, and given this year's theme 'Promoting Originality and Diversity in Research', I'm hopeful that my original and different approach in presenting this paper would be welcomed.

▪ While I talk about Identity in general, and seek its generalizability, the examples I draw and the thoughts I have are mostly from an Indian perspective. This is because of my own strong sense of Indian identity, as well the complexity that comes in defining anything called an Indian identity (owing to India's inherent pluralism and contradictions).

Having said this, the rest of the paper is organized as follows. In the next section, I talk about my understanding of Identity, and how people view Identity. In Section 3, I talk about 'my' circle of identity and how technology (such as social networks) is being used to express identity. In Section 4, I talk about stereotyping – 'my' versus 'his/her/their' identity. Section 5 talks about assertions of identity, identity politics and how technology is being used to assert identity. In Section 6, I propose a theory of expanding circles of identity, while also laying down the properties of the circles of identity. In Section 7, I conclude the paper and talk about future work.

2. What is Identity?

The question of identity is a complex one. It concerns who we are, and what we think of ourselves. This, of course, is just one side of the picture where we are talking about 'my identity' or personal identity. There is also the identity that we feel as being part of a group of or a social circle. We can understand this as 'our identity' or social identity. Then, there are those who form outside our circle of identity, and the people we view as 'he' or 'she' or 'they'. A large part of how we view their identity leads to what is commonly understood as stereotyping.
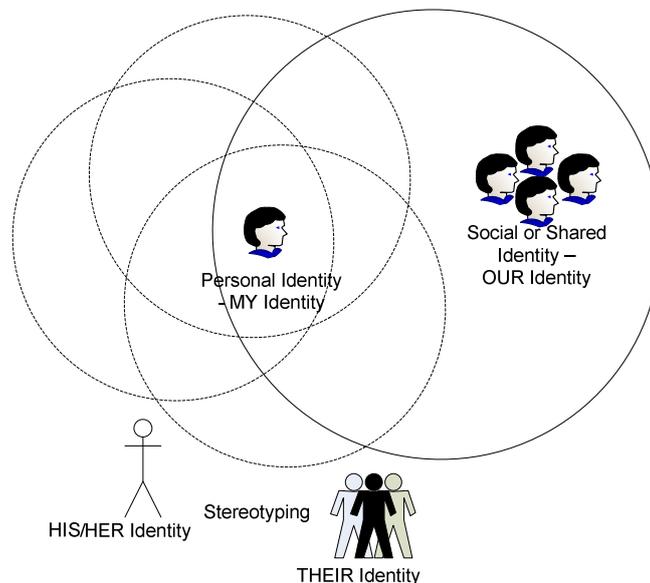

Figure 1 Summing all three views of Identity

A quick search of identity within the literature shows that *identity* is a term stemming from cognitive theory, sociology, politics and psychology and is used to denote an individual's idea of who he (or she) thinks

he (or she) is. Tajfel and Turner [2] developed the social identity theory where a person has not one, "personal self" (my identity or personal identity), but rather several selves that correspond to widening circles of group membership. Different social contexts may trigger an individual to think, feel and act on basis of his personal, family or national "level of self" (our identity or social identity) [3]. While the notion of *personal identity* refers to self-knowledge that derives from an individual's unique attributes [4], *social identity* is the individual's self-concept derived from perceived membership of social groups [5][4]. Social identity brings with it in-group, out-group differentiation. There is an affinity between those within the group. Individuals often *stereotype* others who are outside their groups of identity, drawing prefixed conclusions about them and slotting them in already formulated categories. In *Figure 1*, I try to sum up all three views of identity. Any complete definition of identity must take all the three views into consideration.

Fearon [6] says that 'identity' as we know it derives mainly from the work of psychologist Erik Erikson in the 1950s. He also highlights 14 different definitions of identity (pp.4-5) arrived at by different researchers, which mostly fall into the realm of personal identity, social identity or stereotype outlined above. [6] undertakes an ordinary language analysis of the current meanings of identity and points out how identity is at the center of every major subfield of political science (see *Table 1*). Fearon's [6] own definition of identity is limited to social identity, and restrictive as per the theoretical needs of this paper.

