CHAPTER 1
DALITS, RECOGNITION AND CULTURE:
PROBLEMATISING DALIT RIGHTS IN THE DISCOURSE ON MINORITY RIGHTS

Introduction

Cultural recognition is a central concern to contemporary Political theory. This 'culturalism' has to do with the way 'identity politics' has emerged in the recent past, particularly, after the end of the Cold War. Issues of religious and ethnic identity have come to the forefront, pushing back economic and other important social issues. This is reflected, particularly in political theory, with the critique from Communitarians and Multiculturalists.¹ By stressing the importance of community and culture to the individual, they criticise theories that ignore them, particularly the dominant theory of Liberalism.

By taking the individual as the basic unit of the society, Liberalism, multiculturalists say, undermines the importance of culture and community for this 'individual'. While Marxism criticises the capitalist notion of self as 'ahistorical' and 'acultural', it considers culture as an impediment, as playing a negative role, in human development. Karl Marx did not have a serious critique of 'cultural production'; he concentrated on 'economic production.'² Antonio Gramsci, a later Marxist, seriously stressed the relationship between culture and Power. Unlike other Marxists of his period, he believed that the 'superstructure' is as important as the economic base. One of the important arguments of this chapter is that there is a need to bring this important Marxist insight on culture, back into Political theory. We will come back to this issue later.

¹ For a good discussion on this aspect refer to David Scott, "Culture in Political Theory," Political Theory 31 (1), February 2003, pp. 92-115.
² Culture is used here as it is historically given, not in the adjective sense, of Marxist culture, music culture, etc. More on this aspect will follow.
Communitarians argue, this ‘atomization’ of the individual from his culture and community, within liberalism, has produced a shallow understanding of an individual’s needs and interests. To this critique, modern day liberals like Richard Dworkin, Will Kymlicka, John Rawls and others respond by acknowledging the value of culture and community, and called it ‘liberal culturalism’. But, they value ‘culture’ not as a value in itself, but as ‘context of choice’ for an individual. To which, they claim, liberalism is fundamentally committed. Kymlicka writes, “Cultural membership provides us with an intelligible context of choice, and a secure sense of identity and belonging, that we call upon in confronting questions about personal values and projects.”

Culture, thus, as it is argued, gains a value because it provides the individual a ‘context of choice’ and a secure sense of identity. Since, liberalism is committed to individual’s rights, it also –indirectly- values culture. But, this ‘context of choice’ in the case of Dalits, as is well known, forces a negative identity upon them. Culture becomes the context in which the politics of ‘recognition’ is played.

Recognition, all agree, is a basic human need. Charles Taylor’s comment on this aspect is worth quoting, from his article, “Politics of recognition”. He writes, ‘identity’ means, “something like a person’s understanding of who they are, of their fundamental defining characteristics as a human being.” He then goes on to show, how, ‘Recognition’ is linked to ‘identity’. He writes,

“Our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its essence, often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or a group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Non-recognition or misrecognition can inflict harm; can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being.”

Importantly, Taylor writes, “Due recognition is not just a courtesy we owe people. It is a vital human need.”

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5 Ibid., p. 76.
This “Due recognition,” as it is well documented, was and is not available to Dalits. Instead, culture becomes the medium of misrecognition. It does not provide Kymlicka’s “secure sense of identity,” but on the contrary, an insecure sense of identity.

Recognition also entails, in this context, that an individual be respected and identified with his group or community. Not respecting an individual’s community – its particularity and its values – means not respecting the individual as well. For instance, not recognizing a community’s culture and its difference from that of other communities translates into not recognizing the individual’s particular identity and his cultural needs as well. Here again, in the case of Dalits, they do not form a distinct cultural community, but a ‘community’ with an identity that is an imposition, rather than a choice.

Thus, the issue of ‘Recognition’ in political theory seriously challenges the accepted notions of equality, justice, culture and other important values. For Taylor, “the demand for equal recognition extends beyond an acknowledgement of equal value of all humans potentially, and comes to include the equal of what they have made of this potential in fact.”

In the case of Dalits, the value of recognition further complicates the issue. ‘Recognition’ that is due to them is not provided by the ‘cultural context.’ In fact, ‘misrecognition’ is what they had, and have suffered in this cultural context. Thus, the ‘value of culture,’ as a ‘context of choice,’ becomes a problematic value. Though much writing on the issue of misrecognition and its harm has been done by multiculturalists, communitarians and liberal culturalists about Women, Blacks and other disadvantaged groups, there is no clear argument provided, as to how to tackle ‘misrecognition.’

In fact, this chapter attempts to argue that the ‘value of culture’ whether directly or indirectly, as an individual’s context of choice, unless understood in the adjective sense, contradicts ‘due recognition’ at least for some groups like Dalits. The dominant theories

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6 Ibid.
assume that all minority communities have a unique culture, or cultural minorities, else they are not minority communities at all. Hence, the issue of non-cultural minorities, like Blacks and Dalits is not adequately addressed. Broadly speaking, the bringing back of the value of culture has ushered in a new set of evils. Defending ‘culture’ while opposing hierarchy will, at least in conservative cultures, be detrimental to marginalized groups. This chapter argues that the concept of ‘cultural discrimination’ needs to be expanded by incorporating the discrimination that is done to not just religious (or cultural) minorities but also to internal minorities; and discrimination that is done in the name of and through culture.

This chapter is organized as follows: the first section will begin by portraying the critique as posited by communitarians and multiculturalists on liberalism. We will discuss, in detail, how according to them Liberalism as a political doctrine, fails to understand the importance of culture and community membership. Within this, we will look at the differences between communitarians and multiculturalists; prominent among them are Charles Taylor and Bhikhu Parekh respectively. In the next section, we will look at the liberal response to this challenge dealing with the arguments of liberals like Rawls, Dworkin and Kymlicka. The section that follows, will try to posit the problem of Dalits and their relation to ‘culture’ and how the dominant theories do not adequately address their problems. At the same time it will argue that a liberal defense of ‘culture’ is friendlier to marginalized minorities like Dalits.

What is Culture?

Before we delve into this issue, there is a need to define and understand the term ‘culture’ because of the complexity and multiplicity of its usage. As Peter Worsley clarifies, outside of the social sciences, the word ‘culture’ is used in two main ways. The first, and oldest, uses the term to describe the ‘fine’ arts – not any kind of art, but only certain kinds of music (classical), painting, sculpture and literature created by an intellectual elite and
consumed largely by the upper classes and the highly-educated middle classes. Thus, the book review sections in the ‘quality’ newspapers, or events like the Edinburgh Festival, are often described as ‘cultural’ phenomena.

