
UNIT 15: MULTICULTURALISM AND TOLERANCE (HOW DO WE ACCOMMODATE DIVERSITY IN A PLURAL SOCIETY)*

Structure

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15.0 OBJECTIVES

The aim of this unit is to familiarise you with the ideas of multiculturalism, tolerance and diversity. After studying this unit, you should be able to:

- Explain the meaning of multiculturalism
- Know various models of multiculturalism
- Describe second wave of writings on multiculturalism; and
- Analyze some of the limitations of multiculturalism

15.1 INTRODUCTION

Cultural diversity is posing a challenge to states around the world as various governments are facing demands from cultural minorities for recognition, protection and political autonomy etc within the territory of the state. There

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has been a rise of cultural diversity in various countries due to a number of factors – demise of communism in Eastern Europe leading to demands of nationalism, rise in attraction of communitarian thinking in the 1980s, increase in Muslim immigrants to Western Europe in the 1970s, emergence of indigenous peoples’ movements demanding correction of historical injustices meted out to them, increased political activism of religious conservatives in the US in the 1980s and migration of people due to war or seeking better economic opportunities. As a result, a number of questions have become unavoidable in political theory, from the role of state in dealing with such cultural diversity to limits of toleration, nature of citizenship and rights of women. These critical aspects have been explained in succeeding paragraphs.

15.2 CULTURE AND IDENTITY

Before discussing the concept of multiculturalism, it is important to know issues of culture and identity from which the idea of multiculturalism flows. In a macro sense, culture is the way of life for people, their values, beliefs and practices. There is difference between culture and nature. Culture is passed on from one generation to the other by learning rather than through biological inheritance. Culture, thus, encompasses tradition, religion, language, moral principles and social norms. Identity politics or the politics of difference is increasing recognition of cultural differences in a society. The concept of culture is central to multiculturalism. Different meanings have been attached to culture by different theorists and this in turn has shaped their ideas on multiculturalism. Identity is a sense of unique and separate selfhood and sees individuals embedded in a particular culture or social context. Identity may be multiple like gender, religion, ethnicity etc. Identity is equated with difference as awareness of difference further magnifies an individual’s sense of identity. This has led to politics of recognition, thereby meaning difference should be embraced. This reflects a shift from universalism to particularism. The post-colonial theories that were formulated after the Second World War became the basis of identity politics. They sought to challenge and even overturn the cultural dimension of imperial rule by establishing the legitimacy of non-western and even anti-western political traditions and ideas. *Edward Said* had developed a critique of Eurocentrism through his notion of Orientalism. He argued that western hegemony over the Orient had been maintained by stereotypical portrayal of non-western people to demean and belittle them. With the rise in international migration and globalization, there has been intensification of identity politics around the globe.

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- Note:** i) Use the space given below for your answer.
ii) See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

1) What do you understand by identity?

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15.3 MULTICULTURALISM – MEANING AND CONCEPT

Cultural diversity has been a feature of various societies for a long time. Different dialects and traditions existed in ancient Greece. In the Ottoman Empire, minorities like Christians and Jews existed apart from the Muslims who were in a majority. In the contemporary context, there are countries like India, Canada, the US, UK, New Zealand, France etc who have cultural diversity. Due to the factors mentioned in the introduction, cultural diversity has increased around the world and highly homogenous countries like Japan are becoming rare examples. Diversity can be of many types and some of the main types of diversity are:

(A) **Religious Diversity:** India is a good example of a country with diverse cultures. The religious groups often differentiate from each other through factors like dress code, public holidays, festivals and practices related to their celebration.

(B) **Diversity based on Location:** There may be groups who see themselves as distinct from others due to their specific geographical location. For ex, in the UK, Scots distinguish themselves from others due to their location in the north, although their culture is not significantly different from others.

(C) **Linguistic Diversity:** Language is another basis for the existence of diversity in a country. Some examples include Quebec in Canada, Uyghurs in China and Catalans in Spain.

