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Feminist discontents against multiculturalism: The need for critical multiculturalism

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	Multiculturalism and feminism both contest the undifferentiated notion of liberal democracy and its overemphasis on individual rights; however, the latter does not conform with the special group rights advocated by multiculturalism. This article explores the tension between the feminist idea of gender equality and the group-specific rights endorsed by multiculturalism. The claim of group-specific rights in multiculturalism does not consider internal gender inequalities. Hence, the article critically analyzes some cultural practices to demonstrate how culture is gendered and how multicultural advocacy of group-specific rights is insensitive to gender discrimination within cultural groups. It employs an integrative literature review as a methodology to assess the theory of multiculturalism and draws a feminist perspective to suggest a critical model of multiculturalism. It is concluded that multiculturalism is not sufficient to combat patriarchal repression embodied in the cultural groups. Thus, the article further seeks to forge a form of multiculturalism that is critical to its own shortcomings and is ready to accommodate gender equality.

Introduction

Social and political hierarchies that existed in pre-modern society were challenged by the notion of equal dignity (Taylor, 1994). The concept that every human individual is equal in terms of dignity embraces a vital necessity of an individual's recognition in society, giving rise to liberal democracy.

Liberal democracies have followed social liberalism since the late 1940s and believed in the regnant theory of citizenship. In liberal democracies, the notion of citizenship holds that "in public life all members of these Western democracies have equal status and therefore possess equal rights" (McKerl, 2007: 189). Nonetheless, it leads to the homogenization of cultural groups assuming a common national culture in which every citizen participates equally. While anticipating every individual as an equal citizen, liberal democracy fails to consider other categories such as race, religion, gender, and class. It rather underemphasizes these categories in which citizens are unequal in society. Thus, this universalist notion of liberal democracy is critiqued by multiculturalism and feminism.

Multiculturalism, an ideology that emerged in the 1960s, is associated with the 'politics of recognition, identity politics and the politics of difference' (Taylor 1994, Gutmann 2003, Young 1990). It stands against liberal democracy for its homogenizing tendency, which does not recognize cultural diversity. Multiculturalism believes in equal respect between 'national' and group-specific cultures; hence, it denigrates the dominant culture's intolerance of other ways of life. Multiculturalism further advocates for cultural diversity and the rights of the collective. Similarly, the women's rights movement during the 1960s and 1970s fought against sex-based discrimination and condemned settled patriarchal practices. It denounces structuralviolence against women embedded in patriarchal practices. It is hence believed that the undifferentiated logic of liberalism cannot really do justice and provide equality to women within the existing oppressive societal structures.

Multiculturalism and feminism both contest the undifferentiated notion of liberal democracy and its overemphasis on individual rights; however, the latter does not entirely agree with the special group rights advocated by multiculturalism. This article explores the tension between the feminist idea of gender equality and the group rights endorsed by multiculturalism. It further analyzes how culture is gendered and how multiculturalism is insensitive to gender discrimination within cultural groups. It seeks to forge a form of multiculturalism that is critical to its own shortcomings, which can accommodate gender equality.

The development of multiculturalism and feminism is associated with equal dignity. Charles Taylor discusses two historical changes that have given rise to equal dignity and distinct identity. The first is the collapse of hierarchical society, where the idea of honor is tied to 'inequalities' in the ancient sense (Taylor, 1994). It creates a hierarchy between classes. Nevertheless, the notion of honor was later replaced by the modern concept of dignity, "emphasizing the equal dignity of all citizens, and the content of this politics has been the equalization of rights and entitlements" (Taylor, 1994: 37). The idea of universal dignity disrupts the inegalitarian notion of honor and gives rise to the politics of equal rights and recognition. Multiculturalism and feminism hinge upon the concept of equal dignity, where the former refers to cultural equality and the latter to gender.

On the other hand, multiculturalism and feminism are closely associated with human rights. The struggle of indigenous people and national minorities based on the idea of human equality lays the foundation

for the formation of the United Nations. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948 "marked a major symbolic reversal for racist ideologies and a global political rebuff for movements that championed racist policies" (Rattansi, 2011: 15). The Western allies' defeat of Hitler's Germany and Nazism was a victory over racism and ethnic nationality. The UDHR, thus, commenced a new era dissociating itself from the pre-World War II society, which was dominated by the idea of racial, ethnic, and national superiority over marginalized communities. Further, the sustained struggle of cultural minority groups, including immigrants from former colonies and civil rights movements during the 1960s, contributed substantially to strengthening human rights claims and the emergence of multiculturalism and feminism.