Popular among those who use it in the common sense of ‘high culture’ is Mathew Arnold, he writes, “culture is then properly described not as having its origin in curiosity but as having its origin in the love of perfection; it is a study of perfection.” For Arnold, culture involves beauty, truth, perfection, intelligence, and contact with the best, which has been thought of and said in the world.

The second usage is much wider, and often much less specific. This is the idea of ‘culture’ as way of life. At the broadest level, this may refer to almost everything that distinguishes human beings from animals. Here, culture is contrasted with nature or biology. But culture in this sense is also used to refer to the way of life of a particular population. Thus, we might refer to the culture of a community, or a nation, or a tribe, or a religious group or even a continent.” Raymond Williams, a Gramscian, takes this view of culture. He writes:

“Culture is ordinary: that is the first fact. Every human society has its own shape, its own purposes, its own meanings. Every human society expresses these, in institutions, and in arts and learning. The making of a society is the finding of common meanings and directions, and its growth is an active debate and amendment under the pressures of experience, contact, and discovery, writing themselves into the land. The growing society is there, yet it is also made and remade in every individual mind. The making of a mind is first, the slow learning of shapes, purposes, and meaning. So that work, observation and communication are possible. Then, second, but equal in importance, is the testing of this experience, the making of new observations, comparisons and meanings. A culture has two aspects: the known meanings and directions, which its members are trained to: the new observation and meanings, which are offered and tested. There are the ordinary processes of human societies and human minds, and we learn through them the nature of a culture: that is always both traditional and creative; that it is both the most ordinary common meanings and the finest individual meanings. We use the words culture in these two senses: to mean a whole way of life--The common meanings; to mean the arts and learning--the special processes of discovery and creative effort. Some writers reserve the word for one or other of these senses; I insist on both, and on the significance of their conjunction. The questions I ask about our cultures are questions about deep personal meanings. Culture is ordinary, in every society and in every mind.”

7 Mathew Arnold, Culture and Anarchy (1869).
9 Raymond Williams, “Culture is ordinary,” 1958, p. 6.
In anthropology, there has been a longstanding debate on the meaning of term 'culture'—notably among Franz Boas, Radcliffe-Brown, Malinowski, and Ruth Benedict. The ambiguity on the meaning of this term is quite prevalent even now. It has been variously described as a 'way of life'; 'overarching intellectual framework'; 'way of looking at the world'. Famous among them is Clifford Geertz's description of culture, as "symbolic action in a constructionist idiom," or as "constructed meaning."\(^{10}\) He writes, "the concept of culture I espouse...is essentially a semiotic one. Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun. I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning."\(^{11}\)

'Culture' in this chapter is mostly used, unless specified, not in its common, Arnoldian sense of 'culture', but in its ethnic sense, what Kymlicka calls, "societal cultures"; as a source of identity. In the common sense of understanding 'culture,' this term is applied in its adjective form: like club culture, sports culture, music culture, gay culture, high or low culture, and sometimes as liberal or socialist culture. Whereas, in the words of Kymlicka, it refers,

"to the distinct customs, perspectives, or ethos of a group or association, as when we talk about 'gay culture, or even a 'bureaucratic culture'. ...At the other extreme using 'culture' in the widest sense, we can say that all of the western democracies share a common 'culture'—that is, they all share a modern, urban, secular industrialized, in contrast to the feudal, agricultural, and theocratic world of our ancestors."\(^{12}\)

On the other hand, Culture in its ethnic sense as "societal culture," as Kymlicka defines, is

"A culture which provides its members with meaningful ways of life across the full range of human activities, including social, educational, religious, recreational, and economic life, encompassing both public and private spheres. These cultures tend to be territorially concentrated, and based on a shared language."\(^{13}\)

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\(^{10}\) As quoted in Scott, n. 1, p. 109.
\(^{12}\) Kymlicka, n. 3, p. 18.
\(^{13}\) Ibid., p. 76.
He further writes, "It is not just shared memories and values, but also common institutions and practices." According to Dworkin, culture "provides the spectacles through which we identify experiences as valuable."

Bhikhu Parekh, from a multicultural perspective, defines Culture as, "a historically created system of meaning and significance." Elaborating further he calls it, "a system of beliefs and practices in terms of which a group of human beings understand, regulate and structure their individual and collective lives. It is a way of both understanding and organizing human life. (The understanding it seeks has a practical thrust and is not purely theoretical in nature like that offered by a philosophical or a scientific theory, and the way it organizes human life is not ad hoc and instrumental but grounded in a particular manner of conceptualizing and understanding it.)"

Next, Parekh moves on to describe what constitutes Culture: what are the essential characteristics of a Culture? Culture, according to him, can be seen from many levels. He writes,

"At the most basic level it is reflected in language, including the ways in which its syntax, grammar, and vocabulary divided up and describe the world. Societies sharing a common language share at least some cultural features in common. And when a group of individuals acquires a wholly new language as many colonial subjects did, they also learn new ways of understanding the world. Culture of a society is also embodied in its proverbs, maxims, myths, rituals symbols collective memories, jokes body language, modes of non-linguistic communication, customs traditions, institution and manners of greeting."

Language, thus, becomes an important element in for identifying and defining a Culture.

At the second level, Parekh writes,

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14 Ibid., p. 83.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
"It is embodied in its arts, music, oral and written literature, moral life, ideals of excellence, exemplary individuals and the vision of the good life. Being concerned to structure and order human life, culture is also articulated in the rules and norms that govern such basic activities and social relation as who, where and with whom one eats, associates and makes love, how one mourns and disposes of the dead, and treats one's parents, children, wife and neighbors and strangers."19

From the above description, we can easily deduce that a common language, understood in a broader sense, becomes the basis of a particular culture, and the rules and norms, conception of good life, social structure and social relations, conceptions of the world around, cultural habits, etc., all together are essential to be recognized as culture. Apart from this, culture necessarily belongs to a closely linked group of people, or a community or vice versa. It also has a territorial aspect, of it being limited to a particular region. Cultures, moreover, have a history.

While theorists disagree in their understanding and definition of 'culture', they all agree on valuing, and recognizing cultural membership as a context of choice. They use 'culture' in the sense of 'Societal cultures,' which involves 'shared vocabulary of tradition and convention,' which underlies a full range of social practices and institutions. In the next section, we will see the arguments of communitarians, multiculturalists and liberals on the 'value of Culture', and the criticism that is made against liberalism by the other two.

