

**Core-XI- Diasporic Writngs (18MEN33C)**  
**Unit-I-What is Multiculturalism?- Bhikhu Parekh**

- **A Brief introduction to the author Bhikhu Parekh.**
- Bhikhu Parekh is a Professor of Political theory at the University of Hull from 1982-2001
- Professor of Political Philosophy at the University of Westminster from 2001-2009
- President of the Academy of Social Sciences from 2003-2008.
- Served as a Labour Party Member of the House of Lords.

## What is Multiculturalism?

- **Definition:**
- Multiculturalism is a movement, particularly those of minority groups with different cultures, races and ethnicities demanding special acknowledgement within a dominant political culture.
- The early 1970s marked the emergence of multicultural movement first in Canada, Australia.
- Later, it spread to USA, UK and Germany

## Multiculturalism –What it means and stand for, according to Bhikhu Parekh

- All human beings are culturally embedded in the sense that they grow up and live within a culturally structured world and organise their lives and social relations in terms of a culturally derived system of meaning and significance.
- Different cultures represent different systems of meaning and visions of the good life.
- A culturally self contained life is virtually impossible for most human beings in the modern, mobile and interdependent world. No culture is wholly worthless, that it deserves at least some respect because of what it means to its members and the creative energy it displays, that no culture is perfect and has a right to impose itself on others, and that cultures are best changed from within.
- Every culture is internally plural and reflects a continuing conversation between its different traditions and strands of thought. Its identity is plural, fluid and open. Cultures grow out of conscious and unconscious interactions with each other, define their identity in terms of what they take to be their significant other, and are at least partially multicultural in their origins and constitution.
- A culture cannot appreciate the value of others unless it appreciated the plurality within it.

# Multiculturalists' Perspective

- Multiculturalists' perspective is composed of the creative interplay of these three important and complementary insights- namely the cultural embeddedness of human beings, the inescapability and desirability of cultural plurality, and the plural and multicultural constitution of each culture.
- Every culture is internally plural and differentiated. All cultures are born out of interaction with and absorb the influences of others and are shaped by wider economic, political and other forces.
- This undercuts the very basis of Afrocentrism, Eurocentrism, Indocentrism, Sinocentrism and other kinds of centrism's, all of which isolate the history of the culture concerned from that of others and credit its achievements to its own genius
- From a multiculturalists perspective, no political doctrine or ideology can represent the full truth of human life. Each of them –be it liberalism, conservatism, socialism or nationalism- is embedded in a particular culture, represents a particular vision of the good life, and is necessarily narrow and partial.
- Political doctrines are ways of structuring political life and do not offer a comprehensive philosophy of life.
- From a multiculturalists' perspective the good society cherished the diversity of and encourages a creative dialogue between its different cultures and their moral visions.
- A multicultural society cannot be stable and last long without developing a common sense of belonging among its citizens.

## **Main Ideas/arguments of the author.**

- The commitment to a political community is highly complex in nature and easily misunderstood. The commitment to the political community involves commitment to its continuing existence and well-being and implies that one cares enough for it not to harm its interests and undermine its integrity.
- Commitment or belonging is reciprocal in nature.
- In a multicultural society different communities have different needs and some might be structurally disadvantaged or lack the skill and the confidence to participate in the mainstream society and avail of its opportunities.
- Although equal citizenship is essential to fostering a common sense of belonging, it is not enough. Citizenship is about status and rights; belonging is about acceptance, feeling welcome, a sense of identification. The two do not necessarily coincide.
- The feeling of being fully a citizen and yet an outsider is difficult to analyse and explain, but it can be deep and real and seriously damage the quality of one's citizenship as well as one's sense of commitment to the political community.
- Misrecognition has both a cultural and a material basis.

## Some of the Problems of Multicultural society

- Recognition is not given willingly as a gift or an act of grace. It need to be fought for and involves a cultural and political contestation and sometimes even violence.
- Multicultural societies in their current form are new to our age and throw up theoretical and political problems that have no parallel in history.
- The need to find ways of reconciling the legitimate demands of unity and diversity, of achieving political unity without cultural uniformity, and cultivating among its citizens both a common sense of belonging and a willingness to respect and cherish deep cultural differences.
- This is a formidable theoretical and political task and no multicultural society has so far succeeded in tackling it.
- The erstwhile Soviet Union and Yugoslavia lacked the requisite imagination and wisdom and met their doom.
- The affluent, stable and politically mature democracies as the USA, UK and France have so far had only a limited success, and show signs of strong moral and emotional disorientation in the face of increasing minority demands for recognition and equality.

## **India as a Multicultural Society: The Past, Present and the Future**

- India has managed to persist for five decades as a territorially intact and moderately successful polity because of the judicious balance between unity and diversity embodied in the Indian constitution.
- The author is of the opinion that India should undertake a radical reconsideration of some of the constitutive principles of the Indian state to grasp the enormity of the problem facing India and to explore the ways of tackling it.

## Study Questions

- What is Multiculturalism?
- Write a short note on the emergence of Multicultural movement in Canada and Australia
- What are the claims of Culture-equality and diversity in the global era?
- How does the multicultural society handle recognition and redistribution in a country?
- Write a brief note on the Ethics of Identity in a multicultural society.



## Essay Questions

- Explain Multiculturalism as a political theory.
- Multiculturalism is a way of viewing human life-justify
- What according to Bhikhu Parekh are the three central insights which are necessary to understand Multiculturalism in a different perspective?
- A culture cannot appreciate the value of others unless it appreciated the plurality within it.- Explain
- List out some of the theoretical and political problems faced by the multicultural society in the modern era.
- Write an essay on the challenges faced by a multicultural society to ensure recognition and redistribution of its citizens?
- What are the suggestion given by Bhikhu Parekh to Indian Society to explore the problem of Multiculturalism in India.

### **For further study**

- Read Bhikhu Parekh's Lectures on Cultural diversity in modern society for additional information to enhance your understanding of Multiculturalism and its implications in the social, political, religious, economic and other fields of governance of the society.

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