Our understanding of multiculturalism is primarily informed by how we comprehend culture. Thus, it is essential to define culture before discussing what multiculturalism is. Culture, in a broader sense, is cumulative of what we do, and what we think. Michael Ryan defines culture from a practical perspective as "everything from how we dress to what we eat, from how we speak to what we think" (Ryan, 2010: viii). It is a group-specific characteristic that entails language, food, music, clothing, religion, rituals, arts, and social patterns. Clifford Gertz views culture as "essentially a semiotic one" (Geertz, 2017: 5). It is comprised of complex signs that give meaning to life. Will Kymlicka equates culture to language groups, ethnic groups, and ethnonational groups (Kymlicka, 1995). It tends to exclude other social categories like race and gender. However, this article follows the broader definition of culture, which encompasses all social categories like race, religion, gender, ethnicity, and language of a specific group that produces meaning and identity for its members.

Multiculturalism is defined variously in different disciplines of study. Multiculturalism as an ideology designates openness and respect for different cultural practices, appreciating the right to make decisions the way people want to live their lives. It is "the radical idea that people in other cultures, foreign and domestic, are human beings, too—moral equals, entitled to equal respect and concern, not to be discounted or treated as a subordinate caste" (Cohen et al., 1999: 4). Thus, multiculturalism holds that differences in cultural practices cannot be judged based on the standard of the dominant culture.

Multiculturalism is a response to cultural pluralism in modern society. It is also viewed from public policy, which "focuses particularly on social inclusion and identifying the special needs of particular cultural groups" (Hoffman & Graham, 2015: 337). In this sense, multiculturalism is more a way of acknowledging and compensating for minority cultures that were excluded, discriminated against, and trampled in the past. It claims that cultures of the minority are not well protected by liberal democracy, which solely focuses on individual rights. Hence, multiculturalism stresses that minority cultures require special protection and group rights.

Gender equality refers to the impartiality between men, women, and the sexual minority, the LGBTQ community, in private and public spheres of life. However, this article mainly considers the issues of women for this study. After fighting for the political right to vote, feminists have been struggling against sexual violence, stereotypical representation, and the persistent disparity in economic opportunities. Feminists like Simon de Beauvoir and Mary Wollstonecraft dismiss the notion that women are the second sex and inferior to men. They instead argue that women are moral equal to men. Therefore, women deserve equal

respect, rights, concern, and opportunity as men do. The UDHR staunchly buttresses equality endorsing "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights… without distinction of any kind" (UN General Assembly, 1948). It prohibits discrimination between men and women in any regard. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is an international legal framework that exclusively advocates for women's rights and sets legal standards to eliminate gender inequality. It condemns patriarchy and endorses women's rights as human rights. Thus, gender equality signifies women's equal rights, participation, and self- determination.

Method

This article employs an integrative literature review as a methodology for assessing the theory of multiculturalism. Literature reviews in research are used for different purposes, such as finding what was done, what was found, and the clarity of reporting (Moher et al., 2009). Additionally, a literature review is also useful for evaluating theories, examining the validity and accuracy of theories (Tranfield et al., 2003), and engaging in theory development (Baumeister & Leary, 1997; Torraco, 2005). There are different types of literature review methods, such as systematic review, semi-systemic, and integrative literature review (Snyder, 2019). Hannah Snyder argues that "the purpose of using an integrative review method is to overview the knowledge base, to critically review and potentially re-conceptualize, and to expand on the theoretical foundation of the specific topic as it develops" (Snyder, 2019: 335). This article thus mainly uses the integrative literature review method to evaluate the theory of multiculturalism and it suggests accommodating critical elements to forge a

new model of critical multiculturalism. While so doing, the article attempts to answer the research questions: a) how does multicultural advocacy of group-specific rights overlook gender inequality within different cultural practices? and b) Is multiculturalism sufficient to accommodate women's rights? The article concludes that critical multiculturalism is required to provide a defensible, credible, and critical paradigm of multiculturalism (May, 2003).