Table 1 Identity studies in political science (as per [6])

Subfield of Political Science	Researches where 'Identity' has played a central role
Comparative Politics	Work on nationalism and ethnic conflict [7][8][9][10]
International Relations	Idea of 'state identity' in constructivist critiques of realism and analyses of state sovereignty [11][12][13][14][15]
Political theory	Numerous arguments on gender, sexuality, nationality, ethnicity, and culture in relation to liberalism and its alternatives [16][17][18][19][20]

3. 'My' circle(s) of Identity: Use of technology to express identity

As shown in *Figure 2* below, a person, at any point in time, can hold various identities based on his/her race/ethnicity, nationality, profession, region, religion, sex, sexual preference, etc.
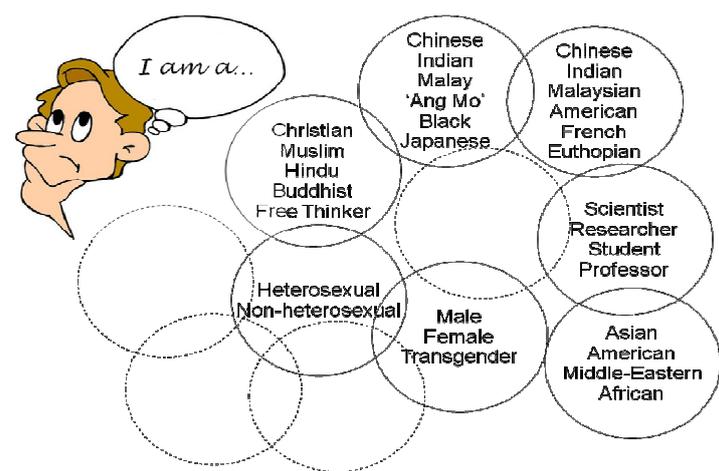

Figure 2 Various identities of a person

E.g. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi could be identified as an individual, a Gandhi, a Bania, a Gujarati, a Hindu, a South-Asian, a lawyer, a leader of the Indian National Congress, a male, a freedom fighter, an Indian, a short man, a brown-skinned man, a human being, a soul [Sanskrit: atma]. Attach greatness to it and let us see how it sounds:

MK Gandhi was a great individual.

MK Gandhi was a great Gandhi.

MK Gandhi was a great Bania.

MK Gandhi was a great Gujarati.

MK Gandhi was a great Hindu.

MK Gandhi was a great South-Asian.

MK Gandhi was a great lawyer.

MK Gandhi was a great leader of the Indian National Congress.

MK Gandhi was a great male.

MK Gandhi was a great freedom fighter.

MK Gandhi was a great Indian.

MK Gandhi was a short yet great man.

MK Gandhi was a great brown-skinned man.

MK Gandhi was a great human being.

MK Gandhi was a great soul = MK Gandhi was a 'Mahan-atma' [Sanskrit] = Mahatma Gandhi

Each of the above sentences refers to the same person. All are perhaps correct at some level or the other. The sentences which appear acceptable to us depend on the level at which we identify with Gandhi or the circle we confine him in – something I'd like to call the 'Circle of Identity'. If we judge him by the caste/community he belonged to, we'd say, "Gandhi was a great Bania or a great Gujarati". If we judge him by his religion, we'd say, "Gandhi was a great Hindu". If we judge him by his Nationality, we'd say, "Gandhi was a great Indian". If Indians accept him as their own, they would say, "Gandhi is the father of our nation". If we judge him by his deeds, we'd say, "Gandhi was a great freedom fighter" or "Gandhi was an apostle of peace". If we judge him at the human or soul level, we'd say, "Gandhi was a great man, or a great human being, or a great soul". The editors of Time magazine judged him by his influence and named him the 'man of the century' (along with Albert Einstein).

The question of identity involves deciding which level you want to be judged at – whether you want to be judged by the caste or community you belong to, the religion you practice, the race you were born in, the colour of your skin, the ideologies you follow, the state or region you come from, the country you call your own, or the deeds you do.

With the advent of Information and Communication technologies, and especially social networking websites based on Web 2.0 such as Orkut (www.orkut.com), Facebook (www.facebook.com), etc., people have found new avenues to express their identities.

Looking at the communities in Orkut gives us a good indication of how people have formed communities to satisfy different identities that they hold. *Figure 3* gives a snapshot of my Orkut communities as of June 2009.

