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## UNIT 24 MULTICULTURALISM

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### 24.1 MULTICULTURALISM: THE CONCEPT

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Most countries of the world today are internally plural. They have people of different religions, races and cultures living within their boundaries. How can these diverse communities of people be treated as equal within the framework of democracy? This is the question that multiculturalism poses and seeks to answer. Multiculturalism begins with the understanding that granting equal civil and political rights was an important achievement within democracy, but it has not adequately addressed the issue of discrimination in society. Marginalized cultural communities, as minorities, continue to be disadvantaged even within the democratic nation-state. Culture-based discrimination exists even in the most advanced liberal polities of the west, and it can not be redressed simply by giving identical rights to all persons as citizens. What we need instead are a set of special arrangements that enable minority cultures to survive and flourish in the public arena.

#### 24.1.1 The Ideal of Non-Discrimination

Multiculturalism aims to minimize discrimination of minority cultural communities and to promote the ideal of non-discrimination. Over the last three centuries or more, democratization has occurred by identifying sources of discrimination within the polity and finding ways to eliminate them. As countries became democratic, they set aside discrimination based upon religion, gender, caste and race. Multiculturalism contributes to this on going project of democratization by pointing to a site of discrimination that had received little attention before, namely, cultural identity. The recognition that cultural identities may also be a source of marginalization, and that the actions of the liberal state may disadvantage members of minority communities is the singular contribution of multiculturalism to the discourse on democracy. More than any other strand of political theory, it is multiculturalism that has drawn our attention

to the discrimination faced by vulnerable minority cultural communities within the state, and shown us that pursuing the goal of non-discrimination requires a radical re-consideration of the dominant tradition of liberal theory.

### **24.1.2 Promoting Cultural Diversity**

To counter existing patterns of culture-related discrimination in liberal democratic polities, multiculturalism recommends policies that enhance cultural diversity in society. Protecting and promoting cultural diversity is a primary value within multiculturalism and it is strongly favoured for the sake of i) minimizing minority discrimination; ii) creating conditions in which minority cultures survive and flourish. Theorists of multiculturalism argue that the policies of liberal nation-state disadvantage minority communities. They place external pressures upon the members of minority communities to assimilate into the culture of the majority. Policies aimed at promoting diversity are seen as ways of curbing the process of homogenization that is engendered by the nation-state. Eliminating sources of minority discrimination is, however, only one of the reasons for valuing cultural diversity. An equally important concern is that the rich mosaic of plurality that marks our societies should survive. According to Charles Taylor, if we cannot contribute to our inheritance, we must at least ensure that the diversity that exists survives and does not perish (Taylor 1994:73).

Within multiculturalism, this concern for the fate of diversity is supplemented by the belief that the presence of many different cultures enriches our lives and enables critical self-understanding. It is argued that no culture can "ever express the full range of human potentialities" (Parekh 1998:207), and each articulates only an aspect of it. Consequently, the presence of many cultures contributes to the "overall richness of society" (ibid.). Different cultures enable us to experience different ways of living and thinking, and this makes us aware that our cultural horizon is only one of the many that have given meaning to lives of countless men and women. This consciousness of the finitude of our existence prompts us to take a critical look at the beliefs and institutional structures of organization that we have inherited and perhaps accepted (Parekh 1998:212 and Taylor 1994:72). Will Kymlicka suggests further that diverse cultures offer concrete alternatives: since diverse cultures present diverse projects and systems of external and internal organization, they provide individuals with substantive options and choices that they may explore as they define what is good and desirable (Kymlicka 1991:165).

For all these reasons, multiculturalists prize cultural diversity and consider it a deeply cherished value that must be protected and promoted in society. What needs perhaps to be underlined here is that the diversity that multiculturalism seeks to promote is that of cultures. While liberalism focuses on diversity of thought, belief and perspective, multiculturalism is concerned about the viability and status of diverse cultures and communities that are associated with them. Further, it is the fate of minority cultures that face external pressures to assimilate or disintegrate that multiculturalism is most concerned about, and by attending to them it aims to protect diversity of cultures. Since the concern all along is for cultural diversity it is the community rather than the individual that has merited greater attention within the framework of multiculturalism.