Results and Discussion

Some multicultural theorists like Kymlicka argue for special group rights, which exempt the minority cultural group from applying general laws. Cultural groups that are internally discriminatory against women are likely to persist in the oppression of women due to the special group rights. Hence, it is argued that the multicultural claim for group rights in Western liberal societies comes at the expense of women's rights. In response to the special group rights, the political theorist and feminist Susan Moller Okin criticizes multicultural insensitivity to gender inequality, raising a thought-provoking question: is multiculturalism bad for women? Most of the minority cultural groups "are themselves gendered with substantial differences in power and advantage between men and women" (Okin, 1999: 12). Okin believes that most cultures facilitate gender hierarchy, allowing males to control females in many ways, therefore, the multicultural claim for cultural group rights is detrimental to women's rights. Okin further suggests women "might be much better off if the culture into which they were born either to become extinct (so that its members would become integrated into the less sexist surrounding culture) or, preferably, to be encouraged to alter itself so as to reinforce the equality of women" (Okin, 1999: 22). Here, she arrives at a controversial

and essentializing conclusion about minority cultures that they are irreducibly patriarchal. She finds Western culture liberal and advises women of minority cultures to adopt it instead.

Leti Volpp dissents from Okin's formulation of multiculturalism in opposition to feminism and the essentialization of minority cultures. This discourse is premised on the faulty logic that immigrant women are the victims of minority cultures. Minority culture in the Western imagination is mainly seen as patriarchal and illiberal; hence, considered to be "sites of aberrant violence" (Volpp, 2001: 1186). The reason behind this consideration of cultures from the Third World as much more sexist than Western ones is partly based on sexual violence, which in the West is customarily conceived as the "behavior of a few deviants" (Volpp, 2001: 1187). In contrast, such violence in the immigrants' cultures is believed "to characterize the cultures of entire nations" (Volpp, 2001: 1187). It is easy for Westerners to label the culture of Third World immigrants 'barbaric', which in Anibal Quijano's understanding, is 'coloniality of power' (Quijano, 2000). Even after the collapse of colonial administration, the hierarchical differentiation between 'us' versus 'them' persists in the cultural representation. Volpp suggests it is disadvantageous to discourse feminism in terms of 'here in the West' and 'there in Rest'. Otherwise, it will essentialize non-Western cultures as exclusively patriarchal and lead to a view of feminism as antithetical to multiculturalism. Instead, it is important to move away from the essentialist notion that members of minority cultures are not capable of meaningful agency (Volpp 2000, Philips 2007).

Saskia Sassen argues that the dominant national culture in Western society can sometimes be oppressive to men at workplaces and schools. She believes such a hostile environment can be overcome with the solidarity of men and women where minority group right serves as an instrument for engaging with or escaping the dominant host culture. Therefore, Sassen warns against reducing culture exclusively to gender because both men and women of a minority culture may feel oppressed by the majority culture. Group rights in such a hostile condition can eliminate the risk of being oppressed by the majority. Sassen asserts, "rather than rejecting group rights as such, the analytic and political focus may well have to negotiate intracultural gender inequalities... and intercultural oppression" (Sassen, 1999: 78). Sassen does not dismiss multiculturalism but emphasizes that politics should engage with discrimination against women within a cultural group. Therefore, it is essential for state policy to investigate intercultural and intracultural injustice and discrimination while protecting the group rights of minority cultures.

The juxtaposition of feminism and multiculturalism is blind to cultural diversities and detrimental to the cultural rights of minorities. Although multiculturalism fails to consider intracultural gender inequality, it has helped minority cultural groups escape the dominant culture's hostility. Thus, instead of completely dismissing multiculturalism as inimical to feminism, it is crucial to develop critical multiculturalism that is sensitive to intracultural oppressions and gender inequality.

Multicultural justification

In the past, Western countries encouraged ethnic minorities and immigrant groups to be assimilated into the dominant national culture. Since this approach was repressive and challenged by the demand for minorities' rights, they began to accommodate cultural minorities positively in the policies. Will Kymlicka is a prominent liberal multicultural thinker interested in

'societal culture' who advocates for cultural group rights. He claims that societal culture provides "members with meaningful ways of life across the full range of human activities… encompassing both public and private spheres" (Kymlicka,1995: 76). Societal culture plays a vital role in the lives of its members; therefore, it is essential to provide them with special group rights if they are subordinated by national culture. While doing so, it fails to acknowledge that "many of the world's traditions and cultures… are quite distinctly patriarchal" (Okin, 1999: 14). However, some multicultural theorists try to go past the tension between gender equality and group rights with their defense. Kymlicka appears to be firmly defending multiculturalism with his idea of 'external protection' and 'internal restriction', whereas Chandran Kukathas with the notion of tolerance and 'let alone'.

Kukathas does not argue for special group rights for minority cultures. He instead believes that even illiberal cultural groups in the liberal society should be tolerated and allowed to practice their way of life free of state interference. He states, "The immigrant community, entitled to try to live by their ways, have no right here to expect the wider society enforce those norms against the individual" (Kukathas, 1992: 133). His argument is problematic because a liberal state is imagined to be blind to oppression in private spheres. For instance, arranged marriage is implicitly a form of coercion in which a girl, the would-be spouse, is not likely to seek legal help. She simply conforms to her parents' choice out of family honor. Similarly, unequal availability of free time at home due to household chores assigned to a girl affects academic progression and consequently makes them less payable in the job market. The culture may appear to be committed to women and girls' civil and political rights in the public domain; however, the private sphere always constrains their freedom and equality. The

tolerance of illiberal practices conveys that domestic violence is not a state's business.

Kymlicka argues that mere tolerance of minority cultures does not help their equal recognition. Believing in egalitarianism, he claims that members of minority cultures are disadvantaged in accessing their own cultural practices compared to the dominant culture. Thus, he argues that positive accommodation of minority group practices should be guaranteed through 'group-differentiated rights' (Kymlicka, 1995). Kymlicka argues that special protection and privilege should be provided to minority cultures that are internally liberal. Some group-differentiated rights also incorporate the exemption from generally applicable laws regarding the virtue of religious beliefs or language accommodation in education. He justifies the group rights based on his notion that minority groups should be "fully consistent with liberal principle of freedom and equality, and which justify granting special rights to minorities" (Kymlicka, 2002: 339). Unless the cultural group is extremely vulnerable, it should govern itself according to liberal principles. He also claims that group rights should not limit the individual liberty of its members based on race, religion, and sex. Kymlicka believes that illiberal cultural groups cannot provide the necessary freedom for individual development and end up in discriminatory treatment. This further leads to the subculture of oppression supported by the liberal state. Internal liberty allows individuals to voice against discriminatory practices and gives a possibility to revise the tradition. Thus, Kymlicka denies special rights to the cultural group, which places 'internal restrictions' on its members. Internal restriction in questioning the malpractices collides with the purpose of our cultural membership, undermining the value culture provides meaningful individual choice. This justification of multiculturalism by Kymlicka is of colossal importance to mitigate the

discriminatory treatment of people within a cultural group politically and publicly. However, the repression of women and girls is largely found in a private sphere; hence, Kymlicka's justification for multiculturalism still cannot be helpful for gender equality.

Multicultural problems

The theory of multiculturalism is critiqued by some scholars for its uncritical tenets toward intersectional issues within cultural groups. "Some Marxist and feminist theorists have expressed worry about the dilution of other important differences shared by members of a society that do not necessarily entail a shared culture, such as class and sex, and the resulting neglect of policies that would minimize economic and gender inequalities" (Eagan, 2024). Uncritical protection of group-specific rights of cultural groups results in the exclusion of structural, economic, and gender discrimination. A political criticism by Jennifer L. Eagan is that multiculturalism weakens national unity and the political value of equal treatment (Eagan, 2024). Similarly, cultural objection to multiculturalism views that it pays greater attention to race, culture, and ethnicity (Bean & Crane, 1996; Bean, Crane, & Lewis, 2002). Multiculturalism is motivated to acknowledge cultural differences with a motive to address current and historical marginalization; however, "it does so at the cost of overstating the importance of ethnicity and culture and understating the fluid and dialogic nature of inter- and intragroup relations" (May, 2003: 203). Ethnicity and culture are two different entities that are often conflated. Thus, there is a tendency to essentialize the categories of race, culture, and ethnicity within the theory of multiculturalism.

Besides, multiculturalism reduces culture to a static and monolithic status. The multicultural accommodation of antiracist

ideas has come to be seen as problematic as it privileges 'color racism' over other kinds of discrimination. "Such an approach subsumes other factors as class, religion, and gender, and fails to address adequately postmodernist accounts of identity as multiple, contingent, and subject to rapid change" (May, 2003: 202). Postmodernism destabilizes multiculturalism's tendency to essentialize identity and culture. It, therefore, demonstrates that multiculturalism lacks postmodernist sensibility in its theory as it ignores the intersectional and dialogic nature of identity. Furthermore, the theory of hybridity also objects to the idea of pure culture, rejecting the essentialization of culture as a fixed and unchangeable object. Homi K. Bhabha views every cultural system as constructed in a space that he calls the "Third space of enunciation" (Bhabha, 1994: 37). It is in-between space which produces hybridity. Although some critics have problematized multiculturalism from different perspectives, such as race, culture, and ethnicity, there is an inadequate accommodation of gender equality within such discourses.