(D) **Racial Diversity:** Existence of different physical features gives rise to diversity based on race. However, these differences should lead to a common identity which can differentiate that group from others. One example is Hutus and the Tutsis in Rwanda. It should be mentioned that race has a limited role in multicultural discourse.

Multiculturalism appeared in political theory in the 1970s and the 1980s when it was used to denote a shift in public policy away from assimilation of ethnic minorities and immigrants towards integration and acceptance of diverse cultures in countries like Canada and Australia. In the US, the debate on multiculturalism started in the 1980s in the context of how the education system should respond to cultural diversity. The term multiculturalism is

used to describe a society in which different cultures can coexist. It signifies attempts to balance diversity against cohesion. Multiculturalism not only recognises cultural diversity, but also advocates that such differences should be respected and publicly affirmed. It maintains respect for cultural differences and does not favour assimilation of minority culture into the dominant one. Instead of seeking a melting pot in which minority groups assimilate into the majority culture, multiculturalism uses metaphors like salad bowl or glorious mosaic where the minorities can maintain their distinctiveness. From the multiculturalism perspective, the public policy should not aim for standardization of cultural forms or any type of uniformity or homogeneity, but instead, heterogeneity should be maintained. There are differences among various thinkers on how this has to be achieved. Some argue that minority groups should be tolerated by leaving them free from state interference, also called as politics of indifference. Others argue that mere toleration of group differences falls short of treating the minority groups as equals and there is a need for recognition and positive accommodation of minority group practices through difference sensitive policies.

In his book, *The Multiculturalism of Fear* (2000), *Jacob T Levy* has divided the difference sensitive policies into eight categories. These eight categories are:

(A) **Exemptions from Generally Applicable Laws:** Exemptions are based on negative liberty pertaining to non-interference of state in certain matters as it could increase the burden on a certain group. For ex, religious exemptions can be extended to a minority group so that they can maintain their identity.

(B) **Assistance Rights:** Certain rights are extended to rectify disadvantage experienced by a certain group in comparison to the majority. This includes positive discrimination or affirmative action to help the minorities. Examples include funding for schools meant for minority languages.

(C) **Symbolic Claims:** This means that all the cultures are represented by the symbols of a country on the grounds of equality. Not including the symbols from minority cultures could be seen as lack of respect and unequal treatment towards them.

(D) **Recognition:** It is a demand to integrate a cultural practice or a specific law into the larger society. For ex, inclusion of the history of Indian and Pakistani immigrants in British history books shows the recognition of these two groups in British multicultural society.

(E) **Special Representation Rights:** They are intended to safeguard the groups which have been systematically marginalized in a bigger society. For ex, extra seats may be set aside for the minorities in the parliament of a diverse nation.

(F) **Self-Government:** The cultural minorities may claim certain degree of

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autonomy under demands for self-government. This is required so that they can develop and preserve their culture.

(G) **External Rules:** It involves restricting the freedom of other people to preserve a certain culture. For ex, outsiders have limited freedom of movement in the areas inhabited by Aborigines. Outsiders even do not have the rights to buy land in these areas.

(H) **Internal Rules:** These rules restrict an individual's behaviour within the group. For ex, if somebody disobeys rules of the group, he/she can be ostracised or excommunicated. There is difference of opinion whether such internal rules are compatible with liberal values or not. Will Kymlicka believes such rules undermine an individual's autonomy and hence, are incompatible with liberal values. In contrast, Chandran Kukathas argues that since liberals are committed to tolerance, such internal restrictions in certain groups should be tolerated.

Apart from the above mentioned categories, multiculturalism has been used as an overarching term to signify the political and moral claims of other marginalized groups like women, people with special abilities and LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender). Multiculturalism is not restricted to claims of culture and identity alone, as some critics have often pointed out. Instead, it is also a matter of political power and economic interest since it involves demands to rectify political and economic disadvantages suffered by people due to their membership of a marginalized group. It is pertinent to mention that multicultural policies are not primarily about redistributive justice (share in resource allocation), but they may accidentally refer to redistributive justice. Freedom from domination is one of the reasons why there is a need for multiculturalism, according to some experts. They argue that one can be unfree even if he/she is not experiencing any interference, for ex, a slave of a benevolent master. Here, special accommodation is not driven by a desire to protect valuable cultures or considerations of equality, but the desire to reduce domination. Some others who write with a post-colonial perspective give importance to historical background, as is the case with aboriginal sovereignty. They contend that history of state oppression of a group should be the main factor in deciding whether group rights should be extended or not to that particular group.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

1) What is multiculturalism?