Show: All, Owned, Pending

name	last post	members
Painting and Art in General	4:32 pm	23,367
Agrawal	4:30 pm	22,056
Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam Fan Club	4:27 pm	246,367
Swami Vivekananda and Vedanta	4:27 pm	173,042
Lata Mangeshkar	4:20 pm	34,347
Painting	4:12 pm	5,138
Indian in NUS Singapore	4:08 pm	2,624
Srimad Bhagavad Gita	3:57 pm	84,517
Indians in Singapore	3:56 pm	10,022
North Indians in Singapore	3:54 pm	2,692
"THE ART OF LIVING"	3:28 pm	52,515
Gandhi	3:22 pm	38,905
Gangtok Rocks !!	2:20 pm	2,401
Post-doctoral (postdoc) & PhD	2:14 pm	1,824
Agarwal's Shine	2:01 pm	5,782
Accomodations in Singapore	11:03 am	507
AGARWAL	Jun 11	8,759
Study in Singapore...	Jun 11	1,200
PhD students	Jun 10	12,243
Sikkim	Jun 10	2,312
Accomodation nr NUS Singapore	Jun 10	225
Admirers Of Lata Mangeshkar	Jun 10	4,245
Indian writing in English	Jun 10	4,120
NUS: School of Computing	Jun 10	194
National Uni of Singapore(NUS)	Jun 10	1,542
Indian Ocean	Jun 10	7,722
Management Information Systems	Jun 10	1,602
Singapore Network	Jun 9	1,265
artist	Jun 9	5,503
Garg's	Jun 8	2,077
Indians in New York	Jun 8	2,545
Painting	Jun 7	3,461
PhD Piled, Higher and Deeper	Jun 6	2,070
ANTI RESERVATION INDIANS	Jun 6	2,029
NUS	Jun 6	1,015
||esatsang||	Jun 6	991
NUS FRESHMEN 2008	Jun 6	154
Indian PhD Students	Jun 5	2,916
Agarwal's	Jun 4	2,377
MS/PhD Scholarships	Jun 3	2,211
PHD & Masters Computer Science	Jun 2	634
Oil painting	May 29	1,253
Pastell paintings	May 28	683
Digital Painting!	May 27	409
PhD is Pain	May 25	153
Tashi namgyal academy	May 20	748
SRIMAD BHAGAVAD GITA	May 19	2,478
Raja Hasan - Future Of Music	May 18	2,234
Ashtavakra Gita	May 9	257
PHD Students in Business	May 8	240
Art of Living Singapore	May 3	124
Gillman Heights friends&Alumni	12/8/08	136
Art Lovers	10/6/08	325
SIA-NOL Scholars	9/26/08	214
Watercolor Painting	8/4/08	43
gooD LooKiNG InDiaNs	7/31/08	176
LIBRA - INDIANS	12/1/07	70
One India = Indians r One	6/18/07	35
Kandoi		4

Figure 3 Snapshot of my Orkut communities as of early June, 2009

In *Table 2*, I classify different aspects of my identity based on membership in Orkut communities (as per *Figure 3*).

Table 2 Classification of my Identities as per membership in Orkut communities

Membership of Orkut community	(Social) Identity being reflected
One India = Indians r One	Same country of origin
Indians in Singapore; Indian in NUS Singapore; Indians in New York; Indian PhD Students	Same country of origin (in city of residence/profession)
North Indians in Singapore	Same region of origin
Sikkim	Same state/province of origin
Gangtok Rocks!!	Same hometown
Agrawal (2); Agrawal's shine; Garg's; Agarwal's; Kandoi	Same ethnicity/community/surname
Singapore Network	Same country of residence
National Uni of Singapore (NUS); NUS; NUS: School of Computing; Tashi Namgyal Academy	Same university/school/department
Post-doctoral (postdoc) & PhD; Study in Singapore…; PhD students; PhD Piled, Higher and Deeper; MS/PhD Scholarships; PHD & Masters Computer Science; PhD is Pain; PhD students in Business	Same profession/need
Management Information Systems	Some domain/field of work/research/study
SIA-NOL Scholars	Same scholarships/privileges
Painting and Art in General; Painting (2); Indian writing in English; artist; Oil painting; Pastell paintings; Digital Painting; Art Lovers; Watercolor Painting	Same passion/hobby/likes
Anti-reservation Indians	Same dislikes/stand on social/political issues
The Art of Living; Shrimad Bhagavad Gita (2); Swami Vivekananda and Vedanta; esatsang; Ashtavakra Gita; Art of Living Singapore	Same taste in spirituality/religion/philosophy
Indian Ocean; Raja Hasan – Future of Music	Same taste in music
Lata Mangeshkar; Dr APJ Abdul Kalam Fan Club; Gandhi; Admirers of Lata Mangeshkar	Same personalities admired
Good looking Indians; Libra-Indians	Same looks/personalities/zodiac signs
Accommodation in Singapore; Accomodation nr NUS Singapore; NUS Freshmen 2008; Gillman Heights friends & Alumni	Same accommodation need