### **24.1.3 Multiculturalism, Pluralism and Diversity**

While arguing for cultural diversity, multiculturalism operates with the understanding that cultural communities are not voluntary associations. In forming associations people come

together by their own volition to pursue a specific goal or interest. Cultural communities, by comparison, are groups in which people find themselves. That is, most of the time people do not make conscious choices; at least they do not choose cultural membership as we choose goods in the market. Further, and this is extremely important, a cultural community is defined by a shared language, history, economic, political and social institutions. Cultures whose fate multiculturalism is concerned about are communities of this kind. They are characterized by common customs, institutions and practices (Kymlicka 1995:76-78).

Since each culture has its own distinct identity and practices, cultures are seen as incommensurable entities that cannot be judged in terms of the values that mark another culture. They can only be known and understood in their own terms. That is, one culture may value technological advancement while the other may seek harmony with nature. Just because the latter does not value or pursue scientific advance as we know it, it does not imply that it is lagging behind. There is, in other words, no ground for assuming that the same values are either cherished in all cultures or that they must be considered worthwhile by all. Cultures must be seen as being incommensurable or non-comparable.

Informed with this perspective, multiculturalism is more than a statement of value pluralism. It does not merely suggest that different value systems exist in society and individuals may favour or commit themselves to any of them. Instead, multiculturalism argues that each culture incorporates a distinct value, different from that which is expressed in another culture. Further, the life of an individual is shaped to a considerable extent by the value framework of the culture to which he belongs. The customs and institutionalized practices of that culture structure his preferences and judgements. What multiculturalism tries then to protect is the cultural context of experience. Its policies are aimed at ensuring that minority cultures – their language, customs and institutions – survive and are treated as equals in the public domain.

The element that needs to be emphasized here is that the mere presence of different religions, races and languages is not enough for a multicultural democracy. The latter requires that each of these cultural communities flourish and receive equal treatment. It is this concern for equality between diverse cultures and communities that is distinctive of multiculturalism and it is this that sets it apart from the assertions of pluralism. Theorists of multiculturalism argue that a plural society requires a multicultural policy framework of democracy but this is at the level of an imperative. In actuality, plural societies may not always head in that direction. Pluralism at the societal plane may co-exist with a state that is mono-cultural, affirming only the culture of the dominant community. Multiculturalism points to just this predicament and shows that many liberal democracies that tolerate differences in society, nevertheless, discriminate against minority cultures. It is to rectify such patterns of disadvantage and cultural discrimination that multiculturalism advocates policies that promote diversity and heterogeneity in the public domain.

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## 24.2 MULTICULTURALISM AND LIBERALISM

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Multiculturalism is not the first theory to address the issue of discrimination. In different ways, both marxism and liberalism have dealt with this issue. Liberalism took note primarily of discrimination based on socially ascribed identities, such as, religion, race, caste and gender. Further, in response to exclusions based on these identities, it suggested that individuals be conceived as citizens, dissociated from their social identities, and in that capacity they must all receive the same rights and be treated alike. In other words, liberalism mooted the principle

of formal equality. On the one hand, it tried to set aside distinctions and privileges based on an ascribed identity by treating all individuals equal in the eyes of the law, and on the other, it made a person's identity as a citizen the only relevant category in the public domain. All other identities were to be effaced or restricted to the private domain. Individuals were to enter into the political and public arena devoid of ascribed identities and personal modes of identification, and participate within it only as citizens of the polity. The category of citizen was, thus, to be religion and colour-blind.

