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A THEORETICAL ANALYSIS OF THE NOTION OF SELF

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Abstract:

This paper discusses the theories of the notion of self. The Liberal theory of self says that self is autonomous whereas the communitarian theory defines it as constituted self. This paper analyzes that how is the liberal theory of self different from the communitarian notion of self? It also discusses the notion of self according to multiculturalism and finds out the differences between multiculturalism and communitarianism on the notion of self. On the other hand, this paper tries to show that there are some similarities between liberal notion of self and multicultural notion of self. The analysis of theories of self show that these theories are not opposite to each other but these theories make a linkage among them through which these theories develop themselves in a different ways.

KEY WORDS:

autonomous self, constituted self, culture, community, individual rights.

INTRODUCTION

According to the liberal notion of self, individuals are not bound by norms and values of society. They can be free from our social roles and relationships. We can easily leave these responsibilities according to our will. Liberal notion of self is that of an autonomous self. The self is supposed to be free from social-cultural circumstances. So that the self could have complete freedom and autonomy and the individual could flourish in its creativity through them. Through the complete freedom individual would have freedom of choice. Freedom of choice gives realization of autonomy to individual. For liberals, self is similar to an atom. It is self-reliant and self-sufficient. Each individual has uniqueness. Community is merely an association and its membership is a matter of his/her freedom of choice. It emphasizes that the individual should have freedom of choice because every community tries to maintain its particularities through its practices. Practices are the flexible rules which also insist to live in a certain way. It assumes practices as a means of restraints of individual autonomy and damages individual's uniqueness. So, individual should be socially abstracted for the sake of his uniqueness.

The liberal notion of self has been criticized by the communitarians. The communitarians say that complete freedom is not possible because individual cannot isolate himself/herself from his/her cultural community. He/she is embedded in the different types of relationships. The complete freedom is similar to Nihilism which ignores the importance of values and norms of cultural community. The liberal views freedom of choices as a means for fulfilling the certain plan. It does not emphasis on the freedom of choice as ends. Similarly, Michael Sandel has argued that through liberal notion of self, we can not understand and analysis our inner and outer world without presumption. Society constructs the approach through which we

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understand ourselves and the other world.

Alisdair MacIntyre and Michael Sandel argue that our identity is not a matter of choice. It does not depend on our will. We are not identified by ourselves. It is a discovery of those attachments which makes our identity. Community not only gives an identity to individual but it also moulds his/her views or towards his/her society. As Charles Taylor says that recognition is not a monologue but a dialogical process. Alisdair MacIntyre and Michael Sandel do not accept the liberal view on society. He argues that we can not deny these attachments. In the social cobweb we are fastened by the series of roles and relationships. These roles and relationships mould our choices and due to these reshaped choices, our goals are also affected by these attachments and we move to it. We are totally entangled with the attachments and social relationships. Self is moulded by the society and engulfed in the social matrix. Not only freedom of choice but also individual's capacity to make choice is also developed by the society. So, our choice and capacity can not go beyond the social surroundings.

According to Will Kymlicka, Taylor's argument on self is not logically sound. Ends are not relevant for all circumstances. Circumstances change time to time. So, individual should have right to revise his/her ends so that, he/she could get a good life. Otherwise, the unrevised ends would be a hurdle for achieving a good life. Gurpreet Mahajan also differentiates multiculturalism from communitarianism. Both theories accept individual as a constituted self. But their views on the constituted self are different. Communitarianism considers that each community has its own perception of morality that is embodied in a particular language. Such morality gives an identity to individual which is formed by the community. So, his/her identity is not only shaped by his/her membership but by the shared conception of good life. The norms and values of the shared goals give him/her a unique identity. The argument is the concept of shared goals is beyond his freedom of choice. The shared goal is based on the common good. So it is totally incoherent and irrational to change it.

Multiculturalism supports the constituted self which is wrapped by the sense of belongingness. It argues that the liberal notion of self isolates individual from his/her cultural milieu. It agrees with the idea that individual's identity is inseparable from community. But it disagrees with the unchangeable shared goals. Here, Will Kymlicka argues that the shared goals must be flexible. Communitarians also believe that there should be a shared conception of good life because without it, the public good cannot be obtained. In the society, if individual good is valued then there would be a clash of interests of individual and none of them would be able to fulfill their interests. The shared goals give stability. It accepts the importance of shared conceptions of good for the survival of the political community, in which, the conception of shared good must be accepted by all.

The bone of contention between liberalism and multiculturalism is formal equality. Liberalism believes that the formal equality is for all types of discrimination whereas multiculturalism accepts it as a means of maintaining discrimination in society. Will Kymlicka finds out that what is the basic difference between the two and on which point they are unable to compromise? He agrees that both theories accept freedom of revisability. Liberalism supports individual autonomy. Here, autonomy means freedom of choice. It includes right to change the choices. This is called freedom of revisability, which makes the freedom of choice more feasible. As Kymlicka disagrees with the separation between choice and circumstances. According to him, the liberal notion of equality separates choices from its circumstances. For them, choice is autonomous. They assume that individuals choice as equal without consideration of his circumstances. It is free from context. He says that choices are not autonomous. Liberals should view the choices in the contexts. All individual's choice cannot be equal for example if some one's choice to get wine. For getting wine, his demand for subsidy would be unfair. But, if someone whose choice is to get costly medicine, his demand for subsidy would be preferable. So, their choices should be concern with the context of choice.

In this way, liberalism and multiculturalism both can support cultural diversity. The crux of the matter is that cultural diversity can be facilitated through various options and alternatives. This shows the acceptance of diverse conceptions of good. Diverse conceptions of good are the core of both theories. For liberalism, it is essential for individual autonomy and for multiculturalism it is essential for the preservice of the cultural communities. Cultural diversity requires that a fixed conception of good life doesn't prevail. Prevalence of cultural diversity requires that some truths are understood as relative as they vary from society to society.

Parekh says that multiculturalism supports culturally differed equality but also supports the broader concept of freedom at the community level. He argues that individual freedom will flourish only when communities would have freedom to live according to their own way. For him, multiculturalism is not against liberalism but it is a concept through which liberalism gives importance to the cultural diversity. Will Kymlicka has argued liberalism is sufficient to the cultural diversity. Due to different philosophy of minds, they have illusion in liberalism as it does not recognize the importance of community and also

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individual as a member of the community. In Kymlicka's reworking of the liberal theory, it has given an alternative to cope up individual's individuality with his social surroundings. For Kymlicka, multiculturalism is based on autonomy rather than equality. He puts strong emphasis on securing individual autonomy, albeit he tries to protect it through the cocoon of culture.

As Bhikhu Parekh argues that cultural diversity not only invokes a deep sense of equality but also gives a wider sense of freedom. This accepts freedom at the community level. Individual freedom will flourish only when communities would have freedom to live according to their own way. We can say that multiculturalism expands the area of liberalism and in this way, multiculturalism sometimes tends to look like a replica of liberalism. But there is a crucial difference between both theories. Liberalism advocates freedom of revisability for the persistence of individual autonomy whereas multiculturalism supports it for the perseverance of the cultural community. We can say that their way of thinking is same but their place of emphasis is different.

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