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15.4 MODELS OF MULTICULTURALISM

Ayelet Shachar gives two types of multiculturalism – strong and weak. Strong multiculturalism is centred on group identity and group rights and it gives rights to the group over its members. The central problem for strong multiculturalists is injustice among different groups. In contrast, weak multiculturalism focuses on intra-group complexities and accommodation. The main focus is on how to harmonise individual rights with group rights. According to *Andrew Heywood*, there are three main models of multiculturalism: liberal, pluralist and cosmopolitan.

(A) **Liberal Multiculturalism:** Commitment to freedom and toleration are two hallmarks of liberalism. Toleration is a willingness to allow existence and expression of rival views. Liberalism gives an individual the right to choose his/her beliefs, cultural practices and way of life. However, toleration extends to values, views and social practices that are compatible with autonomy and personal freedom. Practices such as forced marriages and female circumcision will not be endorsed by liberal multiculturalists as they are against individual freedom. *Will Kymlicka's* theory on liberal multiculturalism is one of the most important, as he combines the liberal values of equality and autonomy with the value of cultural membership. His views are expressed in his books, *Liberalism, Community and Culture* (1989) and *Multicultural Citizenship* (1995). According to Kymlicka, culture is important to individuals for two reasons. First, membership of a culture is an important condition of personal autonomy as they serve as 'contexts of choice' and provide meaningful options by which an individual frames his life and goals. Second, cultural membership is important in shaping self-identity of an individual. A person's self-respect is connected to the respect that is accorded by others to his/her culture. He further argues that since cultural minorities are disadvantaged in accessing their own culture compared to members of majority culture, minorities are entitled to special rights. He says that it is impossible for the state to be completely neutral and its involvement in the cultural character of the state is unavoidable. For ex, the public holidays that a government decides to observe would promote a certain culture and those who do not share the culture promoted by the state would be disadvantaged. True equality, according to him requires different treatment for different groups. Kymlicka has listed three types of minority rights or group differentiated rights. First, there are self-government rights which belong to the national minorities. Examples would include Native

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Americans and Maoris in New Zealand. Second are the polyethnic rights which help religious and ethnic minorities and have been developed through immigration to main their culture. For ex, legal exemptions could be extended to Jews and Muslims from animal slaughtering laws in a country. Third, there are special representation rights that try to rectify underrepresentation of minorities in public life, for ex, the affirmative action in the US. Kymlicka argues that multicultural citizenship and minority rights give minority groups external protections against outsiders. They do not aim to allow the groups to restrict the autonomy and rights of their own members. Kymlicka does not grant right to intervene to the liberal state in the illiberal groups who restrict the freedom of their own members.

