UNIT 16 ETHNICITY POLITICS AND STATE

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16.1 INTRODUCTION

Almost all states today are marked by diversity and difference-differences of ethnicity, culture and religion in addition to many individual differences which characterise members of societies. A large number of these states are confronted with ethnic conflicts, assertion of ethno-religious identity, movements for recognition, rights of self determination etc. In view of the fact that the prospect for peace and war, the maintenance of national unity and the fundamental human rights in many parts of the world and in many ways depend on the adequate solution of ethnic tensions the way States deal with the question has become one of the most important political issues in the contemporary world. Of course each state has its own unique way to deal with or responding to its cultural diversities yet there are some general approaches which states adopt, or have been suggested by experts. An understanding of the responses of States and approaches in dealing with ethnic groups will be useful for the students of comparative politics to analyse the phenomena in general and specific situations as also to make policy suggestions.

16.2 ETHNICITY: MEANING

Race, ethnicity and cultural identity are complex concepts that are historically, socially and contextually based. These social relations, according to James, are dynamic; their meaning changes overtime. Apple refers to them as “place markers” operating in a complex political and social arena.

Historically, the term “ethnic” derives from the Greek ethnos (ethnikos) which refers to Heathen nations or peoples not converted to Christianity. It was also used to refer to races or large groups of people having common traits and customs or to exotic primitive
groups. In anthropological literature the term “ethnic group” is generally used to designate a population which (1) is largely biologically self perpetuating (2) shares fundamental cultural values, realised in overt unity in cultural forms; (3) makes up a field of communication and interaction; (4) has a membership which identifies itself, and is identified by others as constituting a category distinguishable from other categories of the same order. By ethnic group sociologists generally mean a relatively stable socio-cultural unit performing an unspecified number of functions, bound together by a language, often linked to a territory, and derived actually or allegedly from a system of kinship. In this sense the ethnic community is an extremely old collective reality. International Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences defines an ethnic group as “a distinct category of the population in a larger society whose culture is usually different from its own. The members of such a group are, or feel themselves, or are thought to be, bound together by common ties of race or nationality or culture.”

In modern political usage the term “ethnic” is generally used as a designation of social unity based upon common and separate language or dialect, historical living in a defined area, occupation and mode of life, cultural and social traditions, customs and folklore. It is also used for social class, racial or national minority groups and also for distinguishing cultural and social groups in society. There are however differences with regard to emphasis. Some would include a religious denomination under the rubric, some would identify a race as an ethnic group, whereas for others the latter is a smaller subdivision of race, and so on.

There are some for whom an ethnic group is composed of what have been called “primordial affinities and attachments”. For them it is the identity made up of what person is born with or acquires at birth. But for some, ethnic groups, though centrally concerned with cultural matters, symbols and values and with issues of self-definition are not given entities but are social and political constructions. Paul Brass, for instance says:

Any group of people dissimilar from other peoples in terms of objective cultural criteria and containing within its membership, either in principle or in practice, the elements for a complete division of labour and for reproduction forms an ethnic category. The objective cultural markers may be a language or dialect, distinctive dress or diet or customs, religion or race.

Some scholars view characteristics of ethnic groups primarily in alienation or migration etc. T.K. Oommen opines that the ethnic is a group of people who share a common history, tradition, language and life-style, but are uprooted from and/or unattached to a homeland. Some writers in the U.S. have applied the term ethnic groups to immigrant groups who are distinguished by cultural differences in language and national origin and who have no distinguishing physical characteristics. Still for others, territorial relationship is important. Smith, for instance, describes ethnic as a named human population with shared ancestry, myths, history and culture having association with a specific territory and a sense of solidarity.

With regard to basic features of ethnic communities there are differences among Marxist writers also. Y.V. