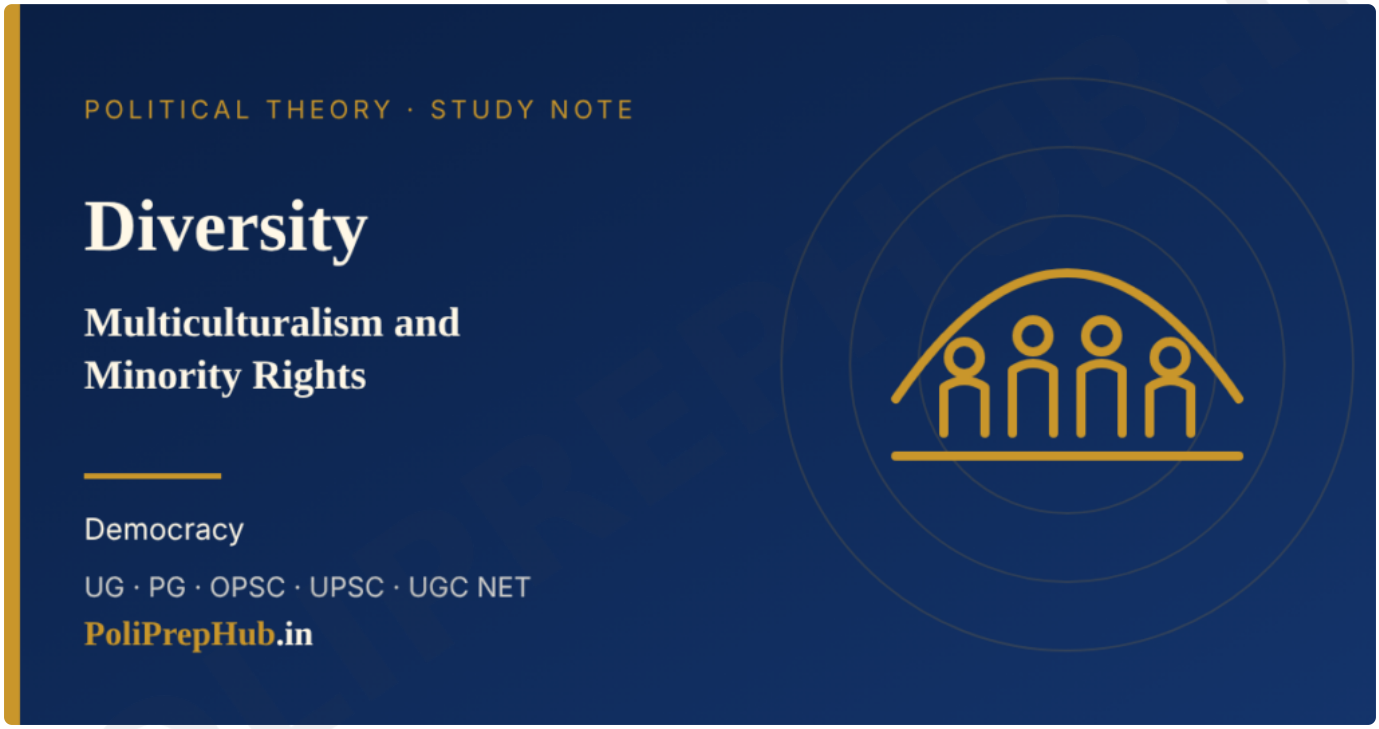
POLITICAL THEORY

Diversity, Multiculturalism and Minority Rights

By **Brajabandhu Mahanta** • November 14, 2026 • 47 min read



Almost every modern state contains people who differ in language, religion, ethnicity, culture, caste, race, region and way of life. Diversity is therefore not an exception but the normal condition of political communities, and the question for political theory is how a state can treat such different people justly. Should it ask all of them to follow one common culture, or should it recognise and support their differences? Should rights belong only to individuals, or also to groups? What protection should minorities receive against the will of the majority? Diversity, multiculturalism and minority rights are the three connected ideas through which political theory has tried to answer these questions.

Diversity is the fact of difference. Multiculturalism is the response which holds that cultural differences deserve public recognition and fair treatment, and that the state should not be neutral in the sense of favouring the culture of the majority without noticing it. Minority rights are the legal and constitutional protections given to groups who are smaller in number or weaker in power, so that they may keep their identity and enjoy equal citizenship. The three ideas developed together in the later part of the twentieth century, with the growth of migration, the rise of identity movements, the end of empires and the demand of indigenous peoples and national minorities for recognition. They are central to debates in liberal political theory about equality, liberty and community, and they have great importance for India, which has among the most complex social structures in the world. For a student of political theory, the subject raises one of the hardest problems of democracy: how to join equal citizenship with respect for difference.

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1. Meaning and definitions

Diversity. Diversity means the presence within a society of many different groups, distinguished by features such as language, religion, ethnicity, race, caste, culture, gender, region and ideology. It is descriptive, since it states what exists. In political thought the word is often used also in a value sense, to say that diversity enriches social life and should be preserved and welcomed. The difference between a diverse society, which is a fact, and a pluralist or multicultural policy, which is a response, should be kept in mind.

Multiculturalism. Multiculturalism has two senses. As a social fact, it refers to a society made up of several cultural communities living together. As a political doctrine and policy, it holds that the state and society should recognise, respect and accommodate the cultural differences of their members, through measures such as the protection of languages, support for religious and cultural institutions, exemptions from general rules, adjustments in education and public life, and, in some cases, group-based representation or autonomy. It rejects the idea that equality requires identical treatment in all matters and holds that fair treatment may sometimes require different treatment.

Minority. A minority is a group which is smaller in number than the rest of the population of a state, which is in a non-dominant position, and whose members share distinct ethnic, religious or linguistic features and wish to preserve them. This was the definition suggested by Francesco Capotorti, a United Nations Special Rapporteur, in 1977. The idea of a minority has both a numerical and a social side, since a group may be large but still powerless, as in the case of women or, in some societies, a majority that was subordinated by colonial or caste hierarchies.

Minority rights. Minority rights are the rights which protect the identity and equality of minorities. They include individual rights exercised by members of minorities, such as non-discrimination and freedom of religion, and group-differentiated rights which belong to the community as such or to individuals because of their membership, such as rights to run their own schools, to use their languages in public life, to have a share in representation, or to

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have self-government in some matters.

Difference between assimilation, integration and multiculturalism. Assimilation asks minorities to give up their distinct cultures and adopt the dominant one. Integration asks them to take part fully in the common civic, economic and political life, while permitting some cultural distinctness, usually in private. Multiculturalism goes further in giving public recognition and support to cultural differences. These are different approaches to the same problem, and actual policies often combine them.

Scholar	Definition or view in brief
Charles Taylor	Identity is formed through recognition by others, and misrecognition is a form of oppression; the politics of difference demands recognition of the unique identity of each group.
Will Kymlicka	Minority rights are consistent with liberalism, since cultural membership is a primary good that provides the context for individual choice.
Bhikhu Parekh	A multicultural society is one with two or more cultural communities, and it requires dialogue among cultures with no culture as the final judge.
Iris Marion Young	Justice requires attention to group difference, and the politics of difference opposes the ideal of impartiality that hides privilege.
Joseph Raz	A liberal state should favour the flourishing of cultures, as a supply of valuable options for individual autonomy.
Chandran Kukathas	Cultural groups should be free to associate, and to leave, but the state should not give groups special rights.
Brian Barry	Multiculturalism, when it gives exemptions by cultural group, conflicts with equality of opportunity and liberal justice.
Francesco Capotorti	A minority is a numerically smaller, non-dominant group of nationals who possess distinct ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics and wish to preserve them.