Figure 3 and *Table 2* reaffirm what we have said through *Figure 2*. We can see that the same person (in this case, me) finds himself (or herself) as belonging to various groups or sub-groups reflecting different identities he (or she) holds.

So far, we've looked at what a person thinks of himself. As evident in my case, we tend to think of ourselves as people with a wide-ranging view of the world, where we are part of various overlapping, dynamic circle(s) of identity, all at one go.

4. Stereotyping – 'Mine' versus 'His' / 'Her' / 'Their' Identity

However, when we think of the other individual, we tend to slot this individual or a group of individuals into another circle of identity, often with solid surrounding walls. Often, this is based on how we conceive this individual as belonging outside our circle. This is called stereotyping. E.g. while Mahatma Gandhi is revered as a great Indian leader in India and an apostle of peace worldwide, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the founding father of Pakistan saw him as a leader of the Hindus alone (to justify his own position as leader of the Muslims, and clearly seeing him as belonging outside his circle of religious identity). This is what Jinnah expressed in his obituary when Gandhi was assassinated on 30 January 1948, "With Gandhi's killing, we have lost a great Hindu leader" (Times of India Archives, 30 January 1948).

This is called stereotyping. This was true not just in the case of Mohammad Ali Jinnah, but we tend to

do it on a daily basis. After the terrorist attacks in New York on September 11, 2001, many people have formed unfair opinions about Islam as a whole. In his recent Cairo speech (4 June 2009), US President Barack Obama has sought to correct this.
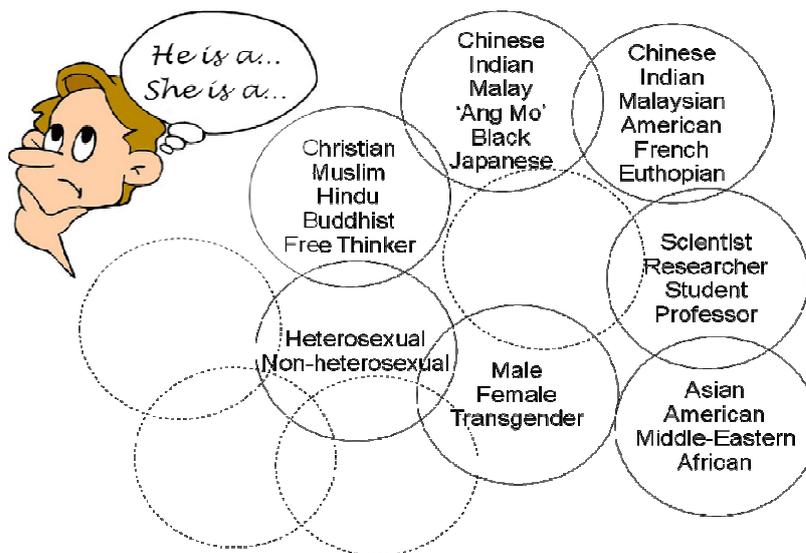

Figure 4 Stereotyping

Figure 4 shows the way we think when we stereotype. It is an opinion based only on looking at the external aspects of a person. This is different from personal identity where we judge ourselves internally based on who we think and feel we are. Most of us tend to stereotype because it is easy and convenient. We slot a new person into a category, because we feel that we already know 'their' type.

Figure 5 Advertisements in a Singapore rental website (http://singapore.gumtree.sg)

Figure 5 shows snippets from a Singapore room/house-rental website (as on June 2009). The first advertisement clearly shows that the owner is not interested in renting out the flat to any Indian or anyone from China. In the second advertisement, the owner indicates that he is "Chinese, Indian friendly owner", signifying that he is not biased towards or doesn't stereotype Indians. However, in writing that, he is indirectly showing that perhaps other Chinese owners do have this bias or stereotype. The same goes for Indian or Malay owners when it comes to renting out their flats to people of other races.