**Communitarian and Multicultural Criticism of Liberalism**

*Theoretical lineages*

The criticism, in general, is leveled at the modern western notion of 'self', which has its roots in the writings of Rene Descartes, John Locke and Thomas Hobbes. According to this view, 'the self' is seen, as separate, autonomous and thinking and is not historically and culturally constituted. The essential self is something one has, observes, and

19 Parekh, n. 16, pp. 143-44.
analyses, not something one creates.\textsuperscript{20} Opposing this view of 'self' within the western thought were Gimbastta Vico, Montesquieu and Johann Herder. All three argued, the 'self' is historically and culturally constituted. Cultures, according to them, are what that give substance and meaning to human lives and 'selves'. Vico argued that,

"it was a pernicious rationalist fallacy to think that we could understand a society fully in terms of a universally shared human nature or by rational analysis. Human nature was a product of history not a trans-historical substance, and was differently developed and expressed in different epochs and societies."\textsuperscript{21}

Herder, a great source for Culturalism, believed that Cultures are 'self-contained and integrated wholes,' and are to have the same rights as (human) individuals. All cultures, in the words of Parekh, were unique expressions of the human spirit incommensurable and, like flowers in the garden, beautifully complementing each other and adding to the richness of the world."\textsuperscript{22} And he further argues,

"a cultural community profoundly shaped its members, it created the whole structure of man's humanity'. To be human was to grow up within a particular cultural community and become a particular kind of person. The abstract and universally shared human nature, which supposedly underlay and remained unchanged across cultures as the Enlightenment thinkers had argued, was fiction...for Herder the mind did not think or will, only the whole human being did, and that too from within a cultural community."\textsuperscript{23}

Herder, giving great importance to language, considered it as the basis and medium of thought, and believed that every 'cultural community' is a unique 'linguistic community'. (We need to come back to this point; as this chapter argues that Dalits do not constitute a single linguistic community to claim the status of a unique cultural community.)

Herder puts himself in stark contrast to Kant. Johann Herder strongly criticised Kant and was criticized in turn. Their bitter rivalry is now reflected in our contemporary debates on valuing 'autonomy' (Kant), or 'diversity' (Herder). Communitarians, multiculturalists and liberal culturalists now endorse the value of 'diversity'. Liberal culturalists like

\textsuperscript{21} As quoted in Parekh, n.16, p. 51.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., p. 69.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., p. 68.
Kymlicka value both the values of 'autonomy' and 'diversity' but the first value has a priority over the later. We will come back to this when we go on to discuss liberalism in detail. We will first look at the communitarian argument against liberalism.

**Communitarianism**

Charles Taylor, a Herderian, criticises liberalism as based on, what he calls Atomism. He questions the view “that the world consists of discrete individuals, and that these separate atomized selves enter into relationships voluntarily, for the sake of realizing some specific goals.” Instead, he argues that humans are embedded in their cultures and communities. Individuals are situated in a web of relations and social matrix that defines their personal identity. As MacIntyre says, “I am someone’s son or daughter, someone else’s cousin or uncle; I am citizen of this or that city, member of this or that guild or profession; I belong to this tribe, that clan, this nation.”

Taylor’s basic thesis is that humans are ‘self-interpreting’ *dialogical* beings. Human life is *dialogical* in character, which means humans are in need of other human beings not just for material and social support, but also for giving meaning to their lives. He writes,

“We become full human agents, capable of understanding ourselves, and hence of defining our identity, through our acquisition of rich human languages of expression. For my purposes here, I want to take language in a broad sense, covering not only the words we speak, but also other modes of expression whereby we define ourselves, including the "languages" of art, of gestures, of love, and the like. But we do not? learn these modes of languages needed for self-definition on their own. Rather, we are introduced to them through interaction with others who matter to us—what George Herbert Mead called 'significant others'.”

The genesis of the human mind is in this sense not monological, not something each person accomplishes on his or her own, but dialogical.

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25 as quoted in Mahajan, *ibid.*, pp.46-47.
26 Taylor, n. 4, p. 79.
This dialogicality is central to the formation of an individual’s identity. For Taylor, “we define our identity always in dialogue with, sometimes in struggle against, the things our significant others want to see in us.” It is relevant here to quote Mead himself,

“The individual experiences himself as such, not directly, but indirectly, from the particular standpoints of other individual members of the same social groups as a whole to which he belongs. For he enters his own experience... only in so far the first becomes an object to himself... and he becomes an object to himself only by taking the attitudes of other individuals towards himself within a social environment.”

In this sense, identity is socially derived and is dependent on society. Here comes the issue of ‘recognition’. Since, our identity is formed by constant dialogue with our ‘significant others’, their ‘recognition’ of our individuality and difference becomes indispensable; their non-recognition or misrecognition can seriously damage our human dignity. But liberalism’s monologicality, according to him, totally ignores this crucial aspect of human life and its importance to identity formation. Thereby, gravely damaging the ideal of human dignity, to which it claims commitment.

Culture, for Taylor, is the arena where this dialogicality becomes obvious. Humans do not just demand to be treated as equals along with others but also wish to be differentiated from others. This tension between ‘equal recognition’ and ‘differential treatment’ is the crux in the politics of recognition. Cultural difference is one such factor that goes into the making of a human identity. Humans are culturally embedded creatures. Cultures, as we know, are many and have been the primary source of differentiation for humans. Humans relate to the world and with other humans through the mediation of Culture. Thus, for Taylor, respecting culture entails due recognition of difference, hence Identity and Human dignity as well. He goes on to emphasize the value of culture as,

“Cultures that have provided the horizon of meaning for a large number of human beings, of diverse characters and temperaments, over a long period of time — that have, in other words, articulated their sense of the good, the holy, the admirable — are almost certain to have something that deserves our admiration and respect, even if it accompanied by much

that we have to abhor and reject. Perhaps, one could put it in another way; it is supreme arrogance to discount this possibility a priori." 28

From the above infamous comment by Taylor, we can see that, for him, culture ultimately becomes a value in itself, cultures need to be protected and valued because of their contribution to humans; as contexts of choice; as relics of the past; on par with individual rights. The last argument needs to be elaborated a bit. Just as we think individuals have rights and deserve to be treated as equals, so do cultures. Hence, Taylor criticizes liberalism for positing individual rights and their freedom in a cultural vacuum,

"because complete freedom would be a void in which nothing would be worth doing, nothing would deserve to count for anything. The self which has arrived at freedom by setting aside all external obstacles and impingements is characterless, and hence without defined purpose, however much this is hidden by such seemingly positive terms as 'rationality' or 'creativity'." 29

Will Kymlicka reformulates this as,

"The desire to subordinate all the presupposition of our social situation to our rational self-determination is finally empty, because the demand to be freely self-determining is indeterminate: it 'cannot specify any content to our action outside of a situation which sets goals for us, which thus imparts a shape to rationally and provides an inspiration for creativity'." 30

Thus, Taylor says,

"Just as all must have equal civil rights and equal voting rights, regardless of race or culture, so all should enjoy the presumption that their traditional culture has value."