Taylor. Charles Taylor, in his essay “The Politics of Recognition” (1992), argued that human identity is formed in dialogue with others, so that a group’s failure to be recognised, or its recognition in a demeaning way, causes real harm and imprisons people in a false and reduced mode of being. He distinguished the politics of universalism, which stresses the

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equal dignity of all citizens and identical rights, from the politics of difference, which asks that the unique identity of each person or group be recognised. He held that a liberal society can be hospitable to difference, but should not demand that all share the same view of the good.

Kymlicka. Will Kymlicka, in *Liberalism, Community and Culture* (1989) and *Multicultural Citizenship* (1995), argued that for the liberal, individual freedom matters, and freedom requires a rich and secure cultural context from which to choose a life. Membership in a societal culture is thus a primary good, and minority groups, which are disadvantaged by the dominance of the majority culture in language, education and public institutions, may be given special rights to even the balance. He distinguished three kinds of group-differentiated rights: self-government rights for national minorities and indigenous peoples, polyethnic rights for immigrant groups, and special representation rights for disadvantaged groups. He also distinguished external protections, which shield a group from the decisions of the larger society and are acceptable, from internal restrictions, which limit the freedom of members within the group and are not acceptable to liberals.

Parekh. Bhikhu Parekh, in *Rethinking Multiculturalism* (2000), argued that human beings are culturally embedded, that cultures are internally plural and open to change, and that no culture is perfect, so that cultures need each other. He proposed an intercultural dialogue and an operative public value system, which grows out of the dialogue and is the common ground on which the polity stands. He held that the state should not impose a single cultural identity and should find the middle path between assimilation and separatism.

Young. Iris Marion Young, in *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990), argued that the ideal of impartial and universal citizenship hides the interests of the dominant groups and disadvantages those who differ from the norm. She identified five faces of oppression, namely exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence, and called for group representation in decision-making and for the positive recognition of differences.

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Raz, Kukathas and Barry. Joseph Raz, in his essays on multiculturalism, argued for the value of cultures as sources of options, and the need for the state to ensure that groups give members the means of choice. Chandran Kukathas, in *The Liberal Archipelago* (2003), took a more minimal liberal position, according to which the society is made up of many authorities, and the state should secure only the freedom of individuals to leave associations. Brian Barry, in *Culture and Equality* (2001), criticised multiculturalism, holding that it invites unequal treatment and that the shared liberal framework of equal rights is enough for fair treatment.

2. Origins and development

Early history of toleration. Before the modern age, empires such as the Persian, the Roman, the Ottoman and the Mughal governed peoples of different religions and customs, often through arrangements that gave communities some self-rule in religious and family affairs, as in the Ottoman *millet* system and Akbar's policy in India. Ashoka's edicts in India urged respect for all sects. In Europe, the wars of religion led to the Peace of Westphalia (1648), and writers such as Locke, in *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689), and Voltaire argued for religious toleration. These arrangements recognised differences but did not rest on equal citizenship.

The nation-state and the pressure to assimilate. The rise of the nation-state in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, from the French Revolution onwards, built a single national identity through common language, schools, army and law, and tended to treat minority languages and cultures as obstacles. J. S. Mill held that free institutions are almost impossible in a country made up of different nationalities, and Lord Acton, on the other side, argued that the co-existence of several nations in one state is a test of liberty. The model of assimilation was followed in France and in many other states.

Minorities under the League of Nations. After the First World War and the break-up of the Austro-Hungarian, Russian and Ottoman empires, the peace treaties and the minority treaties of 1919-20 placed the protection of minorities in Eastern and Central Europe under the League of Nations. The system had many flaws and was misused, notably by Nazi

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Germany, and collapsed. Its failure led, after the Second World War, to a preference for individual human rights over group rights.

The post-war human rights framework. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) spoke of individual equality and non-discrimination. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) included Article 27, which states that persons belonging to ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with others, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion and to use their own language. The UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965) added further protection.

The multicultural turn. From the 1960s and 1970s, civil rights and black power movements in the United States, the demands of French-speaking Canadians in Quebec, the arrival of immigrants in Western Europe, and the claims of indigenous peoples in the Americas, Australia and New Zealand, led governments to accept official multiculturalism. Canada adopted a multiculturalism policy in 1971 and wrote it into the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982. Australia and Sweden followed in the 1970s. In political theory, communitarian critics of liberalism, such as Charles Taylor, Michael Sandel and Michael Walzer, and liberal theorists such as Kymlicka, gave the idea an intellectual form in the 1980s and 1990s.

International instruments of minority protection. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (1992) set out a framework of protection of identity and participation. The Council of Europe’s Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (1995) and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (1992) created binding standards in Europe. The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) recognised rights to self-determination, land and culture, and ILO Convention No. 169 (1989) deals with indigenous and tribal peoples.

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The backlash and the present debate. Since the early 2000s, a number of European leaders, among them the German chancellor Angela Merkel in 2010 and the British prime minister David Cameron in 2011, declared that state multiculturalism had failed, pointing to parallel communities and security concerns after terrorist attacks and growing worries about immigration. Several states moved toward policies of integration and civic values, and of interculturalism, a model, favoured by Quebec and the Council of Europe, which stresses interaction and a shared public culture along with respect for diversity. At the same time, populist and nationalist movements have challenged diversity, while movements for racial justice, indigenous rights and the rights of sexual and religious minorities have pressed for fuller recognition.

3. Features of multiculturalism

- **Recognition of cultural difference.** The central feature is the public acceptance that different cultural groups exist and have value. The state does not treat cultural identity as merely a private matter but acknowledges it in language policy, education, holidays, symbols and law. Official recognition of several languages in India’s Eighth Schedule is an example.
- **Equal respect and dignity.** Multiculturalism asks that no culture be treated as inferior and that members of all groups be given the same respect. Taylor’s idea of recognition rests on the claim that the denial of respect injures people’s self-image and their standing in society.
- **Rejection of enforced assimilation.** Members of minorities are not required to give up their language, religion or customs as the price of citizenship. They may take part fully in civic and political life while keeping their identity. This differs from older nation-building policies that suppressed minority languages and cultures.
- **Group-differentiated rights.** Many versions of multiculturalism hold that equality sometimes requires different treatment of different groups. Examples are rights to run minority educational institutions, exemptions from general rules, such as the right of Sikh men to wear turbans in place of helmets or in the police in some countries, and special

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representation for disadvantaged groups.

