

DEMOCRACY & DIVERSITY

CHAPTER COVERAGE

- Democracy and Diversity : (A) Social Division (B) Social Difference
- Public expression of social difference
- Response of Democracy : (A) Social differences (B) Divisions (C) Inequalities



Democracy and Diversity

◆ A story from Mexico Olympics :

In the 200 meters race in the 1968 Olympics held at Mexico City, US athletes, Tommie Smith and John Carlos, both AFRICAN-AMERICANS, won the gold and bronze medals respectively. They received their medals wearing black socks and no shoes to represent Black poverty. They tried to draw international attention to racial discrimination in the United States. The black-gloved and raised clenched fists were meant to symbolise BLACK POWER. The silver medallist, Australian athlete, Peter Norman, wore a human rights badge on his shirt to show his support to the two Americans.

The international Olympic Association held Carlos and Smith guilty of violating the Olympic spirit. Their medals were taken back. Back home, they were subjected to a lot of criticism. Norman too suffered for his action and was not included in the Australian team for the next Olympic. But their action succeeded in gaining international attention for the Civil Rights Movement in the US.

◆ Civil Rights Movement in America :

Civil Rights Movement in the USA (1954-1968) refers to a set of events and reform movements aimed at abolishing legal racial discrimination against African-Americans. Led by Martin Luther King Jr., this movement practised non-violent methods of civil disobedience against racially discriminatory laws and practices. African-American, Afro-American, or Black American, or Black are the terms used to refer mainly to the descendants of Africans who were brought into America as slaves between the 17th century and early 19th century.

◆ Black Power : The Black Power movement emerged in 1966 and lasted till 1975, which was a more militant anti-racist movement, advocating even violence if necessary to end racism in the US.

◆ Origins of Social differences :

Social differences are mostly based on birth. We belong to a community simply because we were born into it. Differences are also based on our choices. For example, some people are atheists. Some people choose to follow a religion other than the one in which they were born. Social differences divide similar people from

one another, but they also unite very different people. People belonging to different social groups share differences and similarities cutting across the boundaries of their groups.

It is fairly common for people belonging to the same religion to feel that they do not belong to the same community, because their caste or sect is very different. It is also possible for people from different religion to have the same caste and feel to each other. Rich and poor persons from the same family often do not keep close relations with each other for they feel they are very different.

➤ **Social division and social difference**

A social difference means the difference in a group of people due to their race, religion, language or culture. It becomes a social division when some social differences are joined by another set of social differences. In other words, when two or more social differences join together, it turns into a social division. For example, the difference in the Blacks and the Whites in America is due to their different race which is a social difference. It becomes a social division when, say, the income factor is also seen. The Blacks tend to be poor, homeless and the Whites tend to be rich and educated. This creates a divide in the people, making them feel that they belong to different communities.

(a) Reasons of social differences :

- (i) Birth :** Birth is the most important factor which is responsible for social differences. A person in India is considered of a low caste because of his birth in the lower class family. A black is discriminated from white because of his colour which is once again controlled by birth.
- (ii) Differences based on choice :** Some of the differences are based on our choices. For example, some people are atheists. They don't believe in God or any religion. Differences also occur because of choice of occupation. Differences occur among the people because of different profession and economic activities also.
- (iii) Differences based on religion :** Sometimes religion can be one of the causes of social differences. It is fairly common for people belonging to the same religion to feel that they do not belong to the same community because their caste or sect is very different.
- (iv) Differences based on economic status :** Economic status can also be responsible for social differences. Rich and poor people belonging to same community or religion or sect often do not keep close relations with each other as they feel that they are very different.

◆ Overlapping and Cross-cutting Differences :

Social division takes place when some social differences overlaps with the differences.

Eg (a) The difference between the black and white becomes a social division in the US because the Black tend to be poor, homeless and discriminated against.

(b) In our country Dalits tend to be poor and landless. They often face discrimination and injustice.

When social differences cross out one another, it is difficult to pit one group of people against the other.

Eg. The cases of Northern Ireland and the Netherlands. Both are predominantly Christian but divided between Catholics and Protestants. In Northern Ireland. If we are catholic, we are also more likely to be poor. In the Netherlands. class and religion tend to cut across each other. Catholics and Protestants are equally likely to be poor or rich. The result is that Catholics and Protestants have had conflicts in Northern Ireland, while they do not do so in the Netherlands.