On 23 December 2007, a Japanese PhD student sent this email to his colleagues in the APRU Doctoral Students Network, "Merry merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to all (allow me to avoid checking your religion as a 'mixed-religions' Japanese. We celebrate everything as long as it makes people happy!).

The problem with stereotyping based on ethnicity is that it stands on a false premise. It relies upon a definition of ethnicity, which is unclear in the first place. What do we mean by ethnicity? Is ethnicity = genetics? Is ethnicity = geography? Is ethnicity = nationality? Is ethnicity = language?

5. Assertions of Identity / Identity Politics: Use of technology to assert identity

When we talk about assertions of identity, we are talking about knowingly or unknowingly taking a stand of 'We' versus 'Them' i.e. 'our' circle versus 'their' circle. Given below are examples of ways in which people knowingly or unknowingly express or assert their identity. Many are drawn from first hand experiences.

While interacting with a fellow PhD student, a friend and colleague, from an Australian University (who happened to be a Bangladeshi Muslim) during the 8th APRU Doctoral Students' Conference in Tokyo in August 2007, I expressed my desire to visit the Renkoji temple, where the supposed ashes of Indian freedom fighter Subhash Chandra Bose are kept. His first reaction was, "Subhash Chandra was a Bengali". Separated by national and religious boundaries, he still found kinship with an Indian hero because of the common Bengali lineage. On having watched a Hindi movie titled 'Iqbal', I mentioned to my housemate in Singapore (a Marathi Indian from Pune, a city in the state Maharashtra in western India) that Shreyas Talpade (the lead actor in the movie) has acted very well. His instant reaction was, "Shreyas Talpade is a Marathi". When India elected her President 2007, an important factor that surfaced was the 'Patil' surname of the Presidential candidate. Had she not had the particular surname (signifying her being a Marathi), it was unlikely that she'd have been elected President. In a singing reality show titled Indian Idol (on the lines of American Idol), a candidate from the hills of Darjeeling Prashant Tamang won, more so on the basis of his ethnic and linguistic identity as compared to his singing prowess (even though he was a good singer). In his win, he emerged as a strong symbol of Nepali unity and brought pride to a region that had been on the fringes of national imagination. Not only was he honored in the Indian region he belonged to, he was also felicitated by the Prime Minister of Nepal, a neighboring country [21]. Information and communication technologies such as Internet forums, mobile phones, etc. played a great role in the voting process. There were fervent discussions on newsgroups over the contestants, many centered around race and ethnic identities. See, e.g. the discussion following the video on Prashant's win at [22]. The person who posted the video [22] wrote this as information on the video, "The Nepali hero from Darjeeling wins the Indian Idol title in style. Look at the Dhaka Topi that conquered India. Thanks Prashant for making Nepalis proud. God bless you." [23] provides evidence of how makers of the show and mobile phone companies laughed their ways to the bank by playing on sentiments of social and ethnic-based identity (see *Figure 6*).

Figure 6 A billboard urging people to vote for Prashant Tamang by appealing to Nepalese Pride [23]

In another singing reality show, Voice of India 2007, Ishmeet Singh, a budding Indian singer from the ethnic Sikh community was voted en-masse by the Sikh/Punjabi community and crowned the winner of the show[1]. The above examples suggest that people tend to assert their identities (whether ethnic or religious or any other) in various ways in our day-to-day lives.

All the above examples fall into the category of 'social identity' where people feel themselves as an integral part of a certain group with shared norms and values e.g. Bengali, Marathi and Sikh/Punjabi are different social groups (based on language/ethnicity/community) evident in the examples.

Various other examples of comfort within social identity groupings can be seen in our daily lives. In universities across the world (especially where there are students from different countries), it is common to see 'birds of the same feather' flocking together. E.g. in the National University of Singapore and in Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, one can often find mainland Chinese students sticking together, Indian students sticking together (as well as smaller groups based on the specific part of India one comes from), Vietnamese students sticking together, etc. In section 3, we have discussed the community-based groupings (among other groups) formed in social networks such as Orkut and Facebook. As evident by the examples on Subhash Chandra Bose, Shreyas Talpade and Prashant Tamang, there is also the sense of pride in heroes who belonged to your ethnic group.

