Multiculturalism And Women

INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM VERSUS GROUP IDENTITY

This article explores the concept of multiculturalism in "western" and "eastern/southern" societies with particular regard to the condition and problems of women. It points out the frequent contradiction between the policy of protecting the customs and ways of life of minority communities, granting them equality under the law and the principle of upholding the individual rights of their members, especially those of the feminine gender. The article contrasts the various interpretations of multiculturalism in several countries of the Americas, Europe and Asia and highlights the risks of accepting all the traditional practices and mores of immigrant groups especially when they are incompatible with the values of modern democratic societies.

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INTRODUCTION

The debate on "multiculturalism" has assumed importance in the age of globalisation. Multiculturalism may be broadly defined as the "characteristics of a multicultural society" and "the policy or process whereby the distinctive identities of cultural groups within such a society are maintained or supported". It centres on the thought in political philosophy about the way to respond to cultural and religious differences. It is closely associated with "identity politics", "the politics of differences" and "the politics of

recognition" apart from being a matter of economic interest and political power. The term multiculturalism is most often used in reference to Western nation-states and has been the official policy in several of them since the 1970s, for reasons that vary from country to country. Many nation-states in Africa and Asia are also culturally diverse and are "multicultural" in a descriptive sense, although in some, communalism is a major political issue. The policies adopted by these states often have parallels with "multiculturalist" policies in the Western world, even though the historical background is different.

In the case of liberal arguments for the rights of groups, one needs to look at inequalities within the groups in general and between the sexes in particular. It should not be assumed that the self-proclaimed leaders of groups who are usually older male members represent the interests of all group members. What does all this entail with respect to the issue of women's rights and multiculturalism? How far do women as a major subset within the group benefit from group rights? It is especially important to consider inequalities between the sexes, since they are likely to be less public and thus less easily discernible. Are women's human and fundamental rights given priority in group rights? Do men ever sacrifice their individual rights to equal treatment to preserve or protect the cultural or religious identity of a group? There is a need for women, more specifically young women (since older women are often co-opted into reinforcing gender inequality) to be represented in negotiations on group rights, so that their interests are promoted and not harmed by the granting of such rights. The liberation of women should be in the spirit of the modern world and not a "women's issue"—it should be part of the persistent enforcement of human rights. In this context, it is necessary to understand whether the policy of multiculturalism in the West is gender-neutral or gender-biased in favour of men. Many Eastern countries have been historically multicultural but not

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"officially" so. In South Asia, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka are officially secular while Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan are Islamic but historically and culturally multicultural within an Islamic society. Against this background, this present paper studies women's rights vis-à-vis multiculturalism in select countries of the East and the West.

Multiculturalism, as a product of the modern nation-state may be taken as a social value or an ethos of governance. In either case, it is a concept behind political practices operationalised in terms of cultural, linguistic and religious dimensions. Multiculturalism takes into account ethnicity and identity on both the individual and collective levels and may thus take varying forms in different modern nation-states. (Donald E Waterfall, "Multiculturalism as a Modern and Indigenous Concept in India" in Kushal Deb (Ed), *Mapping Multiculturalism*, New Delhi: Rawat, 2002, p276) In traditional societies, several ethnic groups lived together but despite their differences, basically belonged to the same civilisation. For instance, in the countries of the European civilisation, the English and Scots, French and Bretons lived together. In the territory of historical Hungary, Hungarians, Slovaks, Romanians, Croats, Serbs and Germans lived side by side for centuries. Even though their cultures were different from one another, all these peoples shared in the same Christian culture as well. The non-Christian exceptions among them were the Jews and the Gypsies—the latter having been formally Christian. Traditional societies in Christian Europe were patriarchal in character, which basically defined the status of women. The social communities of non-Christian ethnic groups, which came in at a different stage of civilisation (Jews and Gypsies) were also male-centred. The patriarchalism of these ethnic groups was even more rigid when compared to the Europeans. (Judit Hell, *Women's Issues and Multiculturalism*, 2010, online at https://www.bu.edu) Most traditional societies, both Western and non-Western were patriarchal.