- **Importance of cultural membership to individual freedom.** As Kymlicka argues, the culture in which people grow up supplies the framework of meanings and options from which they choose their life. Insecurity of one's culture is therefore a loss of liberty, and its protection is a matter of justice.
- **Liberal limits on group rights.** In its liberal form, multiculturalism protects groups from outside pressure, but does not allow them to oppress their own members. The distinction between external protections and internal restrictions, and the demand that individuals have the right to question and leave their groups, are common to Kymlicka and most liberal writers.
- **Dialogue between cultures.** Parekh and others stress that cultures are not closed and fixed but internally varied and open to change through contact. Multicultural societies, therefore, need continuing intercultural dialogue and the willingness to learn from others, and a shared public culture grows out of this exchange.
- **State neutrality questioned.** Multiculturalists observe that the supposedly neutral state is often tied to the language, holidays, symbols and norms of the majority, and so favours it. A fair state, they say, must not merely refrain from interfering but must make adjustments to correct this bias.
- **Attention to historical injustice and power.** Many claims of minorities arise from conquest, colonisation, slavery, caste discrimination or forced migration. Multiculturalism connects recognition with redress for such wrongs, as in the case of indigenous land rights and affirmative action for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.
- **Political representation and participation of minorities.** Minorities should have a voice in decisions that affect them, through reserved seats, consultation, federal arrangements or autonomous councils. Young argued for representation of oppressed groups in public bodies, and India has used reservation and autonomous district councils.
- **Compatibility with common citizenship.** Multiculturalism does not deny the need for a shared political community. It asks for a citizenship that is inclusive and not based on

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one culture, with common civic values such as constitutional rights and democratic procedures. Its ideal is unity in diversity, with allegiance to the state resting on fair treatment of all.

- **Flexible policy in diverse settings.** There is no single multiculturalist policy. Different groups, such as indigenous peoples, national minorities, immigrants and religious communities, have different needs and so require different forms of accommodation, as Kymlicka's typology suggests.

4. Types of diversity

Type	Meaning	Example
Linguistic	Many languages in the same society	India's 22 scheduled languages; Switzerland's four national languages
Religious	Followers of many faiths	India, Nigeria, Lebanon
Ethnic and racial	Groups with different descent and identity	United States, Malaysia, South Africa
Caste and social hierarchy	Birth-based groups arranged in a hierarchy	India, Nepal
Regional	Groups tied to territories with distinct identity	Scotland, Quebec, Kashmir, Catalonia
Indigenous and tribal	Original inhabitants with distinct customs and land claims	Adivasis in India, Maori, First Nations
Migrant and immigrant	Groups arriving through migration	Western Europe, Gulf states, the United States
Gender and sexual	Differences of gender and sexual orientation	Women, transgender persons, LGBTQ communities
Ideological and political	Differences in beliefs and political positions	Competing parties and movements

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National minorities and polyethnic groups. Kymlicka's distinction is useful in understanding that diversity arises in two main ways. National minorities are groups who were earlier self-governing and territorially concentrated, and were incorporated into a larger state, by conquest, colonisation or federation, such as the Quebecois in Canada, the Scots in the United Kingdom, the Kashmiris or Nagas in India, or indigenous peoples. They generally seek self-government, language rights and autonomy. Immigrant groups, in contrast, have moved voluntarily and individually, and usually seek fair terms of integration, such as the right to maintain customs and to be free from discrimination, and not separate nationhood.

Indigenous peoples. Indigenous or tribal peoples are those descended from the original inhabitants of a land, who have a distinct way of life closely linked to territory, forests and rivers, and have often suffered dispossession. Their claims concern land, self-determination and the protection of customary laws. In India, the Adivasis, the Scheduled Tribes, have special constitutional protection through the Fifth and Sixth Schedules, and the Forest Rights Act, 2006.

Religious diversity. Religion is a major source of group identity, and the relationship between religion and the state differs. France follows *laïcité*, a strict separation, the United Kingdom has an established church along with toleration, the United States has a wall of separation but wide religious freedom, and India follows principled distance and a policy of equal respect for all religions. Disputes over religious dress, places of worship, personal laws and education reveal the tensions that arise.

Social hierarchy and caste. In India, caste is a unique type of diversity, since it is a hierarchy as well as a division, and has been a basis of exclusion and untouchability. For this reason, policies for Dalits are chiefly concerned with equality and removal of discrimination, and not only with cultural recognition. Ambedkar argued that the aim must be the annihilation of caste, and not the preservation of caste identities, which marks a difference between the Indian approach to caste and a purely multicultural approach.

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Intersectional diversity. Individuals often belong to more than one group, and the disadvantages combine. Kimberlé Crenshaw, in 1989, introduced the term intersectionality to describe how race and gender together create specific forms of discrimination, as for Black women. In India, Dalit women, Muslim women and tribal women face overlapping disadvantages, and policies for any single category may miss them.

5. Models of managing diversity

Model	Main idea	Examples
Assimilation	Minorities adopt the dominant culture	Early French and American policies; many nation-building projects
Melting pot	Cultures blend into a new common culture	United States (ideal)
Integration	Equal participation in public life, with some private cultural freedom	France, Germany (in varying forms)
Multiculturalism	Public recognition and support of group differences	Canada, Australia, India (in part)
Interculturalism	Interaction and shared public culture along with diversity	Quebec, Council of Europe
Consociationalism	Power-sharing among segments through grand coalition, veto, proportionality and autonomy	Belgium, Switzerland, Lebanon
Federalism and autonomy	Territorial self-government for minority regions	India, Canada, Spain, Switzerland
Exclusion or separation	Minorities denied equal standing, or kept apart	Apartheid South Africa; segregation in the American South

Assimilation and melting pot. Under assimilation, the state expects newcomers and minorities to take up the language and culture of the majority, and the common national identity is kept uniform. The melting pot, an image popularised by Israel Zangwill’s play of

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1908, pictures a mixing of cultures into a new one, though in practice it often meant conformity to the existing dominant norm. Critics point out that assimilation imposes costs on minorities and treats their cultures as inferior, and Kallen's idea of cultural pluralism was an early reaction. Some recent examples, such as the forced assimilation of indigenous children in residential schools in Canada and Australia, are now regarded as grave injustices.

Integration. Integration allows minorities to keep some cultural traits, but expects them to share a common civic culture and take part in the national economy and polity. France is the main example, with its republican model in which the state recognises citizens and not communities, and requires secular behaviour in public institutions, as seen in the ban on conspicuous religious symbols in public schools in 2004 and on face coverings in public in 2010. Supporters argue that this protects equal citizenship, whereas critics say that it ignores the real disadvantages of minority groups.

Multiculturalism. Canada's policy is the best-known state multiculturalism. It gives support to cultural and linguistic activities, protects the rights of aboriginal peoples in the Constitution, and recognises French and English as official languages. Australia and Sweden have had similar policies. The policy is justified by claims of equality and recognition, and criticised for allegedly fostering separation, tolerating illiberal practices and weakening common identity.

Interculturalism. Interculturalism, advanced in Quebec by Gérard Bouchard and others and by the Council of Europe in its White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue (2008), aims at promoting contact, exchange and a common public culture, and is concerned that multiculturalism may encourage separate communities. Supporters of multiculturalism, such as Parekh and Kymlicka, however, contend that the differences between the two are small in practice.

Consociationalism. Arend Lijphart's consociational democracy is used in deeply divided societies. It has four elements: grand coalition of leaders of all main groups, mutual veto on vital matters, proportionality in representation and public jobs, and segmental autonomy in matters such as education and family law. Belgium, Switzerland and, until recently,

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Lebanon, are examples. Critics such as Donald Horowitz argue that the system freezes group identities, and prefers an alternative, centripetal approach in which electoral rules encourage cross-group voting.