Feminist discontents against multiculturalism

There is a power disparity between men and women in most cultures where men hold more power. The beliefs and practices of a culture, thus, are mainly influenced by male ideology. Their powerful position within a cultural group lets men articulate their voices, and women are often relegated to bearers of male ideology. Therefore, there are at least two critiques of the defender of cultural group rights. First, multiculturalists urge solely on group differences between cultures while paying no attention to intracultural differences. They ignore the fact that minority groups themselves are gendered. Second, they do not consider private spaces

where women are mostly disadvantaged based on sex. Those multicultural thinkers who support group rights defend this criticism arguing that individuals should adhere to cultural practices because it gives them meaning and identity. They also remark that culture gives individuals self-esteem and self-confidence to decide what is a good life for them. This defense of group rights cannot be vindicated because the ideological imposition of dominant male group members primarily constitutes an individual's sense of subjectivity.

Kymlicka believes that a stable culture is a prerequisite for the flourishing of human beings. He wants to promote a societal culture and talks about collective rights for ethnic minorities, but not for other purposes such as women's rights and 'internal minorities' (Green, 1994). However, Okin argues that group-differentiated rights for cultural minorities cannot be unconditional. Cultural groups should not be exceptionally protected when their practices are inhuman and oppressive to women. For her, a plea for the respect of culture should not be used as a shield against sexism. The representative or the self-proclaimed leader of an oppressive cultural group may appear as if there is cohesion and solidarity among its members. The seemingly egalitarian and liberal cultural group can be oppressive intrinsically, mostly in private spheres.

Home is an important place to practice and preserve culture. It plays a crucial role in transmitting the culture to new generations. Women spend their time mostly maintaining family and the reproductive side of life. There is a remarkable intersection between gender and cultural practices in almost every culture. Personal, familial, sexual, and reproductive aspects are the major focus of all cultures. Internal religious mores profoundly influence culture. The private sphere of an individual life is regulated by religious rules such as the code of marriage,

divorce, abortion, inheritance, dress, and so on. However, given the powerful position of male members of the cultures, females are affected and disadvantaged by these codes in enjoying equal rights. For instance, there are some countries in Southeast Asia, West Africa, and Latin America where rapists can legally be exonerated if they agree to marry the victim based on societal or cultural practices.

The cultural traditions from different world religions influence the gender roles of women and often create oppressive domestic and public spheres for them. However, gender discriminations are "not only 'cultural' but have socio-economic dimensions" (Rattansi, 2011: 57). Nancy Fraser criticizes the strand of feminism that is "preoccupied with culture and drawn into the orbit of identity politics" (Fraser, 2009: 102). The politics of recognition dovetailed with neoliberalism "to repress all memory of social egalitarianism" (Fraser, 2009: 106). Fraser argues that multiculturalism, coupled with neoliberalism, increases the economic gulf between men and women. Therefore, she believes it is necessary to unsettle the economic disparity between males and females to establish equality and justice in cultural groups. She further argues that there is a tendency "to subordinate social struggles to cultural struggles, the politics of redistribution to the politics of recognition" (Fraser, 2009: 106). The dominance of national culture is challenged by multiculturalism; however, it fails to address the economic depravity of minorities and women. Thus, political recognition alone cannot provide justice to the economic repression of women within the cultural groups.

Furthermore, there is a tendency to see Western culture in opposition to non-Western ones. Essentializing non-Western culture as exclusively patriarchal does not solve the women's rights issues in the West. The Western liberal states are premised on

the formal equality of men and women. However, women are still underprivileged as women hold few positions of power in the judiciary, academia, religious institutions, trade, and political parties. Their relative freedom of holding jobs in some situations is possible due to immigrant women who work as caregivers at their homes. Women are obliged to work within the patriarchal paradigm and are not full citizens yet due to inequality in income, occupational disparity, underrepresentation in the parliament, and the like.