MULTICULTURAL APPROACHES

In modern societies, a new version of multiculturalism has evolved through immigration into largely homogeneous societies. While immigrants mainly seek to be assimilated to an extent or at least to integrate, they generally do not wish to be absorbed into the majority ethnic communities. They endeavour to preserve their identity, language and traditions and be recognised as minority groups like the Latin Americans in the United States of America (US), Africans

in Britain, Turks in Germany, Arabs in France, etc. (*ibid*) Generally, there are three multicultural approaches to law and national governance. (Pratibha Jain, "Balancing Minority Rights and Gender Justice: The Impact of Protecting Multiculturalism on Women's Rights in India", *Berkeley Journal of International Law*, vol23, no1, 2005, online at https://scholarship.law.berkeley.edu)

Assimilation: This approach imposes the dominant national culture on minority groups. Some feminist scholars believe that this is the best strategy for Western states to follow to ensure the protection of the rights of women within immigrant minority groups. As some forms of gender discrimination are culturally-based, women in patriarchal minority cultures could benefit from integration into less patriarchal majority cultures.

Integration: This approach asks citizens to restrict the practices of their minority religion, language or ethnic heritage to the private domain. For instance freedom of religion in India is a fundamental right guaranteed by the country's constitution. Every citizen of India has a right to practice and promote his/her religion peacefully.

Social/Cultural Pluralism: This approach allows for the existence of different religious, cultural and ethnic principles in the public sphere. India's framework of separate personal laws for various religious communities is representative of this model and is a good example of a multiculturalist approach to law and governance.

Diversity in Multicultural Policies

Multiculturalism is more than just a set of abstract philosophical principles. It also manifests itself in a broad range of policies adopted by governments in response to the diversity within their borders. A number of countries such as Australia, Canada and Sweden are officially multicultural, while others such as Holland, New Zealand and the United Kingdom (UK) though not officially multicultural have nevertheless implemented certain multicultural policies. Even a country like the US, which portrays itself as a great cultural melting pot, where cultural values and practices of immigrants are best combined with those of mainstream society to form a new and single national culture, has adopted a

suite of policies that are multicultural. (Samuel P Huntington, *Who Are We: The Challenges to America's National Identity*, New York: Simon and Schuster 2004 and Rodney E Hero and Robert R Preuhs, "Multiculturalism and Welfare Policies in the US: A State-Level Comparative Analysis" in Keith Banting and Will Kymlicka (Eds), *Multiculturalism and the Welfare State: Recognition and Redistribution in Contemporary Democracies*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2006)

Multicultural policies are not the same the world over. In Europe for example, they are generally designed with the claims and circumstances of immigrants and refugees in mind, while multicultural policies in parts of Latin America encompass the different claims and circumstances of indigenous peoples. (Rachel Sieder (Ed), *Multiculturalism in Latin America: Indigenous Rights, Diversity and Democracy*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002) In the US, the term is generally not applied to indigenous people but to African Americans and policies are geared towards issues of racial differences and disadvantages. Canada's official multiculturalism casts its net even wider to include not only immigrants and refugees but also historical religious and linguistic minorities. (Michael Murphy, *Multiculturalism: A Critical Introduction*, New York: Routledge, 2012) Different but equal is the leitmotif of multiculturalism. While living with differences is a fact of current social existence, multiculturalism reflects upon the status of different cultural communities within a polity. Are diverse cultural communities accommodated as equals in the public arena? Do they receive equal respect and treatment in the state? Does the civic culture reflect the heterogeneity of diverse ways of life? (Gurpreet Mahajan, *The Multicultural Path: Issues of Diversity and Discrimination in Democracy*, New Delhi: Sage, 2002) While these are the general questions of concern, other genuine issues related to equality, dignity and the freedom of an individual seem to have been overlooked by multiculturalism as a policy.

What are the principled limits of multicultural accommodation? Where should one draw the line between protecting the group rights of cultural minorities and protecting the individual rights of their members? It is important to acknowledge from the onset that there is near universal agreement amongst multiculturalists that every human community must be morally accountable for the manner in which it treats its own members and that there are certain forms of conduct (child abuse, murder, sexual assault, slavery and the like) that should never be tolerated no matter how important they might be to a community's identity or culture. The most difficult challenge in the politics of multiculturalism is how to strike a principled balance between the differentiated minority rights of groups and individual human rights. What kind of authority are minorities entitled to exercise over their own members? Should that authority be subject to any principled limits? If so, which parties have a legitimate role to play in

establishing and enforcing these limits and which methods of enforcement are the most legitimate and effective? (Murphy, *ibid*) These questions and concerns are democratic and humanitarian in nature and need discussion and analysis.