Within liberalism ascribed identities are discredited as they are not chosen by the individual. People are born into them and the circumstances that they are placed in on account of these identities are not of their making. Hence, liberals argue that it is the responsibility of the state to ensure that received identities do not fix roles, positions and opportunities in society. What liberals value then is the autonomy of the individual: the freedom to make choices and the availability of options receives the highest priority in their work. Rights are given to protect that freedom, particularly against opposition from the state as well as oppression from the community. The community, like the majority in society, is perceived to be an authoritarian entity that constraints and restricts the autonomy of the person. Hence, it is suspect and receives no rights. Within liberalism, it is the individual and not the community that is, therefore, designated as the bearer of rights.

Multiculturalism challenges this liberal understanding of the self with the argument that membership of a cultural community is valuable to the individual. It defines, at least in part, their personal identity and forms a "context of experience" (Kymlicka 1995:189). That is, community membership structures individual experience and provides a framework within which things acquire value. One's relationship with other groups in society and their perception of us is also influenced by community membership. Since membership of a cultural community forms an "anchor for self-identification" (Margalit & Raz 1990:447) individuals do not, nor must they be expected to, enter into the public domain as "unencumbered" selves, devoid of social identities and a sense of being situated. Contrary to the liberal perception, theories of multiculturalism argue that community identities are bound to enter into the public domain and people may bring into political life issues that arise from their community membership. According to Will Kymlicka, when we expect individuals to bracket their cultural identity, we in fact deprive them of "something that they are reasonably entitled to" (Kymlicka 1995:86).

While devising political institutions of democracy, we need therefore to acknowledge the existence of cultural community identities and begin with the understanding that individuals are not simply members of a political community or a nation-state. They are also members of a cultural community and this membership is deeply cherished by them. Further, excluding a cultural community from the political and public domain, denying it recognition or misrecognizing it, causes grievous injury to the individual (Taylor 1994:25-28). When the cultural community has a low prestige in the public arena, individuals belonging to them develop a sense of low esteem. They become nervous and diffident and are unable to perform successfully in society (Parekh 1992). Some of them respond to the pressures that come from the external world by distancing themselves from their family. This alienation of the self from its family and friends places a heavy toll both on the individual, his family and the community. It creates inter-generation conflicts and deprives the individual of a secure social environment that is necessary for proper growth and development. Since hostile and adverse representations can in this way harm the individual, we owe to others to give them due recognition in the public arena.

For the multiculturalists, a secure cultural context is an essential condition for leading a reasonably autonomous existence and exercising choices. When a culture is misrepresented or threatened, its members become closed and resistant to any change and innovation. They oppose change that is imposed from the outside as well as suggestions that come from within the community. Eventually, members loose out as the space that ordinarily exists for the expression of differences within each culture gets closed. Consequently, even for promoting the ideals that liberals favour - namely, autonomy of the self - a secure culture that receives due public recognition is regarded to be absolutely essential.

### 24.2.1 Critique of Liberal Democracies

Multiculturalism, as we argued earlier, begins with the understanding that liberal democracies have not been able to ensure equal citizenship for all its members. Even though equal civil and political rights have by and large been given to all, yet, persons belonging to minority cultural communities remain disadvantaged in the public arena. They are disadvantaged and discriminated against because the state, through its laws and policies, endorses the culture of the majority community in society. The policies on language, education, declaration of holidays, dress codes, for instance, reflect the culture of the majority. At a more fundamental level, ceremonial rituals and symbols of the state and its departments also express the same cultural orientation. Collectively, actions of the state popularize and sustain the majority culture and encourage, directly and indirectly, assimilation into that dominant culture. In brief, multiculturalism argues that national culture is in actuality rooted in the culture of the majority. Consequently, when the liberal democratic state promotes that culture, it privileges the majority cultural community while simultaneously disadvantaging the minority communities.