Culture and female body

"Gender inequality is common across cultural groups and typically central to the lived experience of women and men" (McDowell et al., 2007: 554). Women are usually portrayed as secondary and subhuman in many world cultures. Beauvoir writes, "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (Beauvoir, 1956: 273). She argues that no biological feature determines the figure of a woman, but it is a sociological and cultural pattern that produces the female body. The attempt to separate the biological fact of sex from the social construction of gender continues in Judith Butler's idea of gender performativity. For Butler, gender is performative, which explains how gender identity is constituted through prescribed norms. Butler believes that women are obliged to perform what is scripted by society. In a radical sense, performativity exhibits how the social structure works as a script, and women must perform accordingly. The identity or property of a particular gender comes to function due to repetitiveness which she compares to "a ritualized production" (Butler, 2011: 60). Therefore, gender is "real only to the extent that it is performed" (Butler, 1988: 527). There is a common element of controlling or suppressing women's bodies and sexuality by males in many world religions and cultural practices. These cultural groups aim to "control women and render them, especially sexually and reproductively, servile to men's desires and interests" (Okin, 1999: 16). Thus, the female body is the construction of male power, which is also evident in the following cultural practices.

Okin (1999) focuses on the founding myths of major religions and concludes that religions privilege males. A subjugating attitude of males is seen in popular sexist myths of different cultural practices, for example, in Judaism, Christianity, and Islamism. In one of the stories of Abraham in Judaism, God decrees Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac. Abraham readily prepares to do what God demands him to do. He does not even feel it necessary to share his decision with Sarah, Isaac's mother. One of the creation myths of Christianity asserts that the male God created Adam first and Eve out of Adam's rib. Further, Eve becomes the reason for temptation and the decadence of Adam and the whole of humanity. Similarly, women's primary role is considered for the reproductive end, and polygamy is often vindicated based on textual evidence in Islamism. These major religious groups' representative myths have shown a long history of subordinating women and preventing them from participating in decision-making in part of their own bodies.

Martha Nussbaum disagrees with Okin's focus on 'founding myths', which has overshadowed the positive contribution of religion to life. Religion cannot entirely be judged based on a few sexist representative myths. She instead agrees with the moral philosophers and believes that "fostering of personal autonomy in all areas of life" (Nussbaum, 1999: 108) should be an appropriate state goal. Religion imposes order and gives meaning to life.

However, there are many cultures and religions that are basically gendered and

deceptively elusive in the private spheres. Gender inequality begins with the very childhood of a girl in a family. Child marriage is an example. A girl child is often coerced to marry a man against her will. She is forced to do so with a man with a substantial age gap. The motif behind such marriage does not follow the well-wishes of a girl; instead, it is intended to ensure that the girl is a virgin at the time of marriage. This practice controls and abuses the girl's right to her body while men are advantaged from it.

Moreover, forced marriage and 'honor killing' are other cultural practices that oppress the female body. The tradition of arranged marriage in South Asia implicitly turns out to be forced marriage. This form of marriage is arranged by the would-be spouse's parents or relatives. Parents tend to find a girl or boy who belongs to their own clan. This type of marriage appears to be under the duress of parents and the community. For instance, a girl in the UK with Pakistani roots is often coerced to marry a cousin in Pakistan or a boy from the same clan. The girl is either threatened to be an outcast from the family or pleads for family honor if she does not follow her parents' choice. Honor killing, rooted in tribal custom, is a murder of a girl or woman for bringing dishonor to the family by male members. It is sometimes connected to an arranged marriage when a girl protests the coercion to marry a boy arranged by her parents or relatives. Besides, honor killing is primarily associated with the sexual (mis) conduct of a girl or a woman out of marriage or heterosexuality. In such a repressive cultural practice, a female does not possess her own body, but the culture does.

'Chaupadi' is an example of a detestable cultural practice of 'othering' women's bodies. It is a practice in Western Nepal among Hindu groups that women in the time of mensuration are considered impure. Therefore, they are banished from the house and made to live in an isolated shed or makeshift dwelling for five days or more. Since girls or women in their period are taken impure, they suddenly become untouchable for at least five days and are severed from all family, cultural, social, and economic life. Damnation of the female body and othering as impure is a way of exercising patriarchy which deprives women every month of participating in domestic and public life. Girls during menstruation are also restricted from attending schools.

Moreover, polygamy practices in many Muslim communities' privilege males. A man culturally owns the right to marry many wives, while women are restricted to marrying multiple men. Women are thus treated servile to males' sexual pleasure and reproductive ends. Muslim women who immigrate to Western society often abhor polygamous marriages. They believe the practice is unbearable back in Muslim countries too, but there is no escape for women in their homelands. Likewise, another disputed tradition is clitoridectomy, referred to as female genital mutilation (FGM) or cutting. It is a partial or total surgical removal of the clitoris. It is widely performed in females in East and West Africa. World Health Organization has condemned this practice as it causes health problems in women. FGM is carried out to pacify women's desires and prevent infidelity. It aims at limiting sexual pleasure and encouraging virginity before marriage. Women who fail to carry out this clitoridectomy are socially excluded from the marital bond.