MULTICULTURALISM IN CANADA

To deal with the influx of immigrants into Canada and a population growing more diverse over time, the Canadian Multicultural Act was passed in 1971 and finalised in 1982. The purpose of officialising multiculturalism in Canada was to remove the country's "British" image and distinguish it from the US's "melting pot" one. (Louis Dupont and Nathalie Lemarchand, "Official Multiculturalism in Canada: Between Virtue and Politics" in Grant H Cornwell and Eve Walsh Stoddard (Eds), *Global Multiculturalism: Comparative Perspectives on Ethnicity, Race and Nation*, New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001) According to official multiculturalism, all cultures have equal value in contributing to the "mosaic" quality of the country and it is the immigrant's choice how to express his/her ethnic origin and/or integrate into society as a whole. (*ibid*) In 1988, the federal government passed the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, which gave official multiculturalism a stronger legal basis by consolidating existing government policies and practices into legislation. In addition, the act provided a more detailed policy statement on multiculturalism and established agencies in support of the policy, such as the Canadian Multicultural Advisory Committee.

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To understand official multiculturalism in a broader context, it is necessary to first examine its basic values and determine what kind of society multiculturalism aims to promote. In this context, it is useful to study the key clauses of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act and in particular the official statement on multiculturalism policy found in section 3. First, the act asserts that all Canadians are entitled to "preserve, enhance and share their cultural heritage". Under the official policy,

citizens are encouraged to retain their cultural heritage while being recognised as part of Canadian society. Not only does this policy of multiculturalism reject earlier practices of assimilation, it also distinguishes itself from the "melting pot" approach typically found in the US. Under multiculturalism, ethnic groups in Canadian society are encouraged to maintain their ethnic distinctiveness, rather than be assimilated into an ever-changing national culture.

Second, the act asserts that individuals and communities are to be assured full and equitable participation in all aspects of Canadian society and that any barriers to that participation should be eliminated. The idea of inclusion is central within the broader Canadian society. It should not be the case that an ethnic group is excluded from participating in key social, political and economic institutions simply because it has chosen to maintain its traditional cultural customs and practices. Third, the act commits the Government of Canada to "promote understanding and creativity that arise from the interaction between individuals and communities of different origins". The idea is that while different ethnic groups are able to preserve and enhance their cultural identities, they are nevertheless encouraged to interact with one another. In other words, Canada's population should evolve into a series of cultural islands, but with mechanisms of interaction to promote mutual understanding and creativity. (Jay Makarenko, *Society, Culture and Communities: Multiculturalism Policy in Canada*, 12 January 2010, online at https://www.mapleleafweb.com)

In the proclaimed values of Canadian multiculturalism, it is assumed that women are at par with men and hence the rights/privileges/concessions are applicable to both sexes equally. The official policy takes care of the public domain leaving the private sphere to the discretion of the group itself. The views expressed by many scholars also reinforce this stand. The crux of their writings portrays multiculturalism as advocating equality of cultures in a democracy, entitling equal status to all cultural communities in the public domain. That is, while granting group rights, equal status is assumed among all members irrespective of gender. However, in reality the situation is different as women in minority groups face the same discrimination and marginalisation that is experienced in many patriarchal societies. Are the so called progressive societies of the West, which have proclaimed multiculturalism as official policy, male biased? Are they ignorant or indifferent to the injustices or even atrocities faced by women of minority groups? Is the sanctioning of group rights a guarantee to the protection of rights of all members in an equal manner? How far is the "idea of inclusion", central to the Canadian official multicultural policy, justifiable?

Granting group rights to cultural minorities often contributes to the subordination and oppression of their female members. Traditional elites use state sanctioned authority to perpetuate the group's inegalitarian cultural practices and stifle reform efforts geared towards the emancipation and empowerment of female members. (Susan Moller Okin, "Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women" in Joshua Cohen, Matthew Howard and Martha C Nussbaum (Eds), *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women: Susan Moller Okin with Respondents*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999) Ayelet Shachar (*Multicultural Jurisdictions: Cultural differences and Women's Rights*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) refers to this phenomenon as the "paradox of multicultural vulnerability", a situation where "well-meaning accommodation by the state leaves members of minority groups vulnerable to severe injustice within the group and may in effect work to reinforce some of the most hierarchical elements of a culture".

