

**Political Ideologies Contexts, Ideas, And Practices**  
**Professor. Arvind Sivaramakrishnan**  
**Department of Humanities and Social Sciences**  
**Indian Institute of Technology Madras**  
**Lecture 11**  
**Multiculturalism**

We need to look at one more form of liberalism, and that is multiculturalism. Now its status as an ideology is not necessarily clear. The term itself has been in widespread use only since the early 1990s or thereabouts. It is been described as an ideological space, rather than an ideology, and that means that it is an area in which the nature of diversity and civic unity or civic commonality are discussed.

But multiculturalism shares a number of features with liberalism and it does so even though there are tensions between multiculturalism and several major ideologies. So, I shall highlight it here rather than in a separate chapter; there is a substantial literature on multiculturalism, and you may have encountered that elsewhere and I will draw on some of that as we proceed. Of course, all societies today, it hardly needs saying, are made up of different cultural inheritances in their own ways.

That is hardly a new state of affairs, and the expanding body of research on languages music, art, archaeology, and other fields shows long histories of cultural complexity and diversity, and for example, much of the grammatical structure of the English language today is a composite of Saxon English, Norman French, and other forms of French - and that is the grammatical structure; the vocabulary of course is taken from all over the world and we use those words and terms and phrases all the time in today's English.

But the earlier forms of the language are unrecognizable when we consider them through the English of our time, whether in vocabulary or grammar; that has been well demonstrated for a long time now. This holds not only for languages but for almost all areas of culture around the world, and we shall see that many of the central issues in multiculturalism raise the wider question of what constitutes culture in the first place.

Multiculturalism as a contemporary political position seems to have started in the United States, with the deepening realization among African-Americans that the end of the United States Civil War might have put an end to official slavery, but that it had certainly not put an end to severe racism and racial discrimination against African-Americans. In the early twentieth century,

several United States states, particularly the southern states, had laws enforcing racial segregation and severe racial discrimination until the federal government passed several laws against that in the early 1960s.

There were campaigners; Marcus Garvey, 1887-1940, was born in Jamaica and he had earlier started a back-to-Africa movement, but the strongest expressions of what was then called black consciousness came from people like Martin Luther King, Elijah Muhammad and his fellow leader Malcolm X. Martin Luther King led a non violent civil rights movement, which inherited a great deal from Gandhi's methods of peaceful, passive, nonviolent resistance but nevertheless resistance.

Elijah Mohammed led the black Muslims, now called Black Nation, for over 40 years, and his fellow leader Malcolm X was the one who said in some sort of meeting of an association that he belonged to, suddenly said, 'Enough is enough. What do we want? Freedom? When do we want it? Now!' And the Black Panther movement and the black power movement got a tremendous boost from that. They took it out into the streets and spoke their minds they were fed up with evasions and euphemisms and fed up with endless committees and procedures. They had had enough.

Well, they had a considerable effect. If I am not mistaken, Malcolm X, was imprisoned, he always said on trumped up charges, and later died in a prison riot, and you'd have to check the details. But the approach as taken by the Black Power movement, and its associated Black Panther Party rejected violence, as did the black Muslims. I beg your pardon, I have to correct that.

Like the Black Power movement and the Black Panther Party in the 1960s, the black Muslims rejected non-violence, they supported more confrontational methods, including a willingness to use arms. It is not an accident, it is worth remembering, that they put the issue on the agenda in the mid-to-late 1960s in a way that that procedural approaches - keeping within the law, keeping within the official structures - had failed to do; and the riots in Watts in Los Angeles in the summer of 1965 showed that United States society would not be the same again. The immediate cause of those was a very confrontational police officer who had provoked confrontations wherever he would go, just because he was a rather confrontational person.

But from then that moment on it was clear that the United States would have to address this issue - the whole issue of racial segregation and racial discrimination. Now it is also worth

noting that, like a lot of other movements around the world, the United States movements asserted forms of cultural or ethnocultural identity as a means of resistance, that is, resistance to often ancient and brutal forms of systematic oppression and racial or cultural subjugation.

This was the case not only in the United States, but in former imperial powers, in the United Kingdom and in France. Assumptions of racial and cultural superiority were widely used and widely shown in the tone and forms of language and in the range and scope of for example, media coverage. Resistance also came from movements like the language based Quebec, language based Québec separatist movements in Canada and the Basque movements in Spain, and ethnonationalist movements such as those of Maoris in New Zealand, and Aboriginal peoples in Australia.