The objectification of the female body prevails in the West too. The culture industry, predominantly run by male members of society, prescribes the norms for women's 'beauty'. Victorian era staunchly sought femininity, frailness, and coyness in women. A beautiful female body is imagined to be seductively glamorous, expecting a slender curvy body with a small waist, large bosom,

and large hip. This imagined female body is influenced by male voyeurism. The unrealistic expectation of Western beauty has led to harmful practices to a woman's body, such as plastic surgery of the face and bosom and an eating disorder called anorexia nervosa.

Following the cultural practices discussed above, it is seen that the social or cultural construction of narrative is what makes the 'female body'. Seyla Benhabib's narrative model of identity demonstrates how an individual's self is constructed. This idea is useful to show how women are caught in the web of narratives that are already discriminatory. Benhabib shares Charles Taylor's dialogic view of identity and argues that one must be a part of interlocution to form a self. However, we are "thrown into these webs of interlocution . . . into webs of narrative" (Benhabib, 1999: 344). The narratives are not ahistorical; instead, "they are culturally and historically specific and inflected by the master narrative of the family structure and gender roles into which each individual is thrown" (Benhabib, 1999: 345). The individual's agency is significantly informed by the existing narratives. Thus, it requires an overhaul and the deconstruction of existing narratives that assign women a secondary status and submissive role in a cultural group.

Towards critical multiculturalism

Multiculturalism has been inadequate in coping with inequalities inherent in patriarchal cultural groups. Special protection of cultural group rights sometimes violates an individual's autonomy and gender equality. Besides, multiculturalism has easily yielded to the notion that ethnic cultures as "having strictly definable boundaries, having unchanging essential components, and lacking quite fundamental internal dissent" (Rattansi, 2011: 152). It treats culture as a monolith and does not leave room for intercultural and intracultural dialogue.

France is a secular and democratic republic that accommodates cultural and religious pluralism. However, some cultural issues have become controversial and disputable in France. Polygamy and headscarves are prime examples of such controversy. French government implicitly allowed immigrant men to bring multiple wives during the 1980s. It is estimated that around 200,000 polygamous families live in Paris (Okin,1999). Most of these polygamous families came to France from Muslim African nations. The permissive policy of France for multiple wives is seen partly based on the recognition of cultural practices. It has raised the issue of women's rights in such marriages. Wives of polygamous marriage are not content with their life situation, but they continue their ties to family based on cultural norms. Okin argues that cultural ideas are sometimes used to "provide rationales for controlling women's bodies and ruling their lives" (Okin,1999: 4). Muslim culture allows men to have many wives but not vice-versa. Wives to polygamous marriage consider polygamy as "an inescapable and barely tolerable institution, in their African countries of origin, and unbearable imposition in the French context" (Okin, 1999: 10). In this situation, the multicultural claim of group rights to practice their cultural practices conflicts with women's rights and gender equality.

Similarly, wearing a burqa is another contested issue in France. A headscarf, hijab, or burqa is generally a head covering worn by Muslim females. It is of different lengths to cover the head, face, neck, and chest. It is associated with the Islamic code of modesty. The hijab is also seen as the symbol of the oppression of women's bodies and controlling of sensual desire. It tends to seclude women from the public sphere and preventing from economic activities. In a

secular nation like France, wearing a veil or hijab is "regarded as signs of the inequality of women under Islam and therefore incompatible with French traditions of sex inequality" (Rattansi, 2011: 57). France has banned the burqa in the public sphere based on the designation of the burqa as a gender inequality; however, the advocates of group rights and multiculturalism argue that it belongs to a cultural tradition, thus, be allowed to wear as a freedom of cultural expression. In this case, France supports gender equality while at the same time limiting the cultural expression the burqa symbolizes. The French government supports cultural tradition in the previous polygamy case but ignores sex discrimination. It reveals the necessity to yoke both multiculturalism and feminism together to ensure group rights and women's rights.

There are some young and educated Muslim women of the second and third generation in Western countries like France, the UK, and Denmark who consciously want to wear a headscarf as an identity marker of Muslim culture and, at the same time, commit themselves to national identity and reject gender discrimination. However, the current protest against the mandatory wearing of hijab in theocratic Iran shows the majority of women's discontent and unwillingness to wear it. The protest began in response to Masha Amani's death. She was a 22-year-old girl killed by morality police for not wearing her hijab properly. Across Iran, tens of thousands of women are coming out to the street and lighting their hijab, denying wearing it anymore. Conscious Willingness to wear hijab as a cultural identity and taking it as a symbol of women's repression are complex situations that neither multiculturalism nor feminism alone can solve the issue. It orients the discussion to critical multiculturalism.