The idea that privileging the majority culture implies disadvantaging the minority cultures is central to multicultural thought. To explain this further with the help of an example: theorists of multiculturalism argue that when English is made the official language of the state, then French language in Canada and the members of that linguistic group are necessarily disadvantaged. The Francophones have to learn English - a language that is not their mother tongue - and excel in it so that they can compete with other people for whom English is the first language. To do this, they have to put in a greater amount of effort than the Anglophones, and they have also to acquaint themselves with the culture that is associated with the English language. Parents, who want to ensure that their children have an equal opportunity to occupy prestigious positions in society, also try to send their children to English medium schools. As more and more people make this choice, English language and culture get popularized. More and more people learn that language, but at the same time the number of people who can read and write in the French language also declines. Eventually, the culture that is associated with the French speaking community suffers in prestige and support. It becomes increasingly non-viable. Even the children from the community do not associate with it. As they are exposed to another culture in school and other public places, they are alienated from it. Thus, through a variety of processes, the French culture and cultural community are systematically disadvantaged.

Theorists of multiculturalism use examples of this sort to show that seemingly neutral laws and policies of the state have an implicit bias that favours the majority community and disadvantages minority cultural communities. The declaration of Sunday as a holiday when public institutions and businesses are closed implicitly favours the Christian community

members. With Sunday as the declared public holiday, a devout Christian can go the church for prayers and observe this day as the day of rest in accordance with the dictates of his religion. However, a devout Muslim, who wishes to offer prayers on a Friday afternoon in accordance with his religion, is placed at a disadvantage in this system. Since Friday is a working day, unlike the devout Christian, does not get any time off. Practices of the state, even the liberal state, thus marginalize and discriminate against the members of the minority culture. Indeed, they place external pressures upon the latter to assimilate into the dominant culture. Since the option for minority communities is only to assimilate or disintegrate, multiculturalism is critical of liberal democracies. It questions the central principles of liberal democracy, particularly the notion of formal equality and neutrality, and offers in their place an alternate framework based on the idea of group-differentiated rights and differentiated citizenship. Within the latter, special rights are sanctioned for minority cultural communities so that they may survive and be treated as equals in the liberal state.

#### **24.2.2 Multiculturalism as A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights**

Multiculturalism rejects the liberal idea of an autonomous, freely choosing, atomized self as well as the belief that the state is, or must be, neutral between different, competing conceptions of good life. It begins instead by locating the individual within a cultural community and argues that no state is, or can be, completely neutral. Even liberal states that claim to be neutral make laws on marriage, divorce, property, inheritance, euthanasia, suicide and a range of other social activities. In each case it endorses and legitimizes one view: for instance, it may uphold and recognize only individual claims to property or only monogamous marriages. Legislation of this kind invariably denies claims of collectively held community property or polygamy as a practice. In fact, all such claims and practices are declared illegal. Here, as in many other cases, the laws of the state reflect a conception of what is good and therefore acceptable. This understanding may conform to the conception of good embodied in some cultures, but may conflict with the practices of other cultural communities. Hence, we need to realize that no state is completely neutral. The liberal principle of neutrality must, therefore, be replaced by the notion of "evenhandedness" (Carens 1999: 46-50). In place of pursuing neutrality as the desired goal, the state must act so as to be evenhanded towards diverse communities.

In presenting the ideal of evenhandedness, multiculturalism challenges the liberal conception of individual, state, community and justice. This must not, however, be taken to imply that multiculturalism is anti-liberal. Most theorists of multiculturalism present these alternatives with a view to making liberal democracies consistent with the liberal ideal of equality for all. They argue that the principles of neutrality and formal equality cannot promote equality for minority cultural communities and their members. A system of special rights is, therefore, advocated to protect minority cultures from discrimination in the polity. Will Kymlicka offers another line of argument in this connection. He states that liberalism does not simply value individual autonomy and the freedom to make choices. It wants individuals to have an opportunity to rethink and revise what they have received from society. Autonomy and freedom is valued only because it enables individuals to reflect upon the beliefs and institutions that they have inherited. It is, therefore, the condition of 'revisability' that is thus cherished within liberalism. However, revising our cultural inheritances is only possible when the culture is secure within the nation-state. When a culture is under threat and struggling to survive, options tend to get closed. Community members living in these conditions have little possibility of

articulating differences and reshaping their cultural context in accordance with their self-understanding.