Michel Sandel another prominent communitarian argues that a liberal view of self is a false view of the ‘self’ and calls it an ‘unencumbered self’. An unencumbered notion of self is one where the self is prior to its ends. Contrary to this liberal assumption of the ‘self’, Sandel argues, that "the self is not prior to, but rather constituted by, its ends - we can distinguish ‘me’ from my ends’ our ‘selves are at last partly constituted by ends that we do not choose, but rather discover by virtue of our being embedded in some shared

29 Ibid., p. 157.
social context.” Michael Walzer, Alister MacIntyre and others argue in the same line. In other words, these communitarians argue what we think is ‘good,’ (ends) for our (self) lives is largely determined by our cultural context. Strong communitarians like Sandel believe that an individual, or self cannot liberate itself form the good, or end that is provided by cultures.

Kymlicka summarizes the communitarian critique against liberalism as follows: “The liberal view of the self (1)is empty. (2) violates our self-perception; (3) ignores our embedded-ness in communal practices; (4) ignores the necessity for social confirmation of our individual judgments; and (5) pretends to have an impossible universality or objectivity.” Further, he says, “True freedom must be ‘situated’.”

Communitarians, on the other hand, hold that “Individuals are constituted by their community and culture.” As Gurpreet Mahajan writes,

“The notion of constituted self entails two things: (i) collective community identity gives my life its moral particularity’ i.e., in the absence of constitutive communal frameworks, the very idea of morality as a rational or intelligible enterprise drops out and as members of specific communities, members are shared by collective goals. Effectively, this means they cannot stand back or distance themselves from these goals to assess them. Conceptions of good life are not perceived here as objects of choice.”

Before going into the liberal and other responses to this communitarian challenge, we will look at Multiculturalism.

Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism strikes a middle ground between the Communitarian and Liberal stands on culture. Primarily, it values ‘Cultural diversity’. At the same time, like liberals, it believes that individuals have the relative autonomy to reject or revise the conception of good that is provided by their community and culture. Parekh writing on the issue of respect for culture says,

31 Ibid., p. 10.
32 Ibid., p. 47.
33 Ibid.
34 Mahajan, n. 24, p. 47.
"A culture has two dimensions, a community whose culture it is and the content and character of that culture. Respect for a culture and for the content and character of that culture. The two forms of respect have differed bases. We should respect a community's right to its culture for a variety of reasons, such as that human beings should be free to decide how to live, that their culture is bound up with their history and identity, that is means much to them, and so forth. Every community has as good a right to its culture as any other, and there is no basis for inequality.

"As for culture itself, our respect for it is based on our assessment of its content or the kind of life it make possible for its members. Since every culture gives stability and meaning to human life, holds it member together as a community, displays creative energy, and so on, it deserves respect. However, after a sensitive and sympathetic study of it form within, we might conclude that the overall quality of life it offers its members leaves much to be desired. We might then think that we are unable to accord it as much respect as another, which is better in these respects. Although all cultures have worth and deserve basic respect, they are not equally worthy and do not merit equal request." 35

Here, in the second part of his argument, Parekh makes an important point that differentiates him from that of Taylor. He strongly disagrees that every culture is valuable or deserves respect no matter what abhorring thing it contains. By distinguishing 'community' from 'content and character of that culture,' he lets the individuals or a community itself, reevaluate or reassess the content and character of their culture. Another insight he gives is that, all cultures are not equal just because they are cultures and belong to a particular community. (This particular insight becomes pertinent to the issue that concerns Dalits particularly. Ambedkar, with whom, this work is concerned with, endorses this relative autonomy to an individual and community against culture.)

Emphasizing this aspect, Mahajan writes, they reject the notion of 'radically situated self.' 36 However, she writes, "what must be underlined here is that multiculturalism does not see the individual as subject of change. It too, locates agency in the community rather than the individual." 37 In other words, "multiculturalism affirms the premise that individual identity is shaped, in part, by cultural community membership, and that individuals value these memberships. It is because these community memberships are deeply cherished that it makes sense to protect and preserve them." 38 For this reason multiculturalism stands for heterogeneity, it entails preserving marginalized minority

35 Parekh, n.16, pp. 176-77.
36 Mahajan, n.24, p. 48.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
cultures. It differs from liberalism by giving emphasis on community rather than 'individual autonomy'. Mahajan, says,

"For Kymlicka both multiculturalism and liberalism are committed to the ideal of 'revisability'. However, while affirming the ideal of revisability, multiculturalism locates the individual within the community and stresses the need to provide a secure context. Liberalism, on the other hand, gives centrality to the idea of individual autonomy, and in this visualizes an autonomous and unencumbered self."³⁹

Let us move on to understand why liberalism sticks on to its value of 'individual autonomy'.

**Liberalism**

Liberalism has emerged as unique political philosophy by undergoing numerous changes. Broadly, it can be classified into classical and modern. G. A Cohen, according to Kymlicka, believes that 'self-ownership,' which was one of the principle characteristics of classical liberalism, has been rejected and names the new liberals as 'social democrats'.⁴⁰ For both the classical and modern forms of liberalism, the individual is taken as the primary unit, and focus is laid on protecting the interests of the individual against the dominant interests of society. For classical liberalism, society is itself considered as an aggregation of individuals.

Liberalism also has deep affinities with Capitalist development or the Market economy. In a liberal society, as it is argued, (though never actually practiced) the state plays only a minimal role of protecting its citizens against external threats; maintaining law and order; and lets the market regulate the distributive system and other interests in society. While retaining the basic philosophy, the modern day liberals give the State a more significant social role than before. In other words, a demand for a welfare state rather than a minimal state is made; a state, which makes policies in a manner that promotes the welfare of its citizens. With this position, they stand in contrast to libertarians who defend a minimalist

⁴⁰ Kymlicka, n. 3, p.10.
State, and who strongly argue that market is the best regulator of social and material resources. We will not attempt at answering the question: what does liberalism stand for?

**Political Morality**

Liberalism’s fundamental political morality (now) defends ‘individualism’. Rawls, a prominent Kantian liberal, writes:

"Individual liberty is so important that the only legitimate ground for restricting a particular basic liberty for everyone—like the right of political participation—is to secure a more extensive system of overall basic liberties for every one. And the only legitimate ground for unequally distributing such a basic liberty is to secure for the less free person a greater system of basic liberty than he otherwise would have had. Other than that, ‘the system of equal liberties is absolute.’"  

But, what does this ‘individualism’ mean? Kymlicka writes, “Our essential interest is in leading a good life, in having those that a good life contains.”  

A good life is, 

"one that is led from inside, in accordance with our beliefs about what gives value to our lives; the other is that we be free to question those beliefs, to examine them in the light of whatever information and examples and arguments our culture can provide. And individuals must have the cultural conditions conducive to acquiring an awareness of different views about good life, and to acquiring an ability to intelligently examine and re-examine these views."  

Rawls believes that the freedom to form and revise our beliefs about values is a crucial precondition for pursuing our essential interest in leading a good life. The individual is viewed by Rawls,  

"as a conscious and purposive agent—he acts so as to achieve certain goals or purposes, based on beliefs she has about what is worth having, doing, or achieving. These beliefs give meaning to our lives; they make sense of why we do what we do. But we may be wrong in these beliefs. We may come to question the value or worth of many of the things we do, from going to church to writing novels. These beliefs underlie the most important decision we make in life, and we care whether these beliefs are true or false."  

Rawls talks of another important value that Liberals stand for—self-respect. Defending it, Rawls includes it in his list of primary goods. As to achieving this self-respect,

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41 Ibid., p. 163.  
42 Ibid.  
43 Ibid., p. 13.  
44 Ibid., p. 163.
"Liberals believe that self-respect is best secured by providing the conditions for freely judging and choosing our potential ends." It is this insistence, Kymlicka writes, on the priority of the liberties of citizenship, which makes Rawl's theory, as formulated in his two principles of justice, incompatible with minority rights. Neither of the two qualifications Rawls makes to the priority of liberty will support any of the measures for protecting cultural membership under consideration. Indeed, such measures violate both qualifications. They create unequal liberties in order to benefit not those with lesser basic liberty (e.g. the whites whose property and voting rights are restricted in aboriginal reserves or homeland), but those with the now greater liberty (the aboriginal inhabitants), and they restrict liberty in order not to enlarge liberty overall, but to protect cultural membership. They have an entirely negative effect on basic liberty, at least as Rawls defines it.) But, for Rawls, community membership is not important per se for self-respect. For Rawls, according to Kymlicka, in a society our self-respect is secured by our recognition as equal citizens, not apparently, by membership in a cultural community."  

And, he adds, Ronald Dworkin, falling under the same category, calls his version of liberalism, ethical individualism. This ethical individualism is constituted of two principles, as Dworkin says,

"The first is the principle of equal importance: it is important, from an objective point of view, that human lives be successful rather than wasted, and this is equally important, from that objective point of view, for each human life. The second is the principle of special responsibility: though we must all recognize the equal objective importance of the success of a human life, one person has a special and final responsibility for that success – the person whose life it is."

From the above principles it is evident that the individual is the primary focus for liberalism. The first principle endorses 'equality' as the basic value, and the second the value of individual responsibility. In other words, as the first principle suggests, for humans it is important to live well, which means to succeed from the critical point of view of individual himself, not from the point of view of others. Implicit here, is the principle of individual autonomy; and precisely for this is reason, the second principle of

47 Ibid., p. 5.
individual responsibility follows. If an individual has to have ‘autonomy’ and ‘responsibility’, he needs to make choices. Culture thus becomes a value, because, it is the context in which individuals make choices. Thus, liberals value culture as a context of individual choice, not because cultures have to be valued per se. They do not agree with communitarians that an individual’s life is totally determined by the cultural context but that the individual exercises a relative autonomy over his cultural context.

Kymlicka defending the ‘value of revocability’, which we talked about in the previous section, criticises Taylor, and says that he,

"seems to believe that we can acquire these tasks only by treating communal values and practices as ‘authoritative horizons’ which ‘sets goals for us’. Liberals, on the other hand insist that we have an ability to detach ourselves from any particular communal practice. No particular task is seen for us by society, and no particular cultural practice has authority that is beyond individual judgment and possible rejection. We can and should acquire our tasks through freely made personal judgments about the cultural structure, the matrix of understanding and alternatives passed down to us by previous generations, which offers us possibilities we can either affirm or reject. Nothing is 'set for us, nothing is authoritative before our judgment of its value."  

Taylor’s emptiness argument fails to show anything in support of the claim that the given must be authoritative horizons of communal values. There is nothing empty or self-defeating in the idea that these communal values should be subject to individual evaluation and possible rejection.

Liberalism, using William Gaston’s rough distinction, in our time is divided into two streams: ‘liberalism of autonomy’ and ‘liberalism of diversity’. Liberalism of autonomy is concerned with the promotion of individual autonomy and entails a commitment to sustained rational examination of self, other and social practices’.  

The second strand values ‘diversity’, understood as “differences among individuals and groups over such matters as the nature of the good life, sources of moral authority, reason versus faith, and the like.”

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48 Kymlicka, n. 30, p. 50.
50 Ibid.
The ‘ideal of autonomy’, as discussed in the preceding section, has its primary source in Kant. “Some liberals believe that the exercise of such freedom of choice is also inherently valuable, something to be valued for its own sake. It is the exercise of an inherently satisfying capacity. Charles Larmore attributes this position to Kant and Isaiah Berlin attributes it to Mill.”

For example, Mill wrote in On Liberty,

“The material and moral, like the muscular powers, are improved only by being used. The faculties are called into no exercise by doing a thing merely because other do it, no more than believing a thing only because others believe it.... He who lets the world, or his own portion of it, choose his plan of life for him, has no need of any other faculty than the ape-like one of imitation. He who chooses his plan for himself, employs all his faculties.... it is possible that he might be guided in some good path, ad kept out of harm’s way, without [exercising the faculties required by choice]. But what will be his comparative worth as a human being?”

Mill does suggest that we should exercise our capacity of free choice because it is our ‘distinctive endowment’. But Mill immediately goes on to say that exercising the capacity is important not for its own sake, but because without it we gain “no practice in discerning or desiring what is best.” Mill thought that it was good for people to reflect on their beliefs and to exercise some kind of self-conscious choice about their way of life. For this, he argued that institutions should be made liberal enough to promote individual autonomy but opposed enforcement of it from above by the State.

Apart from Mill, there is also a Hegelian influence in liberalism through the writings of another prominent liberal: John Dewey. He comments, “‘Fraternity, liberty and equality’ were hopeless abstractions outside of such communities.” ‘Community’ for individuality, within liberal tradition, thus was an important value before the Kantian tradition took over, following the Second World War. Kymlicka writes,

“If we look at the writings of earlier liberals, especially Mill, Green, Hobhouse and Dewey, a different picture emerges. They emphasized the importance of cultural membership for individual autonomy, and so had a different view about the salience of cultural membership. For example, Dewey stressed the importance of belonging to ‘communities’, which involve not only the interaction and interdependences of civil society, but a consciousness of commonality.”