- (a) Cross-cutting difference happens when one type of social difference is weakened by another set of social difference. Then it becomes difficult to group people into a single category because they are going to have different opinions and views on different matters. On some matters there might be agreement on a particular issue and on some matters there might be disagreement on another issue.
- (b) Social division of one kind or another exists in most countries. Germany and Sweden, were once highly HOMOGENEOUS, are now undergoing rapid change with influx of people from other parts of the world. MIGRANTS bring with them their own culture and tend to form a different social community. In this sense most countries of the world are multi-cultural.
- (c) The combination of politics and social division may be dangerous and explosive. Democracy involves competition among various political parties. If they start compelling in terms of some existing social divisions, it can make social division into political divisions and lead to conflict, violence or even disintegration of a country.

◆ **Range of outcomes :**

“Case of Northern Ireland” : its population is divided into two major sects of Christianity : 5 percent are protestants, while 44 per cent are Roman Catholics. The Catholics were represents Nationalist parties who demanded that Northern Ireland be unified with the Republic of Ireland, a predominantly Catholic country. The protestants who wanted to remain with the UK, which is dominantly protestant. Hundreds of civilians, militants and security forces were killed in the fight between Unionists and Nationalists in 1998. The UK government and the Nationalists reached a peace treaty after which the latter suspended their armed struggle. In “Yugoslavia”, political competition along religious and ethnic lines led to the disintegration of Yugoslavia into six independent countries.

Some people conclude that politics and social division must not be allowed to mix Social divisions must never be expressed in politics.

➤ **Politics of social divisions**

In a democracy, there is generally more than one party for elections. People have options at the time of voting and can choose any party according to their wish. There is competition among the political parties to win the elections and form the government. Political parties try to influence and impress the voters by making promises and discussing their plans of growth for the country.

Social division of one kind of another exists in most countries of the world. In a democracy political parties talk about these divisions, make different promises to different communities, look after due representation of various communities and make policies to redress the grievances of the disadvantaged communities. People from one community tend to prefer some party more than other. Yet all this does not lead to disintegration of the country.

◆ **Three determinants :**

Three factors are important in deciding the outcome of politics of social divisions.

1. First of all the outcome depends on how people perceive their identities. If people see their identities in singular and exclusive terms, it becomes very difficult to accommodate. It is much easier if the people see that their identities are multiple and are complementary with the national identity. This helps them to

stay together. This is how most people in our country see their identity. They think of themselves as Indians as well as belonging to a state or a language group or a social or religious community.

2. Second, it depends on how political leaders raise the demands of any community. It is easier to accommodate demands that are within the constitutional framework and are not at the cost of another community.
3. Third, it depends on the how the government reacts to demands of different groups. If the rulers are willing to share power and accommodate the reasonable demands of minority community, social divisions become less threatening for the country.

Thus social diversities in a country need not be seen as a source of danger; In a democracy political expression of social divisions is very normal and can be healthy. Expression of various kinds of social divisions in politics often results in their cancelling one another out and thus reducing their intensity. This leads to strengthening of a democracy.

People who feel marginalised, deprived and discriminated have to fight against the injustices. The struggle against such inequalities sometimes takes the path violence and defiance of state power.

GLOSSARY

1. **Social Division** : Division of the society on the basis of language, region, caste, colour or race and sex. It signifies linguistic and regional diversity.
2. **Social Differences** : These are the situations where people are discriminated against on the basis of social, economic and racial inequality. It gives way to social diversity which is different from society to society.
3. **Civil Rights Movements in the USA** : A series of events and reform movements with the aim of abolishing legal, social discrimination against African Americans. Led by Martin Luther king, this movement practised non-violent methods of civil disobedience against racially discriminatory laws and practices.
4. **African-American** : Afro-American, Black American or Black are the terms used to refer mainly to the descendents of Africans who were brought into America as slaves between 17th century and early 19th century.
5. **The Black power** : It was a movement started by black people in 1966 against racialism and the practice of apartheid. It was a militant movement advocating even violence if necessary to end racism in the US.
6. **Overlapping Differences** : Social differences which overlap other difference are known as overlapping differences. e.g. difference between the Blacks and Whites becomes a social division in US because the Blacks tend to be poor, homeless and discriminated against.
7. **Cross cutting Differences** : If social differences cross cut one another, it is known as cross cutting differences. In another way, in this situation, groups that share a common interest on one issue are likely to be in different side on a different issue.
8. **Homogenous Society** : Homogenous society signifies absences of significant ethnic differences. It is society that has similar kinds of people or inhabitants.
9. **Migrants** : Any body who shifts from one region or country to another region with in a country or to another country for the purpose of work or other economic opportunities.
10. **Multi-cultural community** : Social community formed on the basis of different cultures is known as the multi-cultural community. This happens mostly due to the practise of migration when people bring with them their own culture.
11. **Minority** : It refers to communities who are less than half of the total population of the country. The idea of minority at national level is totally different from what it is at state level.