According to Kymlicka, we need, therefore, as liberals to be concerned about the fate of minority cultures in our society. And in order to further the liberal ethos, or the condition of revisability, we need to supplement the existing framework of individual based rights with special arrangements that allow minority cultures to survive and flourish in society (Kymlicka 1991: 9-19). The multicultural design is here presented to realize the ideal of liberalism, albeit by modalities that found no support in classical liberalism.

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### **24.3 THE IDEA OF DIFFERENTIATED CITIZENSHIP**

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Liberalism addressed the issue of social discrimination by disregarding ascribed identities and extending the same rights to all persons as citizens. Multiculturalism, in sharp contrast to this, argues that identical rights for all are inadequate for minimizing culture-based discrimination. What we require are special rights for identified minorities. The idea that citizens be differentiated on the basis of their cultural identity and that different communities may receive different rights as citizens of the polity is one of the defining features of multiculturalism, and it is expressed through the concept of differentiated citizenship.

The concept of differentiated citizenship rejects the liberal ideal of universal citizenship. Multiculturalism maintains that universal citizenship assumes that all persons are alike. This assumption of homogeneity eclipses group differences. It calls upon the individual to leave behind their particular identities and see themselves only as citizens of the polity. In a society where some "groups are privileged" and others marginalized, this implies that the latter forsake their identity and take on the outlook and perspective of the dominant group—i.e., the majority community. At the same time, the notion of universal citizenship allows the "privileged group to ignore their group specificity" (Young 1990: 165). By enabling the norms and point of view of the privileged majority to appear neutral and universal, this ideal perpetuates "cultural imperialism" (ibid.).

The idea of group-differentiated citizenship and rights is advocated to halt this 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. Since this marginalizes and disadvantages other cultural communities (the minorities), special rights may be extended to them. A distinction may, therefore, be made between citizens on the basis of cultural identity, and this is justified for ensuring equal treatment for all.

#### **24.3.2 Different Kinds of Special Rights**

Within the framework of differentiated citizenship, multiculturalism sanctions three kinds of special rights for minority communities: i) cultural rights; ii) self-government rights; and iii) special representation rights. Beginning with the understanding 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. In western democracies, special cultural rights have been demanded in the form of exemptions from existing laws, assistance for minority cultural institutions and recognition for minority cultural

practices. To take a few examples: the Sikhs in Canada have demanded, and received, exemption from the law that prescribes helmet wearing for motorcycle riders. Women from the Asian communities have been granted exemption from wearing a dress while serving as nurses in hospitals. In both cases, the argument made by minorities was that the prescribed code did not take note of the culture of the minority communities, and exemptions were given so that members of these cultural communities may live in accordance with their accepted cultural practices.

In addition to seeking exemptions, minority communities have also sought assistance, by way of financial and other infra-structural support, so that their culture can be represented in the public arena. Here, support has usually taken the form of assistance to establish museums, run minority educational institutions and hold public festivals. At times, minority communities have also demanded recognition for their distinct cultural practices. In India, for instance, religious communities wanted, and were given, recognition for their family law. So, today individuals are governed by the personal law of their community. The most significant aspect of claims for recognition are that communities through them seek endorsement of traditional cultural practices and institutional structures. Most often, the acceptance of these claims brings into effect plural structures of jurisdiction and governance. Sometimes, traditional norms receive exclusive jurisdiction over the members; on other occasions, traditional norms are placed alongside the laws formulated by the state. Whatever be the specific form of arrangement, these cultural rights bestow upon the community and its practices a legal status, thereby making it a legitimate actor in the public domain.