51 Kymlicka, n. 30, p. 48.
53 Kymlicka, n. 30, p. 48-49.
54 Ibid., p. 207.
Emphasizing the *dialogicality* of human life, Dewey wrote, “Our sense of our own personality is largely a looking glass phenomenon. It is a reflex thing. We form our ideas, our estimates of ourselves and our self-respect in terms of what others think of us, in terms of the way in which they treat us.”\(^55\) And he writes, “Only by participating in the common intelligence and sharing in the common purpose as it works for the common good can individual human beings realize their true individualism.”\(^56\) Dewey strongly defends ‘individualism’, not like Kantians, but in his Hegelian manner. The individual, he insisted, is always already social. Shusterman writes, “Although advocating individual ‘self-realization as the moral ideal,’” he argued that the individual self is best fulfilled not by consciously attending to its individuality, but by instead attending to the social relations and shared concerns that shape and enrich the self in forming its interacting environment. “Self-realisation may be the end” but preoccupation with self is not the way to achieve it. For, “to make self-realisation a conscious aim might and probably would prevent full attention to those very relationships which bring about the wider development of the self.”\(^57\) But, as Kymlicka puts it, this does not mean Mill, Dewey, Hobhouse and others were communitarians; they noted the social nature of the self and for this reason talked about the importance of community membership. Community membership helped the human individual to give meaning and context; and to enlarge the individual self, not the opposite. Communities were not a value unto themselves nor were they strong defenders of cultural pluralism. Culture for them was to provide the background or base for the rights of the individual they strongly defended.

Thus, it can be argued that this dialogicality of human lives was well recognized in liberal tradition by classical liberalism, only after the Second World War. As Brian Barry believes, it was only due to the bitter experience with ‘culturalism’ that liberals altered their strategy.

\(^{56}\) Ibid.
\(^{57}\) Ibid., p. 201.
Culture and Power: sub-culture and counter-culture

In this section, we shall begin with a pertinent comment on this issue by Bhikhu Parekh. While criticizing Taylor on recognition he writes:

"Charles Taylor correctly observes, social recognition is central to the individual's identity and self worth, and misrecognition can gravely damage both. This raises the question as to how the un- or misrecognized groups can secure recognition, and here Taylor's analysis falters. He seems to think that the dominant group can be rationally persuaded to change its views of them by intellectual argument and moral appeal. This is to misunderstand the dynamics of the process of recognition.

"Misrecognition has both a cultural and material basis. White Americans, for example, take a demeaning view of African Americans partly under the influencing of the racist culture, partly because the deeply disadvantaged blacks do sometimes exhibit some of the features that confirm white stereotypes. Misrecognition, therefore, can only be countered by both undertaking a rigorous critique of the dominant culture and radically restricting the prevailing inequalities of economic and political power. Since the dominant group welcomes neither the radical critique nor the corresponding political praxis, the struggle for recognition involves cultural and political contestation and sometimes even violence, as Hegel highlighted in his analysis on the dialectic of recognition and which Taylor's sanitized version of it ignores. As we have seen, the politics of culture is integrally tied up with the politics of power because culture is itself institutionalized power and deeply imbricated with other systems of power. Cultural self-esteem cannot be developed and sustained in a vacuum and requires appropriate changes in all the major areas of life. No multicultural society can be stable and vibrant unless it ensures that its constituent communities receive both just recognition and a just share of economic and political power. It requires a robust form of social, economic and political democracy to underpin its commitment to multiculturalism." 58

Here, in the second part of his comment Parekh points out the important relation between culture, recognition and power. By arguing that recognition is not just an intellectual exercise but more important, recognition means sharing political power. There is a need to look at this issue more closely.

Peter Worsley writes,

"By 1930s, there has been several differences within American cultural anthropologists: differences between those who saw cultures as integral value-system, and those who emphasized the co-existence of plural sets of values within any culture; between those who emphasized culture as legacy and inheritance and those who argued that the essence of human existence was innovation and creativity; and differences over the weight to be given to social change rather than to continuity". 59

58 Parekh, n. 16, p. 343.
59 Worsely, n. 8, p. 17.
The term ‘sub-cultures’ was used to refer to ethnic communities and even to ‘deviant,’ and sometime criminal populations—jazzmen in south side ghettos, marijuana smokers and street gangs each had their own sub-cultures. Parekh uses the term in a similar manner. He differentiates three types of in cultural diversity – sub-cultural diversity, perspectival diversity, and communal diversity. Commenting on the first type he writes,

“although its members share a broadly common culture, some of them either entertain different beliefs and practices concerning particular areas of life or evolve relatively distinct ways of life of their own. Gays, Lesbians, those following unconventional lifestyles or family structures, and so on belong to the first category, and miners, fishermen, jet-set transnational executives, artists and others to the latter. They all broadly, share their society’s dominant system of meaning and values and seek to curve out within it spaces for their divergent lifestyle. They do not represent alternative culture but seek to pluralize the existing one. For convenience I call this sub-cultural diversity.”

Next, we come to, what Worsley calls, counter-culture. It is a form of radical critique of the dominant culture. Marxism, through the writings of Italian communist Antonio Gramsci, produced a critique of ‘capitalist culture’. In his work, The Modern Prince, Antonio Gramsci writes,

“Can there be cultural reform, and can the position of the depressed strata of society be improved culturally, without a previous economic reform and a change in the position of the social and economic fields?” And he continues, ‘intellectual and moral reform has to be linked with a programme of economic reform’ indeed the programme of economic reform is precisely the concrete form in which every intellectual and moral reform presents itself.

The basic insight that Gramsci provided was that ‘Culture’ is a neutral category, but had deep affinities with ‘Power.’ Until then, the dominant Marxism, believed in ‘economic determinism’. ‘Economic determinism’ was the thesis that economic factors are the sole determinants that explain the composition or form of a particular society. It employs the

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60 Ibid.
61 Here, its is important to note that Parekh makes a further distinction between those who have or seek distinct ways of life but comply with the majority culture and those specialized communities like fishermen who again seek to pluralize the dominant culture. In the case of India, these fishermen communities fall under a separate caste category. To what extent they would or can pluralize the dominant culture is worth reconsidering. Most of them have a low social status in the overall social hierarchy.
63 Parekh, n. 16, p. 3.
64 Ibid.
technical distinctions of ‘base’ and ‘superstructure’. The economic basic determines the ‘superstructure’. The superstructure consists of the civil society and the state. Here, Gramsci, argues that the superstructure is as important as the ‘economic base’. In civil society, educational, religious and other important elite institutions produce the legitimacy for the existing ‘mode of production’. He calls this ‘hegemony’. In civil society, these institutions become the ‘cultural apparatus’ for the dominant groups of society to maintain their dominance over other subordinate classes. He writes,

"From the point of view of the organizing center of a grouping is that of the ‘continuity’ which tends to create a ‘tradition’ – understood of course in an active and not a passive sense: as continuity in continuous development, but ‘organic development.’ This problem contains in a nutshell, the entire grouping to its most advanced fraction: it is a problem of education of the masses, of their ‘adaptation’ in accordance with the requirements of the goal to be achieved. This is precisely the function of law in the state and in society; through ‘law,’ the state renders the ruling group ‘homogeneous,’ and tends to create a social conformism which is useful to the ruling group’s line of development. The general activity of law (which is wider than purely State and governmental activity and also includes the activity involved in directing civil society, in those zones which the technicians of law call legally neutral – i.e., in morality and in custom generally).”