Federalism and territorial autonomy. For minorities concentrated in a region, federal or autonomous arrangements give them control of their own affairs. The linguistic reorganisation of Indian states, the Sixth Schedule councils, the special provisions for the north-eastern states under Articles 371A to 371J and Quebec's powers in Canada are examples. Such arrangements can reduce conflict but may also raise demands for further separation, which states handle through negotiation and accommodation.

6. Minority rights

Why minority rights are needed. In a democracy, decisions are generally made by majority rule, and majorities, in the nature of things, favour their own language, religion, holidays and customs. Minorities are therefore exposed to the risk of neglect, discrimination and even persecution. Equal voting rights alone do not remove this risk, since a permanent minority will always lose. Minority rights are meant to give such groups security, equal standing and a fair chance to keep their identity. Mill and Tocqueville wrote of the tyranny of the majority, and the experience of ethnic cleansing, genocide and communal violence in the twentieth century made the question urgent.

Kind of right	Meaning	Examples
Individual civil and political rights	Equal rights for persons belonging to minorities	Non-discrimination; freedom of religion and expression
Self-government rights	Autonomy or control over matters of the group's life	Autonomous councils; Quebec's powers; indigenous self-rule
Polyethnic rights	Support and exemptions for cultural practices of immigrants and others	Religious dress exemptions; funding for cultural activities

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Special representation rights	Guaranteed seats or voice in decision-making bodies	Reserved seats; consultation of minorities; New Zealand’s Maori seats
Language rights	Use of the language in schools, courts and administration	Schools in mother tongue; official use of languages
Educational and cultural rights	Right to set up and run educational and cultural institutions	Articles 29 and 30 in India
Religious rights	Freedom to practise, manage and propagate religion	Articles 25 to 28 in India
Property and land rights	Protection of land and resources, especially for indigenous groups	Forest Rights Act; Fifth and Sixth Schedules

Negative and positive rights. Negative minority rights protect against interference and discrimination, as when the state forbids discrimination on the ground of religion or language. Positive rights call on the state to provide assistance, for example by funding minority schools, translating official documents or reserving seats. Both are needed, since formal non-discrimination cannot overcome the effect of past disadvantage, while positive measures need safeguards against misuse.

Individual and collective rights. A debate concerns whether minority rights belong to individuals or to groups. In the liberal view, rights ultimately belong to individuals, and the group is only the means through which individuals enjoy them. Others, among them Kymlicka, hold that some rights, such as self-government of an indigenous people, are properly held by the group. Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights speaks of persons belonging to minorities, which reflects the individualist view, and the UN Declaration on Indigenous Peoples recognises collective rights. In India, Article 30 gives the right to minorities, whether based on religion or language, to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice, which is treated as a right of the community.

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Justifications for minority rights. Writers have offered several grounds. The first is equality: majority culture enjoys advantages in language, schooling and symbols that minorities do not, and special measures are required to put them on a fair footing. The second is the value of cultural membership for individual autonomy, as in Kymlicka and Raz. The third is historical injustice, such as conquest or colonisation, which gives indigenous and national minorities a claim to redress. The fourth is recognition and dignity, as in Taylor. The fifth is peace and stability: accommodation of minority demands can prevent conflict and secession, as in the experience of federal accommodation in India and Canada. A final ground is the enrichment of society as a whole through diversity.

Limits of minority rights. Rights of minorities are not unlimited. They must be consistent with the basic rights of individuals, including the members of the minority itself, and with public order. Liberal theorists reject internal restrictions that deny equal rights to women, dissenters or children, and require that individuals can freely exit from their group. States may also refuse claims that conflict with fundamental principles of equality, such as the practice of untouchability or child marriage, even if defended as cultural practices. The question of where to draw the line gives rise to difficult cases, such as those on personal laws, religious dress and ritual slaughter.

Affirmative action and positive discrimination. Closely connected with minority rights are measures of preferential treatment for disadvantaged groups, such as reservation in education, jobs and legislatures. These are justified by the aim of equality of opportunity and of correcting historic exclusion. They differ from cultural minority rights in aim, since they are directed at overcoming disadvantage and not at preserving a way of life. In India, reservation for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, and the Other Backward Classes, rests on this ground, and the Supreme Court in *Indra Sawhney v. Union of India* (1992) upheld reservation for OBCs with a limit of fifty per cent and the exclusion of the creamy layer.

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International protection. The main international instruments are Article 27 of the ICCPR, the 1992 UN Declaration on Minorities, the 2007 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Working Group on Minorities and a Special Rapporteur on minority issues monitor their application. Enforcement is weak, since much depends on the willingness of states, and the principle of state sovereignty is often invoked against external scrutiny.

7. Debates in the theory of multiculturalism

The liberal egalitarian critique. Brian Barry, in *Culture and Equality*, argued that treating people differently on the ground of cultural membership violates equal treatment, and that where a rule burdens a certain group, the correct response is to change the rule for everyone and not to grant exemptions to some. He held that multiculturalism wrongly treats culture as an excuse for people's choices and diverts attention from socio-economic inequality. Kymlicka and others reply that Barry's view ignores the way in which the supposedly neutral rules are drawn up in favour of the majority culture.

The feminist critique. Susan Moller Okin, in her essay "Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?" (1999), argued that group rights may harm women within minority groups, since many cultures control women through family law, dress and marriage, and that granting rights to groups empowers the male leaders who define the culture. Others, such as Ayelet Shachar, in *Multicultural Jurisdictions* (2001), pointed to the paradox of multicultural vulnerability, in which the protection given by the state to the group increases the pressure on its vulnerable members, and suggested joint governance in which individuals can use both the group's and the state's rules. Indian discussions on personal laws, from the Shah Bano case of 1985 to the triple talaq judgment of 2017, show the practical importance of this debate. Critics of Okin, among them Leti Volpp and Uma Narayan, said that she treats minority cultures as more oppressive than the majority culture and overlooks the part played by women themselves in changing traditions.

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The communitarian approach. Communitarians such as Alasdair MacIntyre, Michael Sandel and Michael Walzer argued that individuals are shaped by communities, and that liberalism's picture of the unencumbered self ignores this. Walzer, in *Spheres of Justice* (1983), held that justice must respect the shared understandings of different communities. Taylor combined this approach with a liberalism open to recognition. Liberal critics reply that communities themselves may be oppressive and that individual rights must have priority.

Redistribution and recognition. Nancy Fraser, in *Justice Interruptus* (1997), argued that injustice has two dimensions, economic maldistribution and cultural misrecognition, and that remedies must address both, through redistribution and through recognition. A politics of recognition alone may distract from economic inequality, as Barry and Marxist critics claim, but a politics of redistribution alone ignores status hierarchies, such as caste, race and gender. The Indian experience of caste, in which status and economic position are linked, is often cited as a case of both.

