

Standing Up for a Multicultural Nationalism

Gurpreet Mahajan, Jawaharlal Nehru University

Over the last two decades multiculturalism has been pitted against nationalism. The former, it is said, speaks from the perspective of the minorities, while the latter presents the picture from the side of the majority. Not only the ultranationalists, but also the liberals and the conservatives identify multiculturalism as the problem. The effort to accommodate minorities and their diversity has, in their view, 'gone too far' and undermined the shared culture that shaped their (European or American, as the case might be) national identity.

Against this background, the paper tries to explore the question – is multiculturalism incompatible with nationalism? Is nationalism intrinsically anti-diversity, and in this sense, anti-multicultural? It argues that multiculturalism and nationalism share a common ground as both recognize the value, and the need for, community. Unlike liberalism which privileges the unencumbered individual (and this is the reason why liberal nationalism rings somewhat hollow), multiculturalism understands that individuals value community affiliations, including membership of a political community. Multiculturalism also recognizes that every identity has some cultural markers and we cannot imagine a state or a national identity sans culture. The task therefore is to find ways in which the markers of one's national identity incorporate diversity and resonate positively with members of diverse cultural communities.