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Here, comes the link between culture and dominance. Thus, culture becomes an important factor to maintain ‘hegemony’ over economic relations. In order to counter it, Gramsci, argues intellectuals can be instrumental in creating a ‘counter culture’ to overthrow dominance of certain groups. The important insight that Gramsci can give to the debate on cultural rights is that ‘culturalism’ or cultural rights can promote ‘conservative’ tendencies and can help in maintaining the status quo. The exploited classes, Worsely writes, “also develop their own counter cultural forms of resistance. Though they suffer inequality and oppression, how they respond to those conditions depends on how they interpret and explain them, or have them interpreted and explained to them. Their responses, that is cannot simply be ‘read off’ from their position in the class structure”

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Parekh, taking a similar line, talks of ‘perspectival diversity’, writes,

65 Ibid., p. 195.
66 Worsely, n. 8, p. 17.
"some members of the society are highly critical of some of the central principles or values of the prevailing culture and seek to reconstitute it along appropriate lines. Feminists attack its deeply ingrained patriarchal bias, religious people its secular orientation, and environmentalists its anthropocentric and technocratic bias. These and other subcultures, for they often challenge the very basis of existing culture, nor distinct cultural communities living by their values and views of the world, but intellectual perspectives on how the dominant culture should be reconstituted. I shall call this perspectival diversity." 67

We can conclude this section by saying that 'culture', as Gramsci points out, is a category that should be understood critically. Its strong links with power must not be ignored as multiculturalists, communitarians and, sometimes, liberals have done. In other words, by ignoring the way culture becomes an instrument of the dominant group to perpetuate its dominance not just over cultural minorities but also over its internal minorities like women, blacks, Dalits, and other lower castes/classes, these theories seriously misrepresent the issue. Based on this understanding, we will move on to one of the principle arguments of this chapter, a Gramscian understanding of culture is helpful to understand the relation between Dalits and culture. We will also see how the particularity of their situation, as a minority, can give us further insights into understanding the relationship between the two, and at the same time the inadequacy of non-Marxist theories to understand the issue. Before that, let us understand the uniqueness of the Dalit predicament. It is argued, here, that Dalits do not constitute a different cultural minority but yet are a minority due to a culture.

Dalits and Culture

Dalits, as a category do not constitute an "encompassing group." 68 They cannot be called a community in the sense of a tribal community or a religious community. A tribal community is much more closely knitted than a religious community; mostly dwell and are strongly linked to a fixed territory; are endogamous; homogenous in lingual, occupational, ritual and cultural habits. In some cases, they may be dispersed into

67 Parekh, n.16, p. 3.
68 Here, the reference is to the notion of "encompassing group" as developed and used by Joseph Raz and Avishai Margalit in their article, "National self-determination," Journal of Philosophy, 87 (9), September 1990, pp. 443-47 and in particular, to the first three of the six points that characterize an encompassing group.
different areas but maintain strong affinities with each other. Put simply, they do not claim and share in any unique culture of their own like a tribal community; nor are they a religious community. A religious community is one which is based on a religious belief; belief in a prophet or a messenger; has a notion of god; or a revelation. At the same time, they do not share any particular language, region, religious belief, food habits, marriage laws and occupation: in sum in any unique culture. They exist as different communities wherever they exist, particularly as minorities, and in the words of T. K. Oommen, as “perennial minorities.” They are largely recognized by the professions they do. These professions in turn give them the identity and status of a Dalit. It is important to understand that there is variation in the work they do and the social status they enjoy. There are, also, groups who do not stick to any particular kind of labor or profession but, yet fall under an untouchable group. An example of this would be the Mala caste in Andhra Pradesh, while the Madiga group is considered untouchable because they do labor related to leather (considered a polluting occupation). One more important criterion that unites all Dalits is the fact that they do menial labor. Apart from all the differences they have a common identity. This identity is negatively based on experiencing similar treatment from other caste groups: the similar treatment as Untouchables. What unites all these groups is their status as untouchables; an identity which is not self-chosen but which is thrust upon them by others. Therefore, they do not have a unique culture of their own but yet constituted an identity. A unique culture is not necessary to have an identity. Brain Barry, talking of identity formation says,

"Yet we can identify people like women, blacks or gays without having to know anything much about their culture. Even if I want to say there is a women’s culture, black culture or a gay culture, the extent to which members of the group identify with such a group culture varies greatly from one member to another. And discrimination may well be based on sheer identity as a woman, a black or gay rather than on any associated cultural attributes. There are also other groups whose members suffer discrimination or other disadvantage but are not marked by any common cultural characteristics at all. Thus, the physically disabled suffer from the avoidable effects of their disability, plus unfair job discrimination, and failure of institutions to adapt to their needs.... similarly old age."69

Hence, what gives them their unique identity is a similar mistreatment or discrimination by all who are not Dalits or ‘touchables’. But, at the same time, what gives them their

69 Barry, n. 49, p. 307.
identity is a unique cultural system of caste. Seen from this point of view, a unique cultural system of caste throughout India gives the legitimacy to treat them as untouchables. To repeat, what divides them is a particular type of cultural difference and what unites them is a common (mis)treatment by a single, unique, dominant, culture of caste and untouchability. This predicament of theirs needs to be understood a bit more clearly. Robert Deliege commenting on their ambiguous relationship with the dominant culture writes, “The position of untouchables in society is ambiguous. They live on the fringes of society, as intermediaries between the human world and the surrounding ‘forests’.”