Universalism and cultural relativism. Another debate concerns whether human rights are universal or relative to cultures. Defenders of cultural relativism say that human rights standards reflect Western values and should not be imposed on other societies. Universalists answer that basic rights protect all human beings and that cultures are internally varied, and many insiders of the cultures themselves, women and dissenters, demand these rights. Amartya Sen and Parekh both argue that values such as freedom and equality have roots in many traditions. Multiculturalists generally try to hold a middle position, in which the core of universal rights is accepted, but their interpretation is open to dialogue.

Security, immigration and the limits of tolerance. Since the terrorist attacks of the early twenty-first century, concerns over security, radicalisation and immigration have shaped the discussion in Europe and North America. Critics of multiculturalism say that it permits parallel societies, while defenders reply that exclusion and discrimination, not cultural recognition, are the roots of alienation, and that integration needs equal opportunities and mutual respect. The question of what tolerance should be extended to intolerant groups remains a hard one, and the answer usually draws on the principle that

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tolerance cannot be extended to those who would destroy the conditions of freedom for others.

Majoritarianism and nationalism. In many countries, the majority community claims that the nation is defined by its culture, religion or language, and seeks to give it a privileged place. Such nationalism tends to treat minorities as less than full citizens. Multicultural and constitutional theorists respond with the idea of civic or constitutional patriotism, put forward by Jürgen Habermas, in which loyalty is given to the principles of the constitution, shared by citizens of all cultures, and not to one cultural nation.

8. The Indian perspective

The scale of diversity. India is a country of exceptional diversity. It has twenty-two languages in the Eighth Schedule, and the 2011 Census recorded over a hundred and twenty languages with more than ten thousand speakers, though many more languages and dialects are in use. All the major world religions are present, and Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism and tribal faiths all have a place. There are thousands of caste and sub-caste groups, and over seven hundred notified Scheduled Tribes, who form about 8.6 per cent of the population, and Scheduled Castes, who form about 16.6 per cent, as per the 2011 Census. Regional cultures and cuisines differ widely. The Indian experience has therefore been a case study in the management of diversity.

Historical background. The idea of coexistence is old in India, as seen in the edicts of Ashoka, the policy of Akbar, the bhakti and Sufi traditions, and the composite culture of many regions. Colonial rule, however, politicised differences. The census classified people by religion and caste, the Morley-Minto reforms of 1909 gave separate electorates to Muslims, and the Communal Award of 1932 extended them to the depressed classes, Sikhs and others. Gandhi fasted against separate electorates for the depressed classes, which ended with the Poona Pact of 1932, giving reserved seats within joint electorates. The demand for separate electorates and the Partition of 1947 left deep memories, and the framers of the Constitution approached the question of minorities with great care.

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The Constituent Assembly and minorities. The Assembly set up an Advisory Committee on Fundamental Rights, Minorities and Tribal and Excluded Areas, with Sardar Patel as chairman, and a Sub-Committee on Minorities headed by H. C. Mukherjee. After long debate, and in the wake of Partition, the Assembly abandoned separate electorates in 1949, and decided instead on reserved seats for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, and on fundamental rights for minorities, such as the right to practise religion and to run educational institutions. Reserved seats for religious minorities in legislatures were ended, though the Anglo-Indian community was given nominated seats in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies, which was discontinued by the Constitution (One Hundred and Fourth Amendment) Act, 2019. The framers said that the rights of minorities were a sacred trust, and Patel spoke of the duty of the majority to make the minorities feel secure. Ambedkar, as chairman of the Drafting Committee, stressed that in the Indian context the minority should be a political minority which could change into a majority, and not a permanent communal one.

Provision	Subject
Preamble	Justice, liberty, equality and fraternity; secular state; unity of the nation
Article 14 and 15	Equality; no discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth; special provisions for women, children and backward classes
Article 16	Equality of opportunity in public employment; reservation
Article 17	Abolition of untouchability
Articles 25 to 28	Freedom of conscience and religion; rights of religious denominations; no compulsory religious instruction in state-funded institutions
Article 29	Protection of interests of minorities: right to conserve language, script and culture; no denial of admission on grounds of religion, race, caste or language
Article 30	Right of minorities, religious or linguistic, to establish and administer educational institutions
Article 330 to 342	Reservation of seats in legislatures; special provisions for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and backward classes

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Article 343 to 351	Official language; regional languages; directive for development of Hindi
Article 347	Special provision for a language spoken by a section of the population of a state
Article 350A and 350B	Instruction in the mother tongue at the primary stage; Special Officer for linguistic minorities
Fifth and Sixth Schedules	Administration of tribal areas
Article 371 series	Special provisions for certain states
Article 44	Directive principle on the Uniform Civil Code

Fundamental rights of minorities. Articles 29 and 30 are the main rights specific to minorities. Article 29(1) protects any section of citizens with a distinct language, script or culture and its right to conserve it, and Article 29(2) forbids denial of admission to state-run or state-aided educational institutions on grounds of religion, race, caste or language. Article 30(1) gives all minorities, based on religion or language, the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice, and Article 30(2) forbids discrimination by the state in granting aid to such institutions on the ground that they are managed by a minority. Articles 25 to 28 give freedom of religion, including the freedom to profess, practise and propagate it, subject to public order, morality and health.

Judicial interpretation of minority rights. The Supreme Court has dealt with many cases about these provisions. In *In re Kerala Education Bill* (1958), the Court held that Article 30 gives minorities the right to establish and administer educational institutions and that the state may regulate them in the interest of educational standards, but cannot destroy their character. In *St. Stephen's College v. University of Delhi* (1992), the Court held that a minority college may reserve a reasonable share of seats for its own community. In *T. M. A. Pai Foundation v. State of Karnataka* (2002), an eleven-judge bench held that the unit for determining a linguistic or religious minority under Article 30 is the State and not the whole country, that minorities have the right to administer unaided institutions, with regulation for merit and transparency in admission, and that the state could not insist on reservation in private unaided institutions. In *Islamic Academy of Education v. State of Karnataka* (2003)

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and *P. A. Inamdar v. State of Maharashtra* (2005), the Court dealt with questions of fees and admissions in unaided professional colleges. In *Bal Patil v. Union of India* (2005), the Court considered the claim of Jains to be a minority, and Jains were later notified as a minority community by the Centre in 2014. The question of the minority character of the Aligarh Muslim University has been in court since *S. Azeez Basha v. Union of India* (1967), and was considered again by a seven-judge bench in 2024. In *S. R. Bommai v. Union of India* (1994), the Court held secularism to be a part of the basic structure.

Statutory and institutional safeguards. The National Commission for Minorities Act, 1992, set up the National Commission for Minorities, and the Centre has notified Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and Parsis as minority communities in 1993, and Jains in 2014. The National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions Act, 2004, created a body to deal with disputes on the minority status of institutions. The Constitution provides for a Special Officer for Linguistic Minorities under Article 350B. The Ministry of Minority Affairs, set up in 2006, runs schemes of scholarships, development of minority concentration areas and the Prime Minister’s 15-point programme. The National Commission for Scheduled Castes and for Scheduled Tribes, and the National Commission for Backward Classes, which received constitutional status through the 102nd Amendment of 2018, have a similar protective role. The Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955, and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, give legal protection against discrimination and violence.