They have [also] had an impact in Canada. Well, it is very obvious, Québécois - and in the written form something closer to Parisian French, is just part of the cultural fabric of the nation and documents, official documents are written in both languages and that is that. In other parts of the world, of course - the Basque movement have recently relatively recently abdicated violent methods; for a time they were very violent.

The Welsh language has had its own impact because of the resistance by the Welsh language movements from the late 60s onwards. They started as, as a violent movement, the Free Wales army, but if I am not mistaken, the, the people involved were, were quickly imprisoned. But today in Wales, you, you get off the train and you find all the signs in Welsh first and English afterwards. Welsh language is part of the fabric of life in Wales, when at a time 40 or so years ago, it looked as though it was dying out. Now, much the same has been recognized in Australia where, where aboriginal claims to land - although land ownership, I understand, is not an aboriginal concept, aboriginal occupation of land has been recognized in a range of ways we don't need to go into the details.

We do not need to do that here. But in the second half of the twentieth century, other forms of multiculturalism arose in the United States and in other Western countries, as they imported relatively large amounts of cheap labour from other parts of the world. Now in the United States, of course, it is in effect apart from Native Americans or First Americans, the United States is an immigrant nation and for a very long time now has readily received substantial numbers of people from other parts of the world.

For example, very poor people from Southern Europe, people escaping racial persecution of Jews in what was then Russia and well, after the Second World War, industrial countries in Western Europe and Scandinavia, imported large amounts of cheap labour from very poor regions of the world, either for post-war reconstruction, or as in the case of the United States, for agricultural work.

As the economy expanded very rapidly, the post-war economies expanded very rapidly. The importation in the case of the United States was from Central and Latin America; it is still a very serious issue. Well, today, it is hard to believe that some of the governments concerned even thought that those they imported who largely came from the poorest classes, even in their own country of origin, would actually go back after a few years.

But this has been documented in the case of the British decision in the early 1950s to import cheap labour from South Asia and from the what was then the British Caribbean. But it is documented that the cultural issues involved and that the permanence of those imported were simply not considered or were largely discounted by the states concerned, the percentages are not great, even though the media are often extremely inflammatory in their coverage. In 2011, about 10 percent of the then British population were of South Asian or African Caribbean descent. So, we're not looking at very substantial proportions at all. Of course, as people in the street now say, 20 percent 40 percent and so, on the usual 'We're being swamped.' Frankly, nonsense. But much of that has to do with inflammatory media coverage and virtually all the media have participated in this, either for headlines or because they have not checked the facts or because in cases they could not be bothered to do so, or because some of them simply were expressing the prejudices of their editors and owners.

Well, in the last quarter of a century or so, there has been a further factor. Industrial countries in particular have experienced significant influxes of refugees as a result of war, and ethnic conflict and other forms of upheaval, some of which have been documentedly exacerbated by foreign intervention. The obvious example for us is the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the legality of which is severely disputed; it was almost certainly illegal.

It has resulted in the desperate outflow of very substantial numbers of people from the Middle East, as, has the intervention in 2011, in Libya, which was intended to cause regime change. Similarly, the well, the war in Syria, was undoubtedly the result of an attempt to cause regime change, even though domestic assemblies such as the United Kingdom parliament have rejected and resisted military intervention.

The continuing civil war in Syria, which has now lasted seven or eight years, has resulted in perhaps 4 four to 6 million displaced people, millions who fled Syria - and my point here is that in recent times, perhaps the last 20 years or so, significant flows of refugees have taken place as a result of foreign intervention whether military or economic reasons.

In South Asia of course, we are familiar with the fact that India took about 8 million refugees from what became Bangladesh in 1971-72, and in the early 1990s, several countries in the Great Lakes region of Africa took a total amounting to over a million people fleeing from genocidal wars, well that is the background.

Now, what about multiculturalism as policy? This dates from the mid 1960s and early 1970s. At that time, Canada and Australia officially started to call themselves multicultural societies. At about that time, public service staff in many industrial countries also started modifying policies and everyday practice, for example, in health care and education, and they came to see that earlier assumptions about uniformity of culture and language were actively causing harm to substantial sections of their societies or preventing the relevant groups from making the best use of public institutions and public services.

