

Multiculturalism: A Very Short Introduction

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Rattansi, Ali (2011). *Multiculturalism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press. Price: USD 11.95; Pages 184; ISBN: 9780199546039.

Ali Rattansi has been educated at the Universities of Manchester and Cambridge. He has written many books including *Race, Culture and Racism* (1992); *Racism, modernity, and Identity* (1994) and *Racism: A very short introduction* (2007). He is a visiting Professor of Sociology at City University, London.

Multiculturalism is a body of thought in political philosophy about the proper way to respond to cultural and religious diversity. Multiculturalism has been used as an umbrella term to characterize the moral and political claims of wide range of disadvantaged groups, including African Americans, women, gays, lesbians, and disabled. Most theories of multiculturalism tend to focus their arguments on immigrants who are ethnic and religious minorities, minority nations and indigenous people.

Ali Rattansi explores the contemporary debate surrounding multiculturalism that spans from national identity to social cohesion and from cultural fragmentation to political correctness. Through this book he is raising some important questions surrounding multiculturalism and through the deliberations on these questions he is trying to explain the concept of multiculturalism and its relevance to the readers. The questions that he poses at the very beginning of the book are Has multiculturalism failed? Is it time to move on? And if so, what is the alternative?

The book comprises five chapters. The first chapter deals with what basically multiculturalism is and deliberates on the origin of the concept of multiculturalism. Is multiculturalism bad for woman is the question raised in chapter two. Chapter three explores the issue of ghettos created by multiculturalism. Chapter four and five deals with integration, cohesion and national identity.

The first chapter builds the origin of the concept of multiculturalism in the context of cultural diversity in different countries such as Canada and Australia. In

this chapter more or less the author tries to explain group rights and individual rights under the umbrella of multiculturalism. He argues that there is always contradiction between group rights and individual rights. But he strongly mention that group rights have no rights over individual members. He argues that supposedly traditional cultural practices cannot be allowed to override to considerations essential to human rights and ability of members of any ethnic group to dissent from the supposed cultural traditions of their ethnic groups. He also emphasizes policies to be more effective for reducing ethnic disadvantages.

In second chapter, the author explores whether multiculturalism is bad for women? To answer the question, the author puts forward the point that multiculturalism is clearly bad for women if multiculturalism involves support for the survival of ethnic minority cultures and their traditions i.e., disadvantage women. For example, forced marriages and honour killing still exist in the society. Similarly, in July 2008, France denied citizenship to a burka wearing woman of Moroccan origin on the ground of her radical practice of Islam. This French decision raise a number of crucial issues that go to the heart of debates about the relationships between women, multiculturalism, national identity and religion-especially Islam.

The author puts forward the argument that, women should not be disadvantaged by their gender; they should be recognized as having human dignity equally with men, and the opportunity to live as fulfilling and as freely chosen lives as men can. The author cites Okin (1999) to argue his point. According to Okin, "Multiculturalism is harder to pin down - the minority culture, or ways of life are not sufficiently protected by ensuring the individual rights as member of group but they should have special rights".

In the third chapter the author stated that none of the reports into 2001 disturbances blame multiculturalism

for the events or underlying social factors that led to division and hostility between communities. And they certainly do not use the term "ghetto" to describe the ethnic 'clustering'. The author also describes the concept of 'integration' and argues that integration remains as a dominant theme in the new alternatives to multiculturalism. It emphasizes the need to assess its appropriateness to the issues such as the multiethnic issue faced by the European nation states. For example, in France and Netherlands and elsewhere, the idea of 'integration' and 'common values' to unite minorities and the majorities have also come to form the centerpiece of new citizenship policies.

In the fourth Chapter, 'The pitfalls of integration' the author explains that the key problems in ethnic relations are the failure on the part of minorities to 'integrate' into the European society into which they have migrated. According to Rattansi this is the central motto of the new approach (i.e. integration) that is replacing multiculturalism.

In chapter five, the author raises the question that if 'integration' or the British idea of 'community cohesion' is replacing multiculturalism in Europe, then integration into exactly what? Or cohesion based on precisely what? This idea is bound up with the idea of national identity. Integration and cohesion have always implied that minorities and new immigrants need to abide by and take pride in whatever considered to be the core, the defining essence of the particular nation into which they have been the privilege of entry and eventually fall membership. It is the Muslims who have become the target for the program of community cohesion and integration in Britain and the rest of Europe as identities of all British especially those of its ethnic minorities are complex, unstable and shifting.

The author argues that seeing the European nation states, it seems multiculturalism is over. Thus the question he raises is whether multiculturalism has failed? As regarded by governments, intellectuals and large sections of the national population as either disastrous or at least a serious wrong turn in the response to immigration by non-white populations usually from former colonies to the European powers in the period

after 1945 at the end of second world war.

The author further enquires whether this is the whole story? The author has mentioned that though there are certain flaws of multiculturalism, it is not necessarily lead to the conclusion that multiculturalism has been a disaster or even a major mistake.

Western European nation states, the emergence of post-and the restructuring of the welfare state-and the multicultural policies that developed in response to immigrants have influenced the overall national cultural fragmentation and national identity.

Despite all cultural-wars, in USA the general principles are embedded especially in education and national narrative. In UK and else where in Western Europe, all public media has been dominated by those who wish to have multiculturalism. In Europe, policy and ideological shift has taken place but it has not always moved away from multiculturalism. It is rather transformation beyond multiculturalism which might be called 'interculturalism'. For Rattansi, it is a transformation beyond multiculturalism which is called interculturalism.

Multiculturalism is important for understanding a changing reality at national and international levels. Multiculturalism used in such a normative sense, refers to an ideology that attaches positive value to cultural diversity, calls for equal recognition of different cultural groups and calls upon the state to support such groups in various ways. "We are all multiculturalist now", Nathan Glazer declared with characteristic bluntness and authority in 1997. Multiculturalism of course has had bad press in recent years, but the charges against multiculturalism as set out in public debate are either misguided or exaggerated when set against evidence garnered by social scientists and from government inquiries. The various chapters in this book identify what multiculturalism actually means assess the complaints against multiculturalism. Anyone interested in understanding culture might find this book very useful.

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