Committees and reports. The Gopal Singh Committee (1983) reported on minorities and weaker sections. The Sachar Committee (2006), headed by Justice Rajinder Sachar, found that the Muslim community in India lagged behind in education, employment and access to credit, and made recommendations for an Equal Opportunity Commission and improved participation. The Ranganath Misra Commission (2007) recommended reservation for religious and linguistic minorities, which has not been implemented. The Kundu Committee (2014) examined the progress of implementation of the Sachar proposals. The Mandal Commission (1980) led to reservation for Other Backward Classes in 1990 and the *Indra Sawhney* judgment (1992). The Constitution (One Hundred and Third Amendment) Act,

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2019, gave ten per cent reservation to economically weaker sections, and the Supreme Court upheld it by a majority in *Janhit Abhiyan v. Union of India* (2022).

Language and federal accommodation. The linguistic reorganisation of states after 1956 gave expression to the aspirations of linguistic communities in the political system. The three-language formula in education, the recognition of many languages in the Eighth Schedule, and the Official Languages Act, 1963, which allowed continuing use of English, were means of accommodating linguistic diversity. Language agitations, such as the anti-Hindi agitation of 1965 in Tamil Nadu, show how sensitive the matter is. The Sixth Schedule, with its autonomous district and regional councils in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram, and Article 371A for Nagaland and Article 371G for Mizoram, give territorial autonomy to tribal communities.

Tribal rights. The Fifth and Sixth Schedules, the Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996, the Forest Rights Act, 2006, and judgments such as *Samatha v. State of Andhra Pradesh* (1997), which restricted the transfer of tribal land to non-tribals, and the Niyamgiri case of 2013 give some protection to the land and culture of Scheduled Tribes. Verrier Elwin's idea of a policy of tribal integration without forced assimilation, adopted by Nehru in the Tribal Panchsheel, and Jaipal Singh Munda's voice in the Assembly show a continuing debate between assimilation and autonomy.

Caste, reservation and recognition. In India, the group-based policy most extensively used is reservation for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and OBCs, which is aimed chiefly at removing the effects of caste discrimination. This has produced a distinct Indian experience of what Kymlicka would call special representation rights, but with a different aim. Scholars such as Marc Galanter, in *Competing Equalities* (1984), have analysed the Indian law of compensatory discrimination, and Ambedkar's insistence on the annihilation of caste distinguishes the Indian approach, since the aim is to remove caste, not to protect it as a cultural identity.

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Personal laws and the Uniform Civil Code. The existence of separate personal laws for Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Parsis and others is a form of legal pluralism, and Article 44 directs the state to endeavour to secure a uniform civil code. The Hindu law was reformed by the Hindu Code Bills of the 1950s, while Muslim, Christian and Parsi laws were left largely to the communities, though they have been changed by courts and legislation, as in the Shah Bano case (1985), the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986, *Shayara Bano v. Union of India* (2017) declaring instant triple talaq invalid, and the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act, 2019. Those who favour a uniform code argue that it ensures gender justice and national integration, while others, including many minority leaders and some women's groups, argue that reform should come from within communities through consultation, and not by imposition by the majority. The Law Commission, in its 2018 consultation paper, said that a uniform code was neither necessary nor desirable at that stage and that reform of laws within each religion was preferable.

Indian thinkers on diversity. Gandhi spoke of the equality of all religions and of a nation built on cooperation among communities. Tagore warned against narrow nationalism and held up an India open to many cultures. Nehru, in *The Discovery of India*, described India as an ancient palimpsest on which layer upon layer of thought had been inscribed. Ambedkar stressed constitutional morality and fraternity. Rajeev Bhargava describes Indian secularism as principled distance, in which the state keeps a flexible distance from all religions. Bhikhu Parekh has described India as a community of communities and has praised the Indian Constitution for giving a place to group rights. Critics, such as Partha Chatterjee, have pointed to the tension between the state's secular claim and the actual treatment of minorities, and Ashutosh Varshney, in *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life* (2002), found that cities with strong inter-communal civic associations experienced less communal violence.

Contemporary issues. Several matters are currently under public discussion. Communal violence, as in 1984, 1992-93 and 2002, and incidents of mob violence, concern the security of minorities. The Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019, and the proposals for a National Register of Citizens raised questions of religion and citizenship. Debates on conversion laws in several states, on religious dress in educational institutions, as in the Karnataka hijab

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case in 2022, on the representation of minorities in legislatures and public services, and on the language of the Union and the states are all part of the same field. The Supreme Court has spoken often about fraternity and the dignity of every citizen as constitutional goals, and the public discourse has seen both assertion of majority identity and new claims by minorities, Dalits, tribal groups and others. The challenge is to maintain a political order in which every citizen stands as an equal while cultural differences are respected.

9. Importance and limitations of multiculturalism and minority rights

Importance and merits

- **Secures equal citizenship in practice.** Formal equality may leave minorities at a disadvantage when public institutions are designed around the language and culture of the majority. Accommodation and special protection help turn formal equality into real equality, as when a state provides schooling in the mother tongue or protects the right to run minority institutions.
- **Protects dignity and identity.** People’s sense of self is tied to the culture, language and community to which they belong. Recognition by the state, as Taylor argued, affirms their worth, and misrecognition does lasting harm. This is important to groups that have suffered stigma, such as Dalits and indigenous peoples.
- **Supports individual freedom and autonomy.** Kymlicka and Raz argue that a secure cultural context gives people meaningful options to choose from, so protecting cultural membership protects freedom. A person whose language and community are fading has a narrower range of life choices.
- **Prevents the tyranny of the majority.** Constitutional safeguards for minorities limit the power of a majority to impose its religion, language or customs, and so preserve the liberal and democratic quality of the state. Articles 29 and 30 of the Indian Constitution serve this function.

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- **Promotes peace and national unity.** Accommodating the demands of minority groups, through federalism, language rights and power-sharing, reduces the sense of grievance that leads to conflict or secession. India's linguistic reorganisation, which strengthened and did not weaken unity, and the accords ending insurgencies in Mizoram and elsewhere, are examples.
- **Corrects historical injustice.** Many groups have suffered conquest, slavery, colonial domination or caste oppression, and recognition and special measures are forms of redress. Reservation for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and land rights for indigenous peoples are examples.
- **Enriches society.** Diversity of languages, arts, foods, ideas and ways of life adds to the vitality and creativity of a society, and exposure to different views encourages learning and tolerance. Cities with many communities often show cultural and economic dynamism.
- **Encourages democratic participation and inclusion.** Representation and consultation of minorities give them a voice and a stake in the system, and reduce alienation. A legislature that includes members of various groups also has a wider range of experience to draw upon in making policy.
- **Suits the reality of modern states.** Almost every state is diverse, and policies of forced assimilation have often led to injustice and violent resistance. Multiculturalism offers a more realistic and humane way of living with difference.
- **Provides standards for international relations.** The principles of minority protection and indigenous rights give a basis for international monitoring and for diplomatic efforts to prevent ethnic conflict, as in the work of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities.

Limitations and criticisms

- **Risk of fixing and dividing identities.** Policies that recognise groups may treat cultures as fixed and bounded, encourage people to see themselves mainly in terms of group membership and harden the divisions. Critics, such as Amartya Sen in *Identity and*

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Violence (2006), warn against reducing people to a single identity, and describe this as plural monoculturalism.