This happened in the mid-1960s, when, if I am not mistaken, opinions were divided on the ethnic monitoring of claimants for Social Security and even the limited public health care that was available. Opinions were divided even among African, African-American movements. But the monitoring did, I think monitoring did start, and it showed very significant under-claiming on the part of African-American communities throughout the United States.

Now that led to changes in policy and staff training, in making publicly available information about the services available and so on; this has been done in other parts of the industrial world. Now the point is that these were, you know, these attempts to act on the recognition that the societies involved were now significantly, now had significant elements or significant proportions of people from very different cultures, originally from very different cultures did lead to significantly expanded public debates on, on multiculturalism, and that started in the 90s; and they were intense arguments for and against the very idea of multiculturalism.

Multiculturalist policies are based on the recognition that particular cultural groups may have distinctive needs and that if we adapt policy and practice to such needs, we reduce unjustifiable discrimination and we also show a recognition, even a celebration, of complexity and diversity in

modern societies. This kind of approach has even been extended to the design of countries' constitutions.

That happened in Bosnia-Herzegovina, multiculturalism. Now of course the issue of post coloniality is a vast one and we shall not cover it here. Major writers such as Frantz Fanon on Edward Saeed and others have written famous works on it and among other things. They show the, well, the impact of colonial subjects [Correction - colonial powers] on colonized peoples, and they show that this impact has been immense it permeates the consciousness of colonized and formerly colonized peoples, in language, expression, manner, reactions to encounters with, with the peoples of former colonial cultures and so on.

Contemporary novelists such as Salman Rushdie have included acerbic, acidic, passages on colonial and postcolonial encounters and relationships. Well, what we need to note here is that claims to the public recognition of diversity and demands for the redress of past collective harm have been strongly justified and have often resulted in substantial changes in law, policy, and public institutions.

But the issues raised by the idea of multiculturalism can be almost intractable or insoluble. There have been successes. For example, the 1944 Education Act in England and Wales - there was no doubt a corresponding act for Scotland - required that public sector education institutions have an act of Christian worship every day.

Now when the Education Act was significantly amended in 1988, this provision was modified to recognize the very great cultural and religious diversity of the United Kingdom as it then stood, and if I am not mistaken, the act was rephrased to require a broadly Christian act of worship, if I am not mistaken, but public sector education institutions could apply for exemptions, if their student composition or pupil composition would justify that, and I can recall teaching in a public-sector plus-two college for many years, and one day because I had a key the that would open almost every door in the college - not many of us did, I happen to have been issued it perfectly correctly - group students asked me, came to my office. I think I have met them at the door just by chance at lunchtime.

It was a Friday and they asked if I would open a neighbouring classroom which was empty, because they were planning to hold their Friday Namaz in there. So I said, 'Yes, of course I will; who's your Imam?', and one of them was acting as the Imam for that occasion/. I opened the door and let them in of course you know, they carried on.

Nothing unusual, we were very much a public sector college, we had a very diverse intake, and it was hardly surprising that people wanted to, to observe their particular religious practice in the way it required - no great issue. And I, you know when I opened the door I thought, yes, this is the, the 1988 Education Act at work; a lot of us in education has had issues, other issues with the 88 Act, but we certainly were not worried about this part of it, and this kind of acceptance is now fairly widespread in the industrial world. It is often specified in constitutions or constitutional provisions which already existed have been developed in the light of this.

But the issue is that the wider issues raised by the idea of multiculturalism can be, as I said, almost intractable or insoluble. For example, liberalism requires that we tolerate diversity, but that we cannot accept cultures or subcultures in which individual rights are violated. Now, for example, the United Kingdom accepts the jurisdiction of Jewish civil tribunals, which are called I think Beth Din, and Islamic Sharia councils in respect of family disputes, because in English law, that is the one I am thinking of, particularly in English law, the parties in a civil dispute can refer the matter to an agreed third party. As long as the process is agreed and the outcome is reasonable, the decision the decision itself really does not have to be based on English law.

