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Q1(b)

Write a note on the relation between equality and liberty from the multi-cultural perspective

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2025 · PSIR GS 1 · 10 marks · Political Theory

Political Theory: meaning and approaches.

Core demand of the question

- State how equality and liberty are classically paired and how they can clash
- **Show what a multicultural perspective adds:** group rights, recognition, and difference
- Name **Kymlicka**, **Taylor**, **Parekh**, and **Berlin**
- Reach a balanced relation rather than a slogan

Revision summary

Liberty is non-arbitrary space of action; equality is the claim that this space belongs to every person.

Mill and **Berlin** warn that liberty can be crushed in the name of a single real self or a uniform good.

Taylor, **Kymlicka**, and **Parekh** show that recognition and group-differentiated rights can be liberal tools in diverse societies.

Uniform rules may still silence minorities; group vetoes may still silence women and dissenters inside a community.

The Indian Constitution already pairs equal citizenship with cultural rights, which is the practical form of this relation.

Introduction

Liberty is the space in which a person may act without arbitrary interference. Equality is the claim that that space, and the dignity that attends it, is not the privilege of one rank, faith, or culture. A multicultural society tests the pair because cultures are not identical, and because a uniform rule can still silence a minority.

Body

The classical tension

John Stuart Mill defended liberty of thought and lifestyle so long as harm to others was not done. **Isaiah Berlin** later distinguished negative liberty from positive liberty and warned that a single "real self" can license oppression. Equality, in the liberal canon of **Locke** and **Rawls**, is first moral equality: persons as free and equal, entitled to the same basic liberties. Socio-economic equality then enters as fair opportunity or as **Rawls**'s difference principle.

The clash is familiar. A uniform language or civil code can look like equal citizenship and still silence a minority. Group vetoes can freeze women and dissenters inside "tradition". **Susan**

Moller Okin asked whether multiculturalism is bad for women, which belongs inside this note.

What multiculturalism changes

Charles Taylor argued that equal dignity also requires recognition of a culture's worth. **Will Kymlicka** defended group-differentiated rights - language, land, self-government - as liberal protections of autonomy in a cultural context. **Bhikhu Parekh** insisted that public values in a diverse polity must be dialogically forged, not exported from one Enlightenment.

Liberty is then not only the abstract individual against the state. It is also a Sikh's turban, personal law within constitutional limits, and tribal land and language. Equality is equal standing, not sameness of lifestyle. The Indian Constitution already pairs **Articles 14** to 18 with **Articles 25** to 30 and the Fifth and Sixth Schedules. Multicultural theory names that design rather than treating it as an exception to "real" liberalism.

Flow diagram

Liberty -> Individual non-interference
Equality -> Equal standing
Multiculturalism -> Group rights and recognition
Group rights and recognition -> Liberty
Group rights and recognition -> Equality
Group rights and recognition -> Internal minorities

Conclusion

Equality and liberty remain twins, but multiculturalism refuses to treat them as identical uniforms. Group-differentiated rights and recognition can secure liberty for minorities; they must not cancel the equal liberty of members inside the group. The relation is a constitutional conversation, of the kind **Taylor**, **Kymlicka**, and **Parekh** describe, not a choice of one value against the other.

Facts & figures

Berlin

Negative liberty is non-interference; positive liberty as self-mastery can be twisted into rule by those who claim to know the real self.

Kymlicka

Group-differentiated rights for national minorities and some immigrant accommodations are defended as protecting individual autonomy in a cultural context.

Taylor

The politics of recognition treats misrecognition as a harm to identity, not only as a shortage of identical legal rights.

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