- **Conflict with individual rights within groups.** Group rights may support leaders who control members, especially women, children and dissenters, as feminist critics such as Okin point out. Where the state grants autonomy, individuals may be left without the protection of the general law.
- **Unfair treatment and resentment among other groups.** Special rights for some groups may appear to be privileges and lead to resentment among others, and may lead to competitive claims and politics based on grievance. The reservation politics of India and the debates on who is a minority show how contested these claims can be.
- **Neglect of economic inequality.** Critics such as Barry and Marxist writers argue that a focus on cultural recognition diverts attention from class inequality and poverty, which affect minorities and majorities alike, and that remedies should be directed to universal social and economic rights.
- **Weakening of common citizenship and national cohesion.** Opponents, who include nationalists and some liberals and republicans, claim that emphasis on difference weakens the shared identity and the sense of solidarity that make welfare states and democratic decision-making possible. Parallel communities are often cited.
- **Problem of defining the group and its authority.** It is difficult to decide who belongs to a group, who speaks for it, and which of its practices are authentic. The state may end up deciding what the culture of a group is, and may privilege conservative leaders. Debates on who qualifies as a minority in India, and in which State, show the difficulty.
- **Tolerating illiberal practices.** If cultures are given respect, the state may be reluctant to prevent practices that violate rights, such as child marriage, honour crimes or discrimination, in the name of culture. Liberals insist on limits, but drawing them is contested.
- **Instrumental use by elites and vote-bank politics.** Politicians may use group identity to mobilise support, and minority rights may be used for electoral purposes, with

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benefits going to leaders and not to ordinary members. Critics of communal politics in India raise this concern, and the opposite criticism, of majoritarian mobilisation, is also made.

- **Difficult to apply across very different groups.** Immigrants, indigenous peoples, national minorities, religious communities and caste groups have different histories and needs, so a single policy cannot fit them all. A policy designed for cultural minorities may not suit a group that suffers from social hierarchy, as with caste.
- **Implementation and enforcement weaknesses.** Rights on paper often fail in practice, owing to weak institutions, discrimination, violence and lack of resources. Reports such as the Sachar Committee findings show a gap between constitutional promise and lived reality.

10. Critical analysis

The case for multiculturalism rests on the idea that equality and liberty in a diverse society cannot be achieved by pretending that differences do not exist. A state is never fully neutral, since it must adopt some language for administration, some calendar of holidays and some rules for schools. Multiculturalists argue that the choice of these usually follows the majority culture, and that justice therefore requires attention to the burden this places on others. This argument gives a strong liberal basis to minority rights and has influenced constitutions and international law. It also rests on a moral claim about recognition, that a person’s standing in society is bound up with the respect shown to the group with which he identifies.

Critics on the left and the right, however, have raised significant objections. From the liberal egalitarian side, Barry holds that multiculturalism confuses cultural differences with disadvantage, and that the remedy for unfair burdens is general reform of rules and not group exemptions. From the feminist side, Okin and others show the risk to women inside minority groups. From the Marxist and social democratic side, critics hold that recognition may replace redistribution and distract from material inequality, a point that Fraser tried to answer by linking the two. From the nationalist and republican side, the criticism is that

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diversity politics weakens the unity needed for common citizenship. The defenders reply that these dangers can be handled through design: liberal limits on group rights, the right of exit, a stress on common civic values and combined policies of recognition and redistribution.

A central distinction in the debate is between the protection of cultures and the protection of persons. Where multiculturalism is understood as the safeguarding of individuals' ability to live according to their cultural commitments, it is compatible with liberalism, and the real task is to ensure that individuals can question, revise and leave. Where it is understood as the preservation of cultures as such, regardless of what members want, it raises the problem of freezing traditions and empowering conservatives. Parekh's view that cultures are internally plural and open to change, and Kymlicka's liberal limits, take the first path. The Indian experience shows that groups often change from inside, through reform movements among Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs and others, and that legal change and community reform go together.

The Indian model deserves separate attention. India has not adopted the label of multiculturalism as a policy, but its constitutional design has many features of it: protection of minority educational and cultural institutions, linguistic states, recognition of many languages, tribal autonomy, personal laws and reservations. At the same time, it is based on a strong commitment to individual rights and equal citizenship, and on a critical stance toward some inherited hierarchies, especially caste, which the Constitution seeks to abolish and not to preserve. This combination has been described as a distinct pattern, balancing community and individual, and its success in keeping together a very diverse population is widely noted. Yet it is under strain from majoritarian politics, from uneven implementation of safeguards, from conflicts over personal laws and from competing claims for reservation. The Indian case thus shows both the possibility and the fragility of accommodating differences in a democracy.

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On balance, the better view is that diversity is a permanent feature of modern societies and that the issue is how to manage it justly. Neither forced assimilation nor unlimited group autonomy is satisfactory. A mixed approach, in which equal individual rights are guaranteed to all, minorities get protection against discrimination and domination, cultural and linguistic needs are fairly accommodated, and a shared civic framework is cultivated through dialogue, seems best suited to the needs of a plural democracy. The success of such an approach depends on fair institutions, on reducing economic and social inequality, and on a political culture in which majorities and minorities see one another as equal partners in a common enterprise.

11. Authors and books for UGC NET

Author	Book or work	Main idea
Charles Taylor	“The Politics of Recognition” (1992)	Identity and recognition; politics of difference
Will Kymlicka	*Liberalism, Community and Culture* (1989); *Multicultural Citizenship* (1995)	Cultural membership; group-differentiated rights; external protections and internal restrictions
Bhikhu Parekh	*Rethinking Multiculturalism* (2000)	Intercultural dialogue; operative public values
Iris Marion Young	*Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990)	Five faces of oppression; group representation
Joseph Raz	“Multiculturalism” (1998)	Value of cultures for autonomy
Chandran Kukathas	*The Liberal Archipelago* (2003)	Freedom of association; right of exit
Brian Barry	*Culture and Equality* (2001)	Liberal egalitarian critique of multiculturalism
Susan Moller Okin	“Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?” (1999)	Feminist critique of group rights
Ayelet Shachar	*Multicultural Jurisdictions* (2001)	Paradox of multicultural vulnerability; joint governance

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Nancy Fraser	*Justice Interruptus* (1997)	Redistribution and recognition
Michael Walzer	*Spheres of Justice* (1983)	Complex equality; community understandings
Arend Lijphart	*Democracy in Plural Societies* (1977)	Consociational democracy
Donald Horowitz	*Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (1985)	Centripetal approach; electoral engineering
Horace Kallen	*Culture and Democracy in the United States* (1924)	Cultural pluralism
Kimberlé Crenshaw	“Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex” (1989)	Intersectionality
Amartya Sen	*Identity and Violence* (2006)	Plural identities; critique of singular identity
Jürgen Habermas	“Struggles for Recognition in the Democratic Constitutional State” (1994)	Constitutional patriotism; equal rights and cultural recognition
Rajeev Bhargava	*The Promise of India’s Secular Democracy* (2010)	Principled distance; Indian secularism
Marc Galanter	*Competing Equalities* (1984)	Law and backward classes in India
Ashutosh Varshney	*Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life* (2002)	Civic associations and communal peace
Ambedkar	*Annihilation of Caste* (1936); *States and Minorities* (1947)	Caste and constitutional protection of minorities

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12. Practice questions

Long answer questions

1. Define multiculturalism and discuss its main features.
2. Examine Will Kymlicka’s theory of group-differentiated rights and the distinction between external protections and internal restrictions.