Multiculturalists devote little attention to sources of gender inequality and domination in the private sphere. Women in certain cultural groups, through a combination of socialisation and social pressure, are conditioned to accept their own oppression and a life where they do not enjoy the same opportunities, freedoms and overall sense of wellbeing as men. Examples include pressurising young women to accept arranged marriages, socialising them to believe in their subordinate position in the gender hierarchy, encouraging them to be docile and subservient in the presence of men and discouraging them from pursuing opportunities and roles traditionally reserved for men. Such practices not only perpetuate inequalities in the private sphere, but

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drastically restrict women's access to the resources, opportunities and social supports necessary to achieve equality in the public sphere. The issues of gender discrimination and oppression should be considered before the final decision on granting minority rights is made. Minority rights should be subject to a negotiation process that involves women as equal and active participants alongside the traditional male powerbrokers in their communities—a process that would help ensure that women's interests and wellbeing are not compromised if or when those rights are eventually granted.

Multiculturalism as a term is used in one of three distinct senses—as a description of the state of cultural diversity in a society, as an ideology aimed at legitimising the incorporation of ethnic diversity in the general structure of society or as public policy designed to create national unity in ethnic diversity. (Evelyn Kallen, "Multiculturalism: Ideology, Policy and Reality". *Journal of Canadian Studies*, vol17, no1, 1982, pp51–62) Underlying this policy is the ideal that personal dignity or honour, a fundamental value in a democracy, is closely bound with the collective dignity of a person's ethnic or cultural community. (Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994) A working definition of multiculturalism in Canada is exemplified by the policy of legally recognising and protecting the rights of diverse racial and ethnic minorities for preserving their cultural identities and ways of life. When the underlying function of multiculturalism is to preserve minority cultures, what happens when the values of these minority cultures are not in congruence with gender equality? The policy of multiculturalism places too much emphasis on group rights with little focus on women's rights and issues concerning gender equality.

In the summer of 2004, the Ontario Arbitration Act 1991 came into the news when members of the Islamic community sought to have Islamic law officially recognised under the act. A newsletter published by the Canadian Council of Muslim Women stated, "The issues of religious laws in public law, the jeopardy to women's equality rights, the use/abuse of multiculturalism and the argument of religious freedom have arisen because the Ontario Arbitration Act allows for private, legally binding arbitration agreements, using religious laws". The orthodox Jewish Rabbinical court, Beth-Din and the Roman Catholic court are currently recognised under the Arbitration Act. However, the extension of the act to include Islamic law has been met by a lengthy and emotionally charged debate, both within and outside the Muslim community. Although Islamic tribunals already exist in Ontario and across Canada, recognition under the act would require Ontario law to sanction the principles and practices of Islamic law. The case study of Islamic law and the Arbitration Act provides insight into how the policy of multiculturalism conflicts with women's access to the charter of rights and therefore as equal citizens in the country. (Council on American–Islamic Relations Canada, *Review of Ontario's Arbitration Process and Arbitration Act: Written Submission to Marion Boyd*, 10 August 2004)

The number of women migrants has slowly increased over time and in some "developed" countries their numbers equal those of men. Discrimination on the basis of sex is not uncommon. The way a state reconciles group rights with women's

rights when discrepancies arise is a genuine concern which needs further analysis. Gender inequality manifests in groups through existing cultural practices such as unequal access to educational opportunities, healthcare, ownership rights and political participation. It is imperative to devise mechanisms/procedures to deal with complex situations of conflict between group rights and women's rights. In discussing the impact of multiculturalism on women it is important to highlight the women most likely to be impacted by multicultural policies in Canada. Immigrant women as a group are a particularly vulnerable minority. They face disadvantages that make them less independent than their male counterparts and therefore more reliant on family for support. Difficulties with the native language, poor education and reproductive responsibilities compose a picture that results in their isolation from the broader society. Difficulty with the English or French language also makes it challenging for these women to understand their rights under Canadian law. (Harry H Hiller, *Canadian Society: A Macro Analysis*, Toronto: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2006)

The multiculturalism policy also enhances the diverse cultural and religious values of the Canadian citizenry and because of this it is necessary to locate the role of women in culture. According to Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias,

(cited in Sacha Ludgate, *The Compromise of Canadian Multiculturalism Policy: Group Rights versus Women's Rights*, 2007, online at https://www.sfu.ca) women participate in ethnic processes in five key ways—as biological reproducers; as reproducers of the boundaries between ethnic and national groups; as transmitters of culture; as symbolic signifiers of ethnic and national differences and as participants in the political struggle of their particular group. In these ways women are typically expected to contribute to the preservation of their group's culture and identity. Okin (*ibid*) asserts that religious and cultural groups are particularly concerned with "personal laws"—the laws of marriage, divorce, child custody, division and control of family property and inheritance. As a rule, the defence of "cultural practices" is likely to have a much greater impact on the lives of women and girls than on those of men and boys, since far more of a woman's time and energy goes into preserving and maintaining the personal, familial and reproductive side of life.