(B) Pluralist Multiculturalism: This theory of cultural diversity is based on value pluralism, an idea that there are many values which are equally correct and fundamental although they may be in contradiction to each other. *Isaiah Berlin* is one of the main proponents of the idea of value pluralism. In this view, liberal views like personal freedom and democracy have no greater moral authority than their rival beliefs. This results in live and let live type of multiculturalism. However, Berlin was of the view that value pluralism can exist only within a society that respects individual freedom. Hence, he could not prove how liberal and illiberal cultures could coexist in the same society. *Bhikhu Parekh* has also given his views on pluralist multiculturalism. He argues that multiculturalism is neither a political doctrine nor a philosophical school. Instead, it is a perspective on the way of viewing human life. It has three central tenets. First, human beings are culturally embedded and they grow and live within a culturally structured world. Their thoughts are deeply shaped by culture and they can overcome some, but not all of its influences. Second, different cultures have different meanings of good life. Since each culture can develop limited range of human capabilities and can understand only a part of human existence as a whole, it requires other cultures to stretch its imagination and expand its intellectual boundaries. It also guards against any tendency towards absolutism in any culture. An individual's life is likely to be richer if that person has access to others and in an interdependent and modern world, culturally self-contained life is impossible. Third, every culture is internally plural, its different strands of thought are in continuous conversation and hence, its identity is fluid, open and plural. Various cultures grow by conscious and unconscious interaction with each other and each carries bits of the other within itself. Multiculturalism, according to Parekh, is a creative interplay between these three factors. He further argues that from a multicultural perspective, a society does not commit itself to a particular political doctrine or vision of good life. It also does not ask how much diversity to tolerate within the limits set by it as it forecloses its future development. Multiculturalism begins by accepting the desirability and reality of cultural diversity and structures its political life accordingly. It is a dialogically constituted society which wants to keep the continuous

dialogue and nurture an atmosphere where boundaries of prevailing forms of thought can be expanded to generate collectively acceptable policies and principles. Such a society does not give any priority to any cultural perspective, be it liberal or otherwise. There are certain institutional preconditions that are a prerequisite for dialogue like equal rights, freedom of expression, participatory public spaces, an accountable authority and empowered citizens. It also calls for political virtues like tolerance, concern, mutual respect, self-restraint, love for diversity, a mind open to new ideas and ability to live with unresolved differences. Such a society nurtures wide range of ideas and fosters the spirit of dialogue. By doing this, it draws a line against those who are too dogmatic or self-righteous to participate in its conversational culture and accept its outcome.

(C) Cosmopolitan Multiculturalism: It celebrates diversity as each culture can learn from the other and prospects for self-development are offered by a world of wider cultural opportunities and lifestyle choices. It endorses exploration of different cultural options from an individual's perspective. Cosmopolitan multiculturalism embraces the idea of multiple identity and hybridity. It is argued that irrespective of their different cultural origins, people share the same planet and are facing similar experiences and challenges. Hence, global consciousness and the idea of cosmopolitanism is a running thread in this type of multiculturalism.

Check Your Progress Exercise 3

- Note:** i) Use the space given below for your answer.
ii) See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

1) What is the importance of culture according to Will Kymlicka?

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2) What are the three central tenets of a culture according to Bhikhu Parekh?

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15.5 SECOND WAVE OF WRITINGS

There have been two waves of writings on multiculturalism. The first wave discusses differences among various cultural groups and the debate is centred on relevance of difference-sensitive policies in a liberal context. Some liberals have defended these policies while others argue that they deviate from the core values of liberalism as they undermine the notion of equal individual rights and equal treatment. In the second wave, the writers are not concerned about justice among various groups but within groups. They analyze the policies that protect minority cultural rights and their impact on group members. Multicultural policies may give leaders of minority cultures power for decision making and institutionalising practices that persecute the internal minorities. Here, issues related to women and minority cultural groups like gay, lesbian and bisexuals can be discussed. Gay, lesbian and bisexual persons want to lead a life of dignity, freedom and access to welfare provisions. A variety of social controls and norms are exercised by the minority groups to marginalize them. They face hate speech, violence and psychological harassment.

Feminists have argued that most cultures in the world are patriarchal and gendered and group differentiated rights would reinforce and strengthen patriarchal practices. Polygamy and female genital mutilation are two such examples that go against women's rights. Some writers have even highlighted that there should be no cruelty against animals and group rights can put interests of animals at risk. Some cultural groups engage in animal slaughtering and exemptions to them from state laws on animal cruelty would continue violence against animals.

Check Your Progress Exercise 4

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

1) What is the difference between first and second wave of writings on multiculturalism?

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15.6 LIMITATIONS OF MULTICULTURALISM

A number of drawbacks of multiculturalism have been highlighted by many experts.