In many states, provinces and countries, politicians play up identity politics in a recession-filled job market to whip up sentiment on how people from other ethnic groups or from other countries are stealing jobs meant for locals e.g. see [24] to learn about a politician from Maharashtra, a state in Western India, inciting local people for attacks on North Indians in February 2008. In other extreme examples which cross the boundary of social identity and stereotyping and stem into racism and hatred, there were recent (June 2009) reports of attacks of Indian students in Canada, and Indian and Sri Lankan students in Australia [25] [26].

6. Expanding the Circle of my Identity to include the other: Towards a theory of expanding circles of identity

What is it about our ethnic/community-based identities that makes it even stronger than our human/individual or national identity? Why are organizers of reality shows able to laugh their ways to the bank, knowing fully well that our community-and-region-based identities, coupled with premium telephone/SMS rates and unlimited voting will do the job for them? Why does it matter that Shreyas Talpade is a Marathi Indian and Prashant Tamang a Nepali Indian? Isn't it sufficient that the former is a good actor and the latter a good singer? Was Gandhi a leader just of the Hindus? Was the contribution of Subhash Chandra Bose (or for that matter, prominent figures like Rabindranath Tagore and Swami Vivekananda) limited to Bengal alone? Is checking the religion before wishing 'Merry Christmas' or 'Happy Diwali' or 'Gong Xi Fa Cai' or 'Happy Hari Raya' important? Are we being sensitive, or we simply assuming that e.g. a non-Christian will be offended if we wish him/her Merry Christmas.

The Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen writes in the concluding remarks of his book, "The Argumentative Indian" [1], "I quoted earlier a statement of Jamsetji Tata of an affirmatively nationalist kind, when – commenting on the excellence that young Indians can achieve through education – he said that Indian students 'can not only hold their own against the best rivals in Europe on the latter's ground, but can beat them hollow'. That expression of pride – even perhaps of arrogance – is not the pride of a Parsee who happened to be an Indian, but of an Indian who happened to be a Parsee. There is a distinction here, and it is, I would argue, both important and in need of some understanding right now." (p.356)

---

[1] In a sad incident, Ishmeet Singh died on July 29, 2008, drowning in his hotel's swimming pool in Maldives (Wikipedia – "Ishmeet Singh Sodhi")

Every person comes to this earth alone and dies alone. At the level of the soul, all are individuals united through one common all-encompassing force that sustains them. During his/her journey on earth, every person is born in a certain family, makes friends, struggles through the inevitable hardships of life, and is remembered or not remembered only for his deeds.

In the paragraphs below, I propose a theory of expanding circles of identity to include the person we are interacting with (instead of excluding the person, as we do while stereotyping, which we do often enough).

Listed below are the salient properties of the 'circle of identity':

- Your idea of who you are
- Something personal and internal to you
- Multiple identities – multiple circles of identities (see *Figure 2*)
- Some stronger, some weaker – we feel strongly towards some circles e.g. our nation or our language, while we don't feel so strongly towards other circles we fit in
- Some static, some dynamic – certain circles such as ethnicity, religion and nationality are largely static (though the latter two can still be changed).
- Sub-identities – concentric circles. It is often the case that we have identities and sub-identities e.g. our state/province-based identities are part of larger circles of identity e.g. our nation (see *Figure 7*)
- The larger the circle – the more people it includes
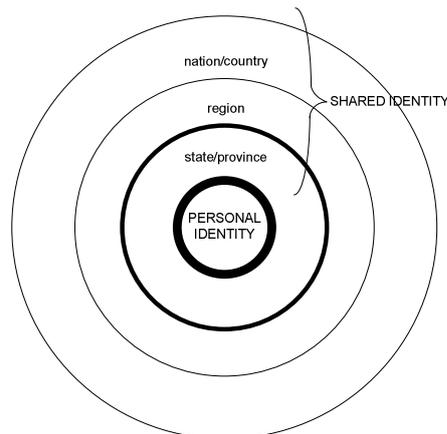- The smaller the circle, the greater the cohesiveness

