

MULTICULTURALISM: NEED OF THE HOUR*Shaikh Zeeshan,***Research Scholar, Department of Philosophy, University of Mumbai.*

Multiculturalism emerge as a new ideology because of various issues, problems and challenges faced by our society. Almost all of the modern societies of the world are culturally diverse and pluralistic. As a political philosophy multiculturalism is a body of thought which respond in proper way to the all kinds of diversity be it cultural, religious, racial or linguistic.

We all accept that cultural diversity exist in all societies. **Multiculturalism** implies a positive acceptance and endorsement of cultural diversity and maintains that such differences should be respected and publically affirms. It means to accept various beliefs and ways of life as values and we should respect all the diversity. Multiculturalism is different and better ideology than pluralism because multiculturalism not only recognize the cultural diversity but also affirms that cultural differences should be publically affirmed. Multiculturalism maintain that different cultures deserves to be strengthened. Multiculturalism also demands remedies to political and economic disadvantages that people suffer as a result of their minority status. All political ideologies, from multiculturalist point of view are narrow and partial because all of them is embedded in particular culture and represent a particular vision of good life.

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Multiculturalism started in decade 1960s. Main question which is asked by multiculturalists is that how can diverse communities of people in any society be treated as equal? Multiculturalism aims to minimize discrimination of minority cultural communities and to promote the ideal of non-discrimination. To counter existing patterns of culture-related discrimination in liberal democratic politics, multiculturalism recommends those policies that enhance cultural diversity in society. Today, most of countries accept multiculturalism as their official policy. In today's world scenario multiculturalism is very important. Different cultures should be recognized because there is a close relationship between human nature and culture. Cultures shape and molds human behaviour. Different cultures have different understanding of this world and good life but these differences do not make them superior or inferior. Will Kymlicka, Charles Taylor, Bikhu Parekh etc. are important well known multiculturalists.

Multiculturalism view a person as 'cosmopolitan' rather than 'multicultural. And this cosmopolitan citizen have a positive and open attitude to different cultures, respect for people of other cultures, and here such respect means recognizing their rights to make choices about how they live their lives. Multicultural education policy focuses primarily on social inclusion and identifying the special needs of particular cultural groups. Indian society is heterogeneous and its diversity is its strength. Cultural and Educational Rights Article 29 and 30 in Part III of the Indian Constitution as a Fundamental Right intend to preserve the culture of minority groups in India. Indian Constitution granted these rights to cultural and linguistic and religious minorities so that diversity of this country remains preserved and provides a way for all groups including marginalized ones to protect, preserve and propagate their culture.

There are many things that make us what we are – how we live, the language we speak, what we eat, wear, the games

we play and the things we celebrate. All of these are influenced both by the geography and history of the place where we live in. There are eight major religion in the world every single of them is practiced in India. We have sixteen hundred languages that are peoples' mother tongues, and there are more than a hundred forms. Yet this diversity is not celebrated. This is because we feel safe and secure with people who look, talk, dress and think like us. Sometimes when we meet people who are very different from us we may find them strange and unfamiliar. At times we may not understand or know the reasons why they are different from us. People also form certain attitudes and opinions about others who are not like them.

Equal citizenship and common sense of belonging are not same. Citizenship is about rights and status but belonging is about acceptance and a sense of identification. Equal citizenship is necessarily essential but it is not sufficient condition for living a happy life. Because one may enjoy all the rights of citizenship but feel that one does not quite belong to the community and one is outsider. Examples like African American in USA, Afro-Caribbean and Asians in UK etc. When any majority dominant culture disrespect and discriminate and try to reinforce their own culture to the minority culture through all their majority power and politics then followers minority culture will feel alienated from the mainstream society.

Multiculturalism aims to protect diversity. Purpose of Indian democracy is to bring unity in diversity and at the same time to protect diversity in unity. Multiculturalism highlights issue of cultural discrimination even in democratic state. It has addressed problems of refugees and immigrants. Multiculturalism also emphasized on minority which is essential for healthy democratic system. It gives importance to various cultural groups.

Multiculturalism argues that identical rights for all are inadequate for minimizing culture-based discrimination. What we require are special rights for identified minorities. This is known as concept of 'differentiated citizenship'. Multiculturalism maintains that universal citizenship assumes that all persons are alike. This assumption of homogeneity eclipses group differences. The idea of group-differentiated citizenship and rights is advocated to stop the process of assimilation by giving minority cultural communities rights that would enable them to protect their culture against pressures of homogenization that come from the state and society. It rests on the belief that society comprises of many different cultural communities. But the state invariably privileges and endorses the culture of one community, which is designated as the majority. Therefore a distinction should be made between citizens on the basis of cultural identity and this is justified for enduring equal treatment.

Multiculturalists say that three kinds of special rights should be given to minority communities: Cultural Rights, Self-Government Rights, and Special Representation Rights. Starting with the first, generally it is observed that the state represents the culture of the majority community, multiculturalists argue that minority communities require special rights so that they have access to their culture in the public domain. To take a few examples: the Sikhs in Canada have demanded, and received exemption from the law that prescribes helmet wearing for motorcycles riders. Women from Asian communities have been granted exemption from wearing a dress while serving as nurses in hospitals. Also in India, for instance, religious communities wanted, and were given recognition for their family laws. The second kind of special right justified within multiculturalism is that of self-government. The purpose of this second special right is to give communities certain degree of political autonomy to govern themselves in a way that they can protect and promote their distinct cultural identity in a given region. The third type of minority is special representation rights. That rationale behind this right is that these rights are essential for minority so that they can have an opportunity to participate in

political process. It is expected to enrich policy making by bringing in the experiences and perspectives of diverse groups in society. In India, special representation was granted the SCs and STs by the Constitution.

India's diversity has always been recognized as a source of its strength. When the British ruled India, women and men from different cultural, religious and regional backgrounds came together to oppose them. India's freedom movement had thousands of people of different background in it. They worked together to decide joint actions, they went to jail together, and they found different ways to oppose the British. Interestingly the British thought they could divide Indians because they were so different, and then continue to rule them. But the people showed how they could be different and yet be united in their battle against the British. Songs and symbols that emerged during the freedom struggle serve as a constant reminder of our country's rich tradition of respect for diversity. In his book *The Discovery of India* Jawaharlal Nehru says that Indian unity is not something imposed from the outside but rather, "It was something deeper and within its fold, the widest tolerance of belief and custom was practiced and every variety acknowledged and even encouraged." It was Nehru who coined the phrase, "Unity In Diversity" to describe the country. India's national anthem, composed by Rabindranath Tagore, is another expression of the unity of India.

Will Kymlicka argues that protection of individual human rights is insufficient to ensure justice between ethno cultural groups and that minority rights must supplement human rights. He distinguishes between multi-nation states and polyethnic states where minorities in self-governing nations become a part of larger state after independence. Polyethnic states are those where immigration results in cultural diversity and established the presence of one or more minority groups. There is a difference between multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism. Jeremy Waldon equates multiculturalism with cosmopolitanism. Multiculturalism attempts for the preservation of one's own culture while supporters of cosmopolitanism think that you have to be free to choose your own culture and religion. Multiculturalism is based on preserving inherent differences while cosmopolitanism is based on bridging them. Will Kymlicka defines multiculturalism as the one grounded in citizenship rights where the state and its institutions promote and respect the rights of minorities in various forms. It aims to construct new civic and political relations by abolishing all forms of discrimination and inequalities. 'Liberal multiculturalism' is a key terms that Kymlicka uses in his book "rests on the assumption that policies of recognizing and accommodating ethnic diversity can expand human freedom, strengthen human rights, diminish ethnic and racial hierarchies, and deepen democracy." He was against the forceful imposition of dominant culture on the minorities. A state professing the ideology of multiculturalism has to recognize the history, culture, language, religion of non-dominated groups. Multiculturalism holds that diversity is desirable. By promoting cultural diversity there is cross cultural exchange, toleration, a willingness to understand and respect difference. All forms of multiculturalism are based on the assumption that unity and diversity can be blended. They are not opposing or destabilizing force.

Multiculturalism is a reasonable tool of preventing ethnic violence. Accommodation of ethnic diversity has become a pre-condition to maintain international order. Increasing number of western countries have adopted the model of multiculturalism. International conventions and international organizations also promoted the growth of multiculturalism. Different from 'Anglo-conformity' model, 'multicultural-model', believes that in order to keep the culture of the immigrants alive, the government must become tolerant towards the immigrants. It was practiced at the beginning of seventies. Under the pressure of the immigrants the model of sixties (Anglo-conformity model) changed. To keep the culture of the immigrants alive the government became more tolerant towards the immigrants. Canada,

Denmark, New Zealand, USA are strongly multicultural. Australia, Finland, Norway are moderately multicultural while Japan and Sweden have barely shifted in this regard. In India, different states have different state official languages is also a kind of multiculturalism.

We can promote the ideology of multiculturalism in any country through various methods like affirmation of multiculturalism in the constitution or by parliament and at central, regional and municipal level. By adopting multiculturalism in school curriculum and by affirmative action for disadvantaged immigrants groups. Will Kymlicka justifies reverse or positive discrimination on the grounds that it is only way of ensuring full and equal participation of all groups in the life of the society, example there are exemptions of Jews and Muslims from animal slaughtering laws and exemption to Muslim girls from school dress codes. Denial of cultural recognition results in isolation and powerlessness, providing a breeding ground for extremism and the politics of hate. For instance, growing support for militants Islam, and other forms of religious fundamentalism have been interpreted in this light.

A true democratic form of government respect the rights of minorities. In consolidated democracies ethnic groups are not afraid to speak out. They do not have the fear of being killed, jailed or fired. Consolidation of democracy limits the ability of ethnic elites to crush ethnic political movements. Elites tend to ban political movements, pay thugs or paramilitaries to beat or kill ethnic leaders. We as global humans who are invariably differentiated by our different ways of life and by our alternative world views, can co-exist in harmony. We can attempt harmony and peace neither by forgetting our differences nor by subjugate other cultures but by understanding and accommodating such differences. If we must strive to promote politics that is at once global and inclusive, the promotion and protection of multicultural citizenship must form a crucial aspect of that endeavour.

Culture has a prime value in human life. Human beings are not independent creature but they are the product of culture. Cultural diversity is seen to benefit society in just the same way that biodiversity benefits an ecosystem. 'An additional advantage of diversity is that by promoting cultural exchange between groups that live side by side with one another it fosters cross-cultural tolerance and understanding, and therefore a willingness to respect difference. Diversity in this sense, is the antidote to social polarization and prejudice.

We cannot neglect the importance of multiculturalism as an ideology in the present world because of various reasons like it seeks diversity in unity. It fosters cross cultural tolerance and people learn to respect differences. Multiculturalism provided vent to the voice of minority groups. It highlighted the issue of minority rights. It brings harmony, peace and sense of co-existence in the society etc.

I would like to conclude this research article by saying that, you follow your own culture and I will follow my culture but I will positively accept and respect your culture too. Neither I expect from you to follow my culture nor I want that you to force me to follow your culture, but I will fight till death for your right to follow your culture.

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