The second kind of special right justified within multiculturalism is that of self-government. Like recognition rights, these too take the form of dual structures of jurisdiction. The only significant difference being that self-government rights are linked to territorial claims. Communities that are concentrated in a given region and have lived there for several generations are supposed to receive this right. Self-government rights are thus defended only for a specific sort of minority: namely, communities that are a distinct nation with historically supported claims over that territory and a desire to protect their cultural identity. The purpose of self-government rights 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 category of minority rights is special representation rights. The assumption behind claims for these rights is that minority communities must have an opportunity to participate in the political process, set agendas and voice their specific point of view. As Iris Marion Young argues, "People in different groups often know about somewhat different institutions, events, practices and social relations, and often have different perceptions of the same institutions, relations and events. For this reason, members of some groups are sometimes in a better position than others to understand and anticipate the probable consequences of implementing particular social policies" (Young 1990:186). Consequently, their participation is bound to enrich public discourse while simultaneously bringing groups that are otherwise marginalized into the mainstream. It is further argued that the deliberate inclusion of various groups, particularly oppressed minorities, can be a powerful tool for defining public norms and creating deliberative consensus.

Special representation is, thus, seen as a way of including and empowering marginalized groups so that they have a sense of participating and contributing to the policy outcomes. At

the same time, it is expected to enrich policy making by bringing in the experiences and perspectives of diverse groups in society. It is this double advantage that justifies claims for special representation for communities. In India, special representation was granted to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled tribes by the Constitution and this gesture was motivated by the need to include populations that had hitherto been excluded from the public and political domain.

### 24.3.2 Differentiating Between Minorities

So far, we have only outlined the three different kinds of special rights that are supported within multiculturalism for minority communities within the nation-state. The question that needs to be addressed now is – Should all minorities receive each of these rights? Should all minorities be given the same special rights?

Within multiculturalism, at the general level, special rights are defended for minorities but rarely is it said that all the three kinds of rights must be given to all minorities within the state. Most theorists agree that these rights are intended only for the minorities that have been historically oppressed. Also, which set of rights should be granted to oppressed minorities has to be determined by looking at the specifics of the case. Different contexts demand different remedies, and which would be the appropriate course in a given situation will depend upon the kind of minority it is, its experience of discrimination and the nature of the state. So we cannot have a general theory of minority rights.

Will Kymlicka, in his writings, however differentiates national minorities and immigrant communities who are also minorities. He maintains that self-government rights may only be given to communities who see themselves as nations with a distinct societal culture, and have historical claims over a given territory. Immigrants come to a country with the clear understanding that they will have to live by the norms of that country, so they cannot claim rights to protect and promote their culture. The issue of whether immigrants can ask for public recognition for their culture and practices is a subject on which there are considerable differences within the multicultural camp. Suffice here to say that special rights are not supported unconditionally, for all communities nor all minorities are expected to be given exactly the same rights as other minorities.

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## 24.4 CRITIQUES OF MULTICULTURALISM

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The multicultural analysis of culture-based discrimination in liberal democracies has received wide attention in recent times. However, its concept of differentiated citizenship and the accompanying defense of special rights for minorities has come under a great deal of resistance. There are four kinds of issues that the critics of multiculturalism have raised. First, it has been argued that the multicultural framework empowers communities and traditional structures of authority. It gives communities authority over the individual and allows them to continue with existing practices in the name of protecting community culture. This sanction given to communities and their practices can be, and often is, used to quell internal differences and promote conformity with existing practices and the views of traditional leaders. As a consequence, individuals as well as marginalized groups within the community, like women, are placed at a disadvantage. Thus, while multiculturalism addresses the issue of equality between groups it neglects the equally important concern for equality within the group.

Second, while discussing the question of special rights for minorities, multiculturalism assumes that each community is a homogeneous entity with a clearly identifiable membership. This notion of community further assumes that individuals have a specific identity and they can, on that basis, be located as members of a specific cultural community. This tendency to slot the individual in one community, the critics argue, may have been appropriate in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century. But today, the individual is continuously exposed to so many different cultural and social influences that we cannot envisage bounded cultures and communities. Besides, individuals usually see themselves as members of many different communities. For example, they may, in different contexts, identify themselves as Indians, Hindus, Brahmins and Women. Their concerns as members of each of these communities may indeed be different and at times, even incompatible. We need, therefore, to begin with a more complex picture of the individual and her community membership.