Figure 7 Concentric circles of sub-identities

- The personal identity that we have (our view of ourselves), our shared identities, and the identities that we assign to people (stereotyping) are all constantly influencing each other (see *Figure 8*).
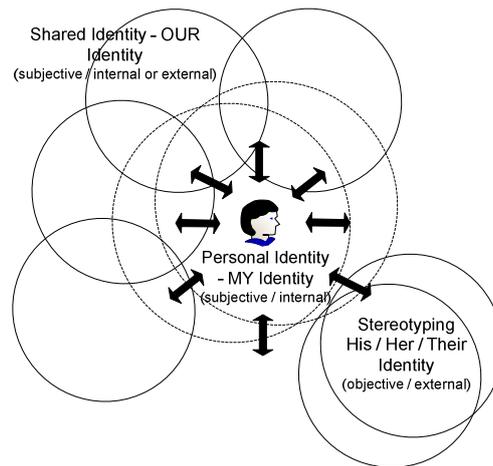
Figure 8 Identity circles influencing each other

- The 'Circle of Identity' is a circle of duality. It unites and divides – all at one go. It includes and seeks to unite all those within the circle. It excludes and seeks to divide itself from all those outside the circle.
- Used wisely, the circle of identity can be used to unite and to connect. Used unwisely, the same circle can be used to divide.

At this stage, there are certain points in which we need to ponder and find answers to.

- Is the difference from those outside the circle external or internal (residing in our minds)?
- Should we give away pride in our own circle(s)? Not necessarily
- Do we use our circles to include or to exclude? Most of the time, we use our circles to exclude the person we are interacting with (rather than including). But there is a possibility that we can use of circles of identity to include the person we are interacting with, rather than excluding him/her. How can we do that?

This is possible by expanding our Circle of Identity (see *Figure 9*). E.g. when a Bengali meets a Marathi in India, they both think of their ethnicities, and view the other as Bengali or Marathi (instead of viewing each other as Indians). However, when either of these two persons meet a Chinese, they'll think of the person as Chinese and themselves as Indians. In both the situations, the circles of identity were used to divide.
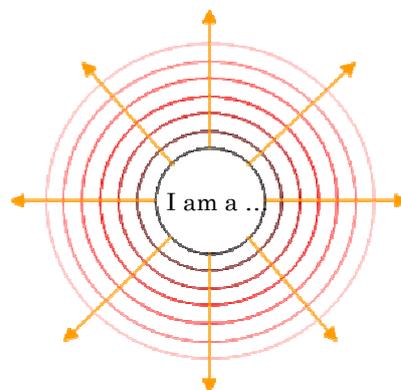

Figure 9 Expanding the circle of identity to include the other

I propose the theory of expanding circles of identity whereby whenever we interact with another person, we can expand our circle of identity to a level higher to include the person we are interacting with (so as to include and find commonality with), rather than to exclude. E.g. in the example above, were the Bengali and Marathi expand their circle from the circle of ethnicity to the circle of nationality, they'd both be Indians and would concentrate on their similarities rather than their differences. Similarly, when the Bengali or the Marathi (both Indians) meet the Chinese, they can both consider themselves as Asians (a circle that unites), rather than as Indians and Chinese.

This process of expansion to include the other perhaps requires more effort, but is ultimately more rewarding. It prevents us from the dangers of stereotyping where we think we know the person before we actually know the person.

This effort will help being about greater sensitivity to the needs of the person we interact with and a possibilities for greater peace. E.g. even in a university setting, if we have a group of Japanese students speaking in Japanese, or a group of Chinese students speaking in Mandarin, and an Indian or Malay friends joins. Conversely, in another scenario, if we have a group of Indian students speaking in Hindi / Tamil / Bengali, etc. and a Chinese friend joins us. Do you continue to speak in our native language or do we switch to a language that the friend who has joined also understands? If we continue to speak our native language, should we do it differently?

7. Conclusions and Future Work

After going through identity, the circle of identity, stereotyping and the use of technology to assert identity, we have proposed the theory of expanding circles of identity. However, my purpose here is not to say that identity or assertion of identity is necessarily bad. It is only to say that it must be used wisely – to include, rather than to exclude. Indeed, a harmonious world is one we seek to find commonalities in differences, and also, where we respect differences and diversity in similarity.

In such a world, we allow each person to live his/her life his way and judge each one based on his/her individual personality, rather than through the narrow prisms and walls of stereotyping that we build around the person.

