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Q6(b)

How does a multicultural society accommodate diversities of all kinds-ethnic, linguistic, and religious? Discuss its major challenges

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2024 · Sociology GS 1 · 20 marks · Religion and Society

Religion and Society: Sociological theories of religion; Types of religious practices: animism, monism, pluralism, sects, cults; Religion in modern society: religion and science, secularization, religious revivalism, fundamentalism.

Core demand of the question

- Define multiculturalism as institutional and everyday accommodation of ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity
- **Discuss how such a society accommodates difference:** law, federalism, civil society, everyday civility
- **Discuss major challenges:** majoritarianism, segregation, inequality and weak common citizenship

Revision summary

Multiculturalism is public recognition of ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity.

Accommodation uses constitutions, federalism, language policy and civil mixing.

India is a principal case of pluralism inside a democratic republic.

Challenges include majoritarianism, communal violence and segregated everyday life.

Inequality that maps onto community turns culture into conflict.

Group rights can clash with gender justice and with a common civic status.

Introduction

A multicultural society is one in which several ethnic, linguistic and religious communities live under one political order and claim public recognition, not only private worship. Accommodation means more than tolerance in the home. It means rules, resources and everyday habits that let diversity persist without civil war. The major challenges are those that turn diversity into hierarchy or into separate warring publics.

Body

How accommodation works

Bhikhu Parekh and Will Kymlicka have argued that liberal states can grant **group-differentiated rights**, such as language in schools or personal law in limited fields, while keeping a common citizenship. India is a major laboratory. The Constitution recognises linguistic states, minority educational rights, and freedom of religion. Federalism and the Official Languages framework try to accommodate language. Personal laws and, in a different way, the debate over a uniform civil code show the tension between community and equal

citizenship. Everyday multiculturalism, as studied in cities, includes markets, schools and neighbourhoods where people deal across difference without becoming one culture.

Accommodation also needs a civil society that is not only communal. Inter-caste and inter-faith associations, a relatively independent press, and public universities have been sites of mixing. T. K. Oommen and others have written on pluralism in India as a historical pattern, not a recent import of a Canadian slogan. The nation-state still supplies a civic umbrella: vote, law and public employment.

Major challenges

Majoritarianism treats the largest religious or linguistic group as the owner of the nation and others as guests. That logic weakens accommodation. Segregation in housing, schools and marriage can produce what some writers call living separately under one flag. Economic inequality, when it maps onto ethnicity or religion, turns cultural difference into class conflict. Communal violence and riots destroy trust that law alone cannot quickly rebuild. A weak common civic culture leaves only community bosses as spokesmen. Feminists have criticised multicultural accommodation when it shelters patriarchal personal laws. **Ambedkar's** warning about caste shows that diversity is not only a bouquet of equal cultures. Some differences are structures of oppression.

Global migration has made Western states face similar tests of language, religion and race. The Indian case adds caste and a civilisation of many traditions inside one republic. Successful accommodation is therefore a daily political and educational labour, not a once-and-for-all settlement.

Flow diagram

Multicultural society -> Rights federalism language
Multicultural society -> Everyday mixing
Multicultural society -> Challenges
Challenges -> Majoritarianism
Challenges -> Segregation and inequality

Conclusion

Multicultural societies accommodate ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity through law, federal arrangements, rights and everyday mixing. The major challenges are **majoritarianism**, segregation, mapped inequality and a thin civic bond. Diversity survives when equal citizenship is strong enough to hold difference without ranking it.

Facts & figures

Group-differentiated rights

Kymlicka's term for rights that attach to cultural communities, such as language, alongside individual citizenship.

Linguistic federalism in India

States reorganised around language as a major device of political accommodation.

Majoritarianism

The claim that the numerical majority owns the nation, which undercuts equal membership of minorities.

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