Third, critics also fear that multiculturalism may lead to the weakening of the nation-state. By associating the culture endorsed by the state with the majority community, multiculturalism, they argue, undermines the very possibility of a shared culture of the people in the nation-state. It thus, threatens the national project and calls upon the minorities to distance themselves from the state. Further, the system of special rights brings into effect a framework of dual jurisdiction and dual loyalties. This itself is seen as a source of disintegration of the state.

Fourth, theorists of the marxist persuasion particularly argue that multiculturalism neglects, the issue of redistribution. It conceives minority marginalization narrowly as a cultural phenomenon requiring cultural remedies in the form of recognition and protection of minority cultures. As a consequence, it loses sight of the multiple ways in which discrimination of minorities occurs and manifests itself in society. In fact, its analysis takes attention away from the urgent task of seeking redistribution of resources and opportunities in society.

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## 24.5 MULTICULTURALISM: AN ASSESSMENT

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Each of these arguments raises important question that merit serious consideration. Indeed, theorists of multiculturalism have in the recent past been attentive to these "concerns (see, Mahajan 2002:166-195). Although it is not possible to detail the responses that have come from the multicultural camp, nevertheless, there are two points that need to be emphasized as we conclude the discussion on multiculturalism. One, multiculturalism advocates special rights with a view to strengthening, and not weakening, existing states. Based on the understanding that the threat to territorial integrity of the nation-state comes from ethnic conflicts within the polity, it tries to accommodate marginalized communities by giving them a voice in the political and public sphere. Special rights, including the right to self-government, are intended to provide mechanisms by which oppressed groups may participate and develop a sense of commitment to the state. Theorists of multiculturalism maintain that citizenship is not simply a legal status; it has a psychological dimension. Unless people have a sense of "emotional attachment", identification with the state is not likely to occur (Carens 1996-7:113). Special rights are expected to fulfil this task by providing avenues for inclusion and equality among minority communities.

Two, the most serious problem before multiculturalism today is how to protect cultural diversity without negating freedom for the individual and equality for all persons. Advocates of multiculturalism address this issue by suggesting that the community must develop institutions of democratic deliberation so that the voice of marginalized groups within the community can

be heard and accommodated internally. Others maintain that the state could prescribe a framework of minimum rights that cannot be violated. Within that framework, communities might determine how best to govern its members. Even though the suggested alternatives are not entirely adequate for dealing with the complex nature of issues raised by the concern for freedom and equality, yet, these responses indicate and affirm that multiculturalism is not simply a theory of community rights. Even though multiculturalists have most often been concerned with questions of inter-group equality, the concern for intra-group equality is not absent within it. Indeed, having placed the first set of issues on the agenda of liberal democracies, multiculturalism is increasingly addressing the question of equality within the community.

The significance of multicultural political theory is that it has drawn our attention to the processes of cultural discrimination within liberal democracies, and compelled us to re-think the ideals that have been cherished within liberalism. In particular, it has prompted us to consider whether individual rights, indivisible state sovereignty and uniform citizenship can effectively ensure equality for all in a plural society. It is by virtue of setting this agenda that multiculturalism has today become one of the most influential strand of democratic theory.

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## 24.6 SUMMARY

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The concept of multiculturalism and the various theories associated with it have become quite important in contemporary lives. Multiculturalism addresses itself to the basic issue of discrimination in society; especially in the context of marginalised cultural communities such as the minorities. Multiculturalism, therefore, emphasizes group specific rights. It lays stress on societal/institutional arrangements for minority cultures to survive and flourish.

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## 24.7 EXERCISES

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- 1) Explain the concept of multiculturalism in your own words.
- 2) Critically examine multiculturalism-liberalism interface.
- 3) Write an essay on the idea of differentiated citizenship.
- 4) Discuss the critiques of multiculturalism.
- 5) How will you assess multiculturalism?