In contrast to the group differentiated notion of equality, Brian Barry has advocated universal notion of equality. He says that religious and cultural minorities should be ready to face the consequences of their practices and beliefs, in the same way as members of majority culture are held responsible for bearing the consequences of their beliefs. He argues that special accommodation is justified for the people with disabilities as any disability limits a person's opportunities compared to others who do not suffer from disability. In contrast, religion and culture do not affect whether someone has an opportunity, although they may impact one's desire to take any opportunity or not.

Some progressive theorists believe that multiculturalism fails to address the grievances of the disadvantaged sections of society. They say that the real problem of minorities is not lack of cultural recognition, but their lack of economic power and social status (issues of class). By focusing on cultural distinctiveness, multiculturalism divides the people who want social reform and reduction in poverty. This in turn, reduces support for welfare policies as the society is divided and forgets issues like poverty that could unite them.

According to Amartya Sen, multiculturalism is based on solitarist theory. He argues that multiculturalism leads to miniaturization of humanity as identity is associated with a single social group. It makes violence more likely as people identify with their own group and sometimes fail to recognize rights of other groups. Conservative and nationalist thinkers believe that multicultural societies are internally divided where violence and hostility are accepted facts of life. People generally are drawn to others with whom they share their identity and they would distrust someone who is different in some ways of life. Nationalists, therefore, would like to limit immigration and assimilate the minority cultures to strengthen national identity instead of particular identities.

Highlighting the problem of minorities within minorities, feminists argue that group differentiated rights are used by men to strengthen and perpetuate their power in a group and women are marginalized in such an environment. They also say that multiculturalism reinforces gender inequality in minority groups.

Check Your Progress Exercise 5

- Note:** i) Use the space given below for your answer.
ii) See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

- 1) Discuss the feminist critique of multiculturalism.

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15.7 LET US SUM UP

Cultural diversity like religion, linguistic and racial continues to be a feature of many states around the world. In political theory, multiculturalism appeared in 1970s and 1980s in countries like Canada and Australia which tried to move away from policies focusing on assimilation of ethnic minorities and immigrants towards integration and acceptance of diverse cultures. Instead of seeking a melting pot in which all differences assimilate, multiculturalism stands for something like a salad bowl where the constituents retain their identity. It does not seek uniformity or standardization, but it tries to maintain heterogeneity. Multiculturalism stands for recognition and positive accommodation of minority group practices through difference sensitive policies like exemptions, assistance rights, external rules and internal rules. There are three main models of multiculturalism – liberal, pluralist and cosmopolitan. There are two waves of writings on multiculturalism. The first wave highlights issues between various groups while the second wave talks of internal problems within a group like subordination of women to men. The idea of multiculturalism has been criticised by many, but one should also keep in mind that multicultural citizenship stands for fairer terms of integration and not separation or division as highlighted by its critics. It also tries to increase participation of the groups that were previously oppressed.

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15.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1) Your answer should highlight following points
 - Identity is a sense of unique and separate selfhood
 - It sees individuals embedded in particular culture or social context
 - This leads to politics of recognition, thereby meaning difference should be embraced

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- 1) Your answer should highlight following points
 - Multiculturalism not recognizes cultural diversity
 - Advocates that such differences should be respected and publicly affirmed

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- Does not aim for assimilation or uniformity
- Supports group differentiated rights

Check Your Progress Exercise 3

- 1) Your answer should highlight following points
 - Culture supports personal autonomy by providing a context of choices to individuals to shape their lives
 - Cultural membership is important in shaping self-identity of an individual
- 2) Your answer should highlight following points
 - Individuals are culturally embedded
 - Every culture requires another culture to stretch its intellectual boundaries to enrich itself
 - Every culture is fluid, open and plural

Check Your Progress Exercise 4

- 1) First wave of writings on multiculturalism, discusses differences among various cultural groups while the second wave is not concerned about justice among various groups but within groups

Check Your Progress Exercise 5

- 1) Your answer should highlight following points
 - Multiculturalism reinforces gender inequality in minority groups
 - group differentiated rights are used by men to strengthen and perpetuate their power in a group

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