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Malaysia has often been described as a plural society composed of three large ethnic groups, Malays, Chinese and Indians. The discourse of "multiculturalism", so evident in Australia, Canada, the UK and the US, is considerably less prominent in Malaysia. The government has pursued what may be termed "pro-Malay" policies and there is little doubt that ethnic categories remain significant in daily and institutional life. However, at the same time Malaysia has produced a plan for the resolution of the problems of inequality and ethnic differences without recourse to a discourse on multiculturalism. This has been possible as historically the character of Malaysian society has always been multicultural. Pakistan is a plural society in terms of both ethnicity and religion. The pluralist character of society draws upon the existence of four historical ethno-linguistic communities—Punjabi, Sindhi, Pakhtun and Baluch. Religious pluralism is characterised by the presence of two major minority groups, the Christians and Hindus, followed by the Ahmadis and several miniscule groups such as Buddhists, Parsis and Sikhs, all together accounting for 3.54 per cent of the population, whereas 96.46 per cent of the population is Muslim. Although officially Pakistan is an Islamic state, its society is multicultural but even the Muslim majority is divided into Sunni and Shiite denominations.

THE INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

Multiculturalism rather than being a concept imported from the West is very much Indian. The fact that the Indian constitution includes provisions for minority protection under Articles 29 and 30 is a reflection of the liberal concerns of the multiculturalism of the West intensely debated over the decades. (Amir Ali, "Case for Multiculturalism in India", *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol35, nos28–29, 2000, pp2503–5) The Indian constitution ensures that no community is excluded or systematically disadvantaged in the public arena and provides autonomy to each religious community to pursue its own way of life in the private sphere. The Indian constitution and polity operate in such a way as to privilege the aspect of minority protection which falls in the private domain of religious and community practices and to place less emphasis on equal recognition to minority groups in the public sector. It is argued that at the heart of the resolution of many ethnic conflicts in India lies a set of multicultural state policies. The Indian constitution as the source of these policies may be said to be a basic multicultural

document, in the sense that it provides political and institutional measures for the recognition and accommodation of the country's diversity.

India, with a population now well over a billion, is the second most populous country after China and socially and culturally the most diverse nation in the world. Formed many thousands of years ago, as a country receiving immigrants who brought their own cultures and traditions, India's diversity is proverbial. Although predominantly inhabited by "Hindus" (over 82 per cent) who are regionally rooted, plural in belief and practice but divided by caste and language, India's population also includes a large number of Muslims (about 12 per cent), Buddhists, Christians, Jains and Sikhs. Linguistically too, India is diverse and the home of several hundred languages and dialects. Most of the states/regions have some dominant ethno-linguistic and ethno-religious groups, although within each of them there are religious and linguistic minorities. (Harihar Bhattacharyya, "Multiculturalism in Contemporary India", *International Journal on Multicultural Societies*, vol5, no2, 2003, pp148–61)

According to the Indian constitution, the state recognises the identity of many scheduled castes and takes responsibility for accommodating them in an unequal society. Article 46 of the constitution promotes the educational and economic interests of scheduled castes and other articles such as 243D, 243T, 330, 332, 334 and 335 ensure the reservation policy of the government in different spheres for the scheduled castes and backward groups. It is estimated that today over 40 per cent of the population falls within this affirmative action provision. (Frank de Zwart, *The Dilemma of Recognition: Administrative Categories and Cultural Diversity, Theory and Society*, London: Springer, 2005)

Multiculturalism as a state policy has been operative in the growing federalisation of the Indian political system, a process that politically accommodates ethnic identities. In this form, multiculturalism has been conjoined with federalism.