It can be based on other systems of law, provided the processes is agreed and the outcome is reasonable. Now, the Beth Din jurisdiction was approved by an Act of Parliament in the nineteenth century. As it happens, Sharia domestic councils in the United Kingdom seem to adjudicate more on divorce than on anything else, and 90 percent of the divorce cases they hear are initiated by women.

That is consistent with divorce proceedings, all over the world. Women initiate these to a far greater extent than men, and that is the kind of issue we will come to later on in our topic on feminism, we are likely to encounter that one again. But problems over cultural identity arise when particular practices violate existing rights, particularly under liberal, liberal or liberal-democratic systems of law.

These could occur under other systems such as republican-socialist systems. But we are looking here at conflicts between particular cultural practices and liberal or liberal-democratic systems of law. For example, the British foreign ministry, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, has a unit dedicated to assisting British residents or citizens, British citizens or I should say subjects of the crown, who are victims of forced marriages, not arranged marriages freely

entered into by both partners - those are recognized in the law of the United Kingdom and had been for a long time.

Another issue over which the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has a dedicated unit. I beg your pardon. I will correct that and I will pause there, so I can do this in editing. The foreign ministry in the UK, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, has a unit dedicated to assisting British residents or citizens who are victims of forced marriages, not freely arranged marriages, but forced marriages.

They, they have these offices and units in many parts of the world and some of them have been very active in other countries in assisting not just British citizens, but British subjects who have been involved in forced marriages in their own countries, sometimes by deceit, and have therefore, in one or two cases, been held captive by their families, when they were settled in the United Kingdom had rights of residence, and we are even working there.

Now, in the UK, the practice of female genital mutilation is a cultural practice. It is been a criminal offence since 1985. It is also a criminal offence for British nationals - now all British residents - to participate, participate in or assist in female genital mutilation outside the United Kingdom. That is a very interesting point there. So, the UK jurisdiction would extend to British residents or British citizens participating in an illegal practice in English law - I say in English law, specifically there is corresponding law in Scotland - even if they are outside UK jurisdiction. So, the criminal liability obtains, even outside UK jurisdiction, if UK residents or British citizens participate in such practices, and British public service staff in health care or teaching have a legal duty now to report the offence if young people under 18 are the victims.

We have to note, of course, that the current Conservative government is yet to implement a section of the Equality Act 2010 which would enable a minister to declare caste discrimination an offence under the Act. That is yet to happen. It has been raised from time to time, for example, in the House of Lords in, I think, 2009 or thereabouts. But no further action has resulted since then. But there are more problems over cultural identity, not just the violation by particular cultural practices of existing rights in a liberal or liberal, liberal democratic society.

But this further problem is, what does it actually mean to belong - what's involved in belonging to a particular group, and do members have significant authority to declare themselves not bound by the any particular groups ways over particular issues? This in turn raises wider questions of who in a group has the authority or power to decide who does and who does not



belong and why. The point is that there is no avoiding questions of the substance and content of the rights claimed, or the cultural practices which are at issue, and uncritical separation of faith and the state is of no help here.

Because in practice that closes down discussion and does not create a space in which the relation between faith or traditional cultural practices irrespective of faith, and the state can be reasonably articulated and addressed. The point is that a very hard separation between faith and the state closes down discussion and does not open up or create a space in which the relation between faith or cultural practices and the state can be articulated and discussed the results well, the results can be extremely troublesome and problematic.

Much of the current debate in European countries about possible bans on the Hijab have excluded for example, European women who happened to be Muslims from any serious exploration and exploration, and expression of what equality, citizenship and faith might mean to them.

That can hardly be what we mean if we are liberals and we advocate Cultural Rights, in effect, as it has been pointed out in France, French citizens who happened to be Muslim women seem to have gone unnoticed in the argument about the hijab, about wearing the veil in public or in public services or in public institutions and so on.

That is been documented my source here is someone called Kennedy who wrote a paper on this. Now, other major ideologies have also had their problems over multiculturalism, conservatism, unsurprisingly is one of the ideologies most incompatible with it. Because according to conservatism, shared values and shared practices and traditions are part of a shared history, and they form a national identity.

For most conservative thinkers, nationalism overrides or takes priority over multiculturalism precisely because of the extent to which shared cultural assumptions, a shared cultural history, shared practices are part and parcel of a conservative outlook on life and a conservative outlook on what makes a cultural practice a nation and so on. Now it is further the case that any a countercultural multiculturalism faces a problem over inequalities of power and status that is structural inequalities.