This common (mis)treatment of untouchability by touchable castes can be understood at many levels. At the most concrete and direct level, Dalits suffer from social segregation or untouchability. This social segregation is of two types: one physical and other social. At the physical level, they were (and are) not allowed to use the same physical space as that of other caste groups. This physical segregation translates into them living in their own enclosed ghettos. At the social level, they are cut off from the mainstream social and cultural sphere. This cultural sphere consists of religious ritual, practices, marriage educational and other important social functions. In the economic sphere they are discriminated and exploited, and have no share in the economically beneficent activities, being limited to activities like scavenging and bonded labor. Deliege, writes, “Furthermore, such social exclusion has an economic dimension. Untouchables are also denied access to the means of production. Economic dependence and material poverty are inherent in their condition.” They were not allowed to own land or build concrete houses. As a proletariat it, “has on its labor power to earn a livelihood, and as a consequence it struggles along in a permanent state of economic dependence on landowners. This dependence is the essential aspect of untouchability.”

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72 Ibid.
At the second, and much deeper level, they suffered (and suffer) gross ‘misrecognition’ by the Caste Hindus. And this misrecognition happens through cultural means. Recall, Charles Taylor’s comment on misrecognition we encountered earlier in this chapter, where he says our identity is shaped by the recognition or misrecognition of others, and, more importantly, that this misrecognition can cause a real damage to a group or persons. This misrecognition happens when a society mirrors back a ‘demeaning’, ‘confining’ or a ‘contemptible’ picture to a group. It is, to reiterate what Taylor says, “imprisoning someone in a false, distorted and reduced mode of being.” Hence, it can be a form of oppression. For example, in many parts of India these groups are forced to do menial jobs against their will because these groups traditionally did these kinds of jobs. But ask the Caste Hindus and they take name of tradition. Here, misrecognition, as Taylor conveniently ignores, happens in the name of culture. As he argues that misrecognition could seriously damage a person’s self-respect and dignity, this can force upon him a negative identity. Thus, the identity of a Dalit or untouchable is negative.

Since, Dalits belong to a community, and inherit a negative identity, they do not like to preserve that community identity. In this case, talk of community rights is meaningless. They cannot, as in Parekh’s understanding, be categorized as sub-cultures, who seek to pluralize the mainstream culture. If we use Parekh’s framework, they, like Feminists, seek ‘perspectival diversity’; where a demand for restructuring the dominant culture along appropriate lines is made.

Dalits, however, forge a common identity based on common suffering as caste communities; they would like to maintain the linguistic, regional and other cultural differences. This seeking to keep linguistic, regional and cultural differences that they share with the dominant caste groups complicates the issue further. In this sense, culture is not totally rejected, but a radical restructuring is demanded to fight the evil of ‘misrecognition and mistreatment’ by the caste Hindus. For Dalits, culture is an important factor, because it is culture that creates their negative identity, an identity that they rightly reject.
There is one more problem that needs to be addressed. Some Dalits groups claim to have a culture, which has been lost due to cultural domination by others. It is worth mentioning in this context, that Ambedkar claims that Dalits did belong to a different culture from that of the Hindus but, due to cultural repression by the Hindus, they have lost their collective memory and practices of their past as Buddhists. He further claims to recover and restore this culture for Dalits. In such a case, Culturalists do not have a specific and clear cut answer. Can cultures be restored? Or can cultures be reinvented and recreated, based on some old and some new values? That would challenge the culturalist perception of culture as a relic of the past, which needs to be preserved.

The issues of ‘individual autonomy’, ‘self-realisation’ and revisability of ‘conceptions of good’ that liberals fiercely defend cannot be addressed without providing a secure cultural context. Kymlicka argues a secure cultural context is one where there is not a threat of cultural homogenization. Cultural homogenization is the process by which a particular culture, mostly the culture of the dominant community, is imposed on minorities, who belong to another culture; thereby forcing the ‘culture’ of minorities to wither away. This, he argues, is cultural discrimination. Hence, a secure cultural context, for Kymlicka, means maintaining cultural diversity. Gurpreet Mahajan, for example, writes, “the significance of multicultural political theory is that it has raised the issue of culture-based discrimination in society.”

By “culture-based discrimination”, she means discrimination based on cultural differences. She writes, “the idea that cultural differences are also a source of disadvantage and discrimination in society is the unique contribution of multiculturalism to democratic theory.” From the above two statements, we can deduce that ‘culturalists’ take cultural discrimination as discrimination based on cultural difference. But, as we have seen in the section titled ‘Culture and Power’, where we discussed the Gramscian insight that culture can be a means of discrimination, there is another aspect of cultural discrimination, which culturalists conveniently ignore. In India, like in Italy, religious and ‘cultural apparatus’ are a means to maintain the dominance of certain groups – in the case of Italy, the clergy and in the case of India, the

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73 Mahajan, n. 24, p. 198.
74 Ibid.
Brahmins, along with other dominant castes. Both represent and have a grip over the religious sphere.

Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter argues, since 'culture,' like politics, touches every aspect of human life, and all humans, the relationship between it and politics is an important concern to the study of politics. Communitarians get the credit for showing this neglected aspect in contemporary liberal theory. On the other hand, the manner in which this issue was brought to the forefront; and the arguments that were furnished to defend it, show a conservative trend in political theory. First, Culturalism, the argument for preserving cultures as relics of the past, assumes that cultures are static rather than dynamic. Second, its links with 'power,' as Marxists like Gramsci talked about, has not been seriously and adequately explored. In this context, Charles Taylor’s article ‘Politics of Recognition,’ though it begins with the serous and important issue of misrecognition of marginalized groups likes Blacks and Women, does not, however, clearly explain how ‘cultural recognition,’ as he sees it, can solve the problem of these groups. The same can be said with respect to Dalits and the Culture question. Kymlicka’s distinction between internal and external rights also does not show how to eliminate the mistreatment and misrecognition that happen through culture. At most, these theories seem to be concerned with groups who have a distinct culture, and are a minority. Since, Kymlicka rejects the distinction between liberal and illiberal cultures, and goes on to show that every culture can be liberalized, it leaves the larger question: how? Dalits, are a group of communities, “perennial minorities” wherever they exist, who are host to multiples levels of mistreatment in the name of Culture and tradition; the notion, ‘rights of minority cultures,’ does not attend to their problems. Liberalism’s concern over ‘individual autonomy,’ ‘self-realisation,’ ‘equal treatment’ and Justice, particularly as developed by Rawls and Dworkin, cannot be realized without addressing the important question relating to Culture. In the case of India and the Dalits, this is the principle drawback. Hence, liberal theories and values cannot be considered without addressing the question:
how to provide a secure cultural context, so that these values can be realized. Ambedkar, as we will see in the next chapter, has to grapple with this complex issue of securing the rights of Dalits, as a unique minority, without losing their internal plurality, in a cultural context that is totally antagonistic to their rights.