3. Discuss Charles Taylor’s politics of recognition and its significance for multiculturalism.
4. Examine the main models of managing diversity: assimilation, integration, multiculturalism, interculturalism and consociationalism.
5. Discuss the constitutional provisions and judicial interpretation of minority rights in India.
6. Evaluate the merits and criticisms of multiculturalism, with reference to the liberal egalitarian and feminist critiques.

Medium answer questions

1. Distinguish between national minorities and immigrant groups in Kymlicka’s theory.
2. Explain Bhikhu Parekh’s idea of intercultural dialogue.
3. Discuss the debate between Susan Okin and her critics on multiculturalism and women.
4. Explain the scope of Articles 29 and 30 of the Constitution of India.
5. Discuss the Sachar Committee findings on the Muslim community.
6. Explain the difference between minority rights and affirmative action.

Short answer questions

1. What is diversity?
2. What is meant by recognition?
3. What is interculturalism?
4. What is consociational democracy?
5. What is intersectionality?
6. Who is a minority under the Indian Constitution?

Very short answer questions

1. Who wrote *Multicultural Citizenship*?
2. Which Article gives minorities the right to establish and administer educational institutions?
3. Which case held the State to be the unit for determining minority status under Article 30?

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4. Who proposed the term intersectionality?
5. Which Act created the National Commission for Minorities?

Objective questions

1. The politics of recognition was discussed by: (a) Charles Taylor (b) Brian Barry (c) Chandran Kukathas (d) Joseph Raz
2. Kymlicka’s polyethnic rights are meant mainly for: (a) Indigenous peoples (b) Immigrant groups (c) National minorities (d) Majorities
3. The book *Culture and Equality* is a criticism of multiculturalism by: (a) Taylor (b) Parekh (c) Barry (d) Kymlicka
4. Which Article provides for a Special Officer for Linguistic Minorities? (a) 350A (b) 350B (c) 347 (d) 29
5. In which case was the unit of minority status held to be the State? (a) T. M. A. Pai Foundation (b) Kesavananda Bharati (c) Maneka Gandhi (d) Bommai
6. Assertion (A): Group rights may harm women in minority communities. Reason (R): Group leaders may control family law and customs in ways that restrict women. (a) Both A and R are true and R explains A (b) Both are true but R does not explain A (c) A is true but R is false (d) A is false but R is true
7. The Sachar Committee reported on: (a) Tribal welfare (b) Social, economic and educational status of Muslims (c) Backward classes (d) Language policy
8. Match: (i) Taylor (ii) Young (iii) Lijphart (iv) Fraser with (a) Consociationalism (b) Redistribution and recognition (c) Politics of recognition (d) Five faces of oppression. (a) i-c, ii-d, iii-a, iv-b (b) i-a, ii-b, iii-c, iv-d (c) i-b, ii-c, iii-d, iv-a (d) i-d, ii-a, iii-b, iv-c

Analytical prompts

1. A state requires all schools to teach in one official language, though a minority community wishes to run its own school in its mother tongue. Analyse the case in the light of minority rights.

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2. A community claims exemption from a general law on grounds of religious practice, though it affects the rights of women. Discuss how a liberal state should respond.
3. Compare Kymlicka’s multiculturalism with Barry’s liberal egalitarian view.
4. Is Indian policy on diversity best described as multiculturalism, secularism or something else? Discuss.

Key takeaways

- Diversity is the fact of difference among groups in language, religion, ethnicity, caste, region and culture, and multiculturalism is the political response that recognises and accommodates these differences.
- Minority rights protect the identity and equal standing of groups smaller in number or weaker in power, and include individual rights, self-government, polyethnic, representation, language, educational and religious rights.
- Taylor stresses recognition, Kymlicka argues for group-differentiated rights within liberalism, Parekh for intercultural dialogue, and Young for the politics of difference.
- Critics include Barry from a liberal egalitarian view, Okin and others from the feminist view, and Fraser and Marxists, who stress redistribution along with recognition.
- Models of managing diversity include assimilation, integration, multiculturalism, interculturalism, consociationalism and federal autonomy.
- International protection rests on Article 27 of the ICCPR, the UN declarations on minorities and indigenous peoples, and regional instruments, though enforcement is weak.
- The Indian Constitution protects minorities through Articles 25 to 30 and 350A and 350B, and adds reservation, tribal autonomy, linguistic states and constitutional bodies.
- A mixed approach, with equal individual rights, protection against domination, fair accommodation of culture and a shared civic framework, is widely seen as the best answer for plural democracies.

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Further reading

1. Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship*
2. Will Kymlicka, *Politics in the Vernacular*
3. Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition* (ed. Amy Gutmann)
4. Bhikhu Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism*
5. Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*
6. Brian Barry, *Culture and Equality*
7. Susan Moller Okin, *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?*
8. Ayelet Shachar, *Multicultural Jurisdictions*
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11. Donald Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*
12. Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence*
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14. Rajeev Bhargava, *The Promise of India's Secular Democracy*
15. Marc Galanter, *Competing Equalities*
16. Ashutosh Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life*
17. Granville Austin, *The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation*
18. Government of India, *Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim Community of India* (Sachar Committee Report)
19. Rajeev Bhargava and Ashok Acharya (eds.), *Political Theory: An Introduction*
20. O. P. Gauba, *An Introduction to Political Theory*

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Frequently asked questions

1. What is multiculturalism? It is the view and policy that the cultural differences of groups in a society should be publicly recognised, respected and accommodated, and that equal citizenship may require different treatment of groups in some matters. It rejects forced assimilation of minorities.

2. What did Will Kymlicka argue? Kymlicka argued that cultural membership is a primary good that gives individuals the context for free choice, so that minority groups, disadvantaged by the dominance of the majority culture, may be given group-differentiated rights. He distinguished self-government, polyethnic and special representation rights, and held that groups may protect themselves from outside pressure but may not restrict the freedoms of their own members.

3. What is the politics of recognition? In Charles Taylor's account, identities are formed through recognition by others, so denial or distorted recognition of a group's identity is a form of harm. The politics of recognition demands that the distinct identity of each group be acknowledged and respected in public life.

4. How does the Indian Constitution protect minorities? It gives freedom of religion in Articles 25 to 28, the right to conserve language, script and culture in Article 29, the right to establish and administer educational institutions in Article 30, and provides for a Special Officer for linguistic minorities in Article 350B. It also provides for reservation and special provisions for Scheduled Castes and Tribes and for tribal autonomy.

5. What are the main criticisms of multiculturalism? Critics argue that it fixes and divides identities, may harm individuals, especially women, within groups, may divert attention from economic inequality, weakens common citizenship and may tolerate illiberal practices. Defenders say that liberal limits and combined policies of recognition and redistribution can meet these concerns.

6. Is India a multicultural state? India has not made multiculturalism a formal policy, but its Constitution contains many multicultural features, such as minority educational rights, linguistic states, tribal autonomy and personal laws. It also stresses individual rights and

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aims to end caste hierarchy, so it is better described as a distinct model of accommodating diversity within equal citizenship.

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