Future work will include comparing the theory of identity with the work of other researchers in the fields of social and political science where identity has been (and is being) studied. Surveys and studies of ICTs can be carried out to understand which circles of identities people form around them, and why they find one circle stronger than the other. What circumstances lead to the strengthening of one circle and the weakening of the other with time?

Until then, let us strive to try out an instance of expanding the circle of identity when we are interacting with a lesser known person, or one who falls outside the circle we have drawn around ourselves.

References
[1] A. Sen, The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian Culture, History and Identity, Penguin Books, Noida, India, 2005.
[2] H. Tajfel and J. C. Turner, An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict. In W. G. Austin and S. Worchel (Eds.), The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations. Brooks-Cole, Monterey, CA, 1979.
[3] J. C. Turner, M. A. Hogg, P. J. Oakes, S. D. Reicher and M. S. Wetherell, Rediscovering the social group: A self-categorization theory. Basil Blackwell, Oxford and New York, 1987.
[4] Social Identity Theory, University of Twente, The Netherlands, 2004. Retrieved 2 June 2009 from http://www.tcw.utwente.nl/theorieenoverzicht/Theory%20clusters/Interpersonal%20Communication%20and%20Relations/Social_Identity_Theory.doc/
[5] M. A. Hogg and G. M. Vaughan, Social Psychology (3rd edition), Prentice Hall, London, 2002.
[6] J. Fearon, What is Identity (as We Now Use the Word)? Mimeo, Stanford University, November 1999.
[7] D. L. Horowitz, Ethnic Groups in Conflict. University of California Press, Berkeley, CA,1985.

[8] A. D. Smith, National Identity. University of Nevada Press, Reno, NV, 1991.

[9] F. M. Deng, War of Visions: Conflict of Identities in the Sudan. Brookings, Washington, D.C., 1995.

[10] D. D. Laitin, "Somalia: Civil War and International Intervention." In B. F. Walter and J. Snyder (eds.). Civil War, Insecurity, and Intervention, Columbia University Press, New York, 1999.

[11] A. Wendt, "Anarchy is What States Make of It", International Organization, vol.46, pp.391-426, 1992.

[12] A. Wendt, Social Theory of International Politics. Cambridge University Press, New York, 1999.

[13] P. Katzenstein, ed., The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics. Columbia University Press, New York, 1996.

[14] Y. Lapid and F. Kratochwil, eds., The Return of Culture and Identity in IR Theory. Lynne Rienner, Boulder, CO, 1996.

[15] T. J. Biersteker and C. Weber, eds., State Sovereignty as Social Construct. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996.

[16] I. M. Young, Justice and the Politics of Difference. Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., 1990.

[17] W. E. Connolly, Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, N.Y., 1991.

[18] W. Kymlicka, Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights. Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1995.

[19] D. Miller, Nationalism. Oxford University Press, London, 1995.

[20] C. Taylor, The Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1989.

[21] IANS, "Nepal PM meets Indian Idol Prashant Tamang", The Times of India, 30 September 2007. Retrieved 5 June 2009 from http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/2415895.cms

[22] caravan7777, "Prashant Tamang the Nepali Hero", YouTube video posted 30 September 2007. Retrieved 5 June 2009 from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M3S9Rdfo-eM

[23] X. Shrestha "Picture Gallery of New Indian Idol Prashant Tamang and his fans collecting funds for vote", Blogtantra.com. Retrieved 6 June 2009 from http://www.blogtantra.com/2007/09/22/picture-gallery-of-new-indian-idol-prashant-tamang-and-his-fans-collecting-funds-for-vote/

[24] "2008 attacks on North Indians in Maharashtra", Wikipedia, Retrieved 6 June 2009 from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2008_attacks_on_North_Indians_in_Maharashtra

[25] AGENCIES, "After Australia, racial assault on Indians in Canada", The Times of India 11 June 2009, Retrieved 11 June 2009 from http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/World/Racial-assault-on-Indians-in-Canada/articleshow/4638419.cms

[26] PTI "After Indians, Sri Lankan students attacked in Australia", Press Trust of India, 11 June 2009. Retrieved 11 June 2009 from http://www.ptinews.com/pti%5Cptisite.nsf/0/CE812A9C64E8A41A652575D20055B8C2?OpenDocument