A great deal of work on multiculturalism rather neglects this. It is the case that advocates of multiculturalism have often sought recognition, advancement or redress through the assertion of cultural or ethnic identity. But that in turn opens the possibility that practices such as child

marriage, could at least in theory be justified as being central to any given culture and that shows another significant area that multiculturalism seems to have neglected and that is the question of what constitutes a culture in the first place.

Any serious examination that will of course, very quickly show us the complexity and variety of almost any culture on the planet and the mutability of any and all cultures. It is a very uncomfortable space to be in but it is the space we are in any way and that emerges when we examine multiculturalism closely.

Well for example, the Salmeen and Tarik Mahdood have pointed out that what they call interculturalism has to be a political discourse, if it is to enable us to express and address the wide range of concerns, which inevitably arise, because our identities are complex, as are the areas in respect of which we significantly and you know, are equally and significantly different.

We are equal in significantly different in, in an enormous number of ways. But, the fact is that our identities are equally complex, uncertain, often mutable, think of the arguments around gender cell fascination or sexual or self or the self description of sexual orientation today. These are current issues rightly so, and getting attention which they, of course, should have. But think of the ways in which we no longer readily accept assigned identities over things like sexual orientation or gender self or gender identification and so on.

Now, in effect, what multiculturalism shows us if we take it seriously, is that all cultures are continuing conversations. That is a point I take from Bhikhu Parekh who wrote about this in the late 1990s. That means that all cultures are involved in so to speak, exchanges with their own inheritances, and those other cultures. However different those others might seem to be and we find archaeological and other evidence of cultural influences all over the world, like dating back even thousands of years, nothing unusual.

Humans have always exchanged languages, ideas, currency, trade, knowledge and so on. We do not need to spend too much time on this here. But the work of Aristotle was rescued by a Roman general, if I am not mistaken, called Sulla, when Sulla's soldiers might have burnt the books. Sulla recognized he was quite a scholar himself, that he was reading the work of a great philosopher and took it back to Rome with him.

But something like 1000 years later, perhaps just under a 1000 years later, in Moorish Spain, at least one scholar I think it was Ibn Rushd recognize that the work of Aristotle was that of a great philosopher translated it into Latin because very few people at that time had classical Greek and

return made the work therefore available in Europe where the literal people had Latin a similar project was undertaken by a Persian philosopher I think it was Ibn Sina I cannot remember which was version which was which was moreish.

But they both in effect returned the work to it's to its cultural home. But they recognize the great philosopher where they saw one and this is, there's nothing unusual about this works have been. It is not just works but cultures, food habits, trading food, trading textiles, has continued as far as we know as long as humans have existed and therefore the very idea of cultures as walled off as self and closed cells of some kind is ultimately the incoherent and untenable.

But what does that require of us? It does mean that we have to engage with the substance of cultures we encounter and for liberal political philosophy for liberal ideology, that does mean having to find a response to cultures and practices where the fundamental precepts of liberalism are violated. This is not straightforward and in practice, liberal democracies have usually made it clear that existing rights must not be infringed by cultural practices of any kind.

It does not matter whose culture they are, they must not be infringed. This issue has arisen, as a result, I will just give you an example of a lecture given to senior lawyers, barristers, courtroom lawyers in England by the then archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, now Dr. Williams pointed out that if I am not mistaken, he pointed out that the Jewish domestic tribunal the family tribunal has long had legal recognition in, in the United Kingdom and Dr. Williams expected that Sharia law or aspects of Sharia law would be formally recognized before too long.

Now, inevitably, the press I would say badly misreported Dr. Williams and grossly exaggerated the likely consequences of what he would said. What the press coverage seemed not to say at the time, was that Sharia law was already a perfectly good and valid procedure for the settlement of certain kinds of family disputes and had already been in use for quite a long time. It was perfectly consistent in these uses with existing English law.

Right and by implication, Scotts law as well by implication, but the point is that existing rights in English law or Scotts law were not to be not to be violated. Now that is one kind of liberal response liberalism can accommodate. It has to accommodate plurality and diversity, but it cannot accept the violation of fundamental liberal principles. We shall see an example of that as we proceed.