Cultural defense in people's legal and civil lives may cost individual autonomy and rights, infringing the basic principles of a liberal society. For instance, polygamy, child marriage, forced marriage, clitoridectomy are unacceptable practices in liberal societies. In some cases, Bhikhu Parekh writes, "even the staunchest champion of cultural autonomy has reluctantly asked the law to intervene" (Parekh, 1999: 70). The inhuman treatment of members in the name of culture should not be allowed to continue its oppression and sexism. However, Parekh is critical of Okin's stance that she is right to call for fundamentals of liberalism against oppressive cultural practices, but it is wrong to invite the liberal state to intervene in the entire cultural practices. Laura Parisi sees that women may agree with the multicultural claim of group rights to cultural practices "while at the same time disagreeing with how these cultural practices affect their personal autonomy and agency" (Parisi, 2010: 16). Praisi does not reject multiculturalism but anticipates a multicultural framework where women's agency is not crippled.

Furthermore, Carlos Torres argues for an urgent need to develop a multiculturalist paradigm to combat its critiques. He views that there is "the need to defend multiculturalism from the conservative right that has demonized multiculturalism as an antipatriotic movement" (Torres, 1998: 446). Therefore, it is essential to develop a critical model of multiculturalism that can defend the postmodernist and feminist critique of multiculturalism. Parekh believes multiculturalism cannot be reduced to Kymlicka's 'group-differentiated rights'. It is a part of, but multiculturalism in its broader sense is a force that revolts against liberal hegemony. It rejects the Western moral and political doctrines that tend to universalize the way of organizing life. Parkeh here critiques multiculturalism for its moral deficit toward hegemonic patriarchal culture. Nevertheless, he believes it is still possible to reach a consensus through "an uncoerced and equal

inter-cultural dialogue" (Parekh, 1999: 74). Inter-cultural and intra-cultural freedom is a solution to deep moral and cultural dissent. Inter-cultural dialogue, Parkeh believes, has "a profoundly transformative effect on all involved" (Parekh, 2006: 271). A liberal state's dialogue with cultural minorities and their oppressed members will create a conducive ambiance for cultural diversities and gender equality.

Conclusion

The discussion between multiculturalism and feminism has mainly brought two issues to the surface: the essentialization of non-western culture, and gender discrimination within cultures. The binary logic of multiculturalism and feminism often rests upon 'west' vs. 'rest'. The remark that women from the non-West should be salvaged from their 'deviant' cultures, which may threaten Western civilization, and this logic is only Eurocentric and demeaning to the non-Western culture, impedes intercultural dialogue. The logic of liberalism cloaks women's oppression in the West and establishes that men and women are equally treated in Western liberal societies. Feminists should be cautious in examining women's relationship with the particular form of patriarchy and its socio-economic, and geo-political dimensions. Women in the West are also discriminated against in their representation in parliaments, wages in employment, administration, academia, and so on. The understanding of women's oppression must be grounded in all cultures that they are all patriarchal irrespective of degrees.

Providing special protection to minority cultural groups that are already patriarchal may aid in persisting the inequality of women within these groups. Cultural defense in criminal law, religious law over domestic law, and self-determination rights for indigenous groups are likely to reinforce the discrimination against women. Rejecting multiculturalism may lead to women's right to double marginalization in the Western liberal society, first as a member of a minority culture and then as a woman within her own culture. Feminism and multiculturalism both are premised on liberty and equality; therefore, they can still be reconciled where the cultural group rights are sensitive to gender inequality and its marginalized members. Multiculturalism, which focuses on intracultural inequality while rebuffing patriarchal norms and traditions, can direct the tension between feminism and multiculturalism to a critical version of multiculturalism. This form of multiculturalism should be focused on the voices of 'minorities within minorities' (Eisenberg & Spinner-Halev, 2005), keeping women's voices at the heart of gendered cultural traditions. Critical multiculturalism considers group inequalities and postmodernist plural identity and focuses on the intersectionality of gender, race, religion, class, and economic discrepancies.

Declaration of Ownership

This article is my original work.

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There is no conflict of interest to declare in this article.

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This study was approved by the institution.

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