The central government reserves 27 per cent of government jobs and seats in higher education for other backward classes (OBCs). Some states maintain even higher quotas. Scheduled castes and tribes also have their own quotas. The two most influential religious minority groups, Muslims and Sikhs also have their own rights recognised by the state. After the 1984 anti-Sikh riots, the centre agreed to give more government jobs and economic freedom to the Sikh majority state of Punjab. (Darshan S Tatla, "Sikhs in Multicultural Societies", *International Journal on Multicultural Societies*, vol5, no2, 2003, pp177–92)

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of the Indian political system, a process that politically accommodates ethnic identities. In this form, multiculturalism has been conjoined with federalism.

The constitution provides political and institutional recognition and accommodation to India's diversity. In the Indian context, Rajeev Bhargava (Rajeev Bhargava, Amiya Kumar Bagchi and R Sudarshan (Eds), *Multiculturalism, Liberalism and Democracy*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999) has identified three problems with multiculturalism as far as identity is concerned. First, an overemphasis on identity may be exclusive in the sense of excluding people or "others" from an essential identity. Second, encouragement of cultural particularity deepens divisions and undermines the "common foundation for a viable society". Third, it may result in curbing individual freedom by advocating "aggressive community power over individual freedom" and thus corroding the values of liberal democracy. Bhargava (*ibid*) ultimately sees the solution of the problem of identity in India in "democratic multiculturalism" which combines cultural and political communitarianism. On the one hand, it recognises the importance of cultural identity and on the other is committed to bringing the issue into the political domain. The conflicts that result from the differences of identity are to be resolved through dialogue, discussion and negotiation. Democratic multiculturalism entails the role of an effective democratic state, which "intervenes in religious and cultural practices to get rid of oppressive practices" so that the possible subordination of the individual to the authority of the "collectivity" is curbed, if not abolished.

Given that multiculturalism is a reality in almost every nation and that some traditional cultures have historically oppressed women, governments bear the burden of formulating policies that protect women's rights within a multicultural framework. Post-independence India has a strong democratic tradition and a commitment to respecting individual civil and political rights. Due to the sheer diversity of the populace, Indian policymakers face a tough challenge in providing space to various minority groups to prosper while ensuring that the individual rights of its citizens, including women, are upheld. (Jain, *ibid*)

In some states there is reservation in education and employment for women, *dalits*, OBCs and even minorities. There is women's reservation within the existing *dalit* and OBC reservations even in *panchayat* (village council) and *zilla parishad* (district council) elections. This was essential, as in rural areas patriarchy is more pronounced resulting in the greater subjugation of women. In formulating or framing policies such as the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, literacy promotion or any rural development programme, India has always taken care to address the issue of women, especially the rural and disadvantaged, *dalit*,

adivasi, minority and backward classes women. Sustained efforts have been made to make them a part of political and economic development. Although not officially multicultural, India has always attempted to include every section/group of women in its growth trajectory.

CONCLUSION

Granting group rights in an unrestricted fashion protects some cultural practices that have historically oppressed women. Condoning the oppression of some group members by legally protecting those cultural practices is at odds with a liberal rights agenda advocating equal rights for all citizens. There is no doubt that globalisation has profoundly influenced multiculturalism and controversies and disagreements are bound to surround the contours of a multicultural society. In the words of Aung San Suu Kyi, (quoted in Jain, *ibid*) "it is precisely because of the cultural diversity of the world that it is necessary for different nations and peoples to agree on those basic human values which will act as a unifying factor". Multiculturalist notions need to conform to universal human rights, although there is an ongoing dispute about what those are and how they are to be interpreted and enforced, thereby ensuring women's rights within a protected culture or group.

Multiculturalism is a radical idea that considers people in other cultures, foreign and domestic, as moral equals, entitled to equal respect and concern, not to be discounted or treated as subordinate castes. It condemns intolerance of other ways of life, finds the human in what might seem "other" and encourages cultural diversity. However it is especially important to consider the inequalities between the sexes, since they are likely to be less public and thus less easily discernible. Women's human and fundamental rights must be given priority even over group rights. Men are less likely to be required to sacrifice their individual rights to equal treatment in order to preserve or protect the cultural or religious identity of a group. The liberation of women should be in the spirit of the modern world and not a mere "women's issue"—it should be a part of the persistent enforcement of human rights. Women need to have an identity of their own in a minority group as the problems they face are unique, distinct and differ accordingly, depending on the nature and level of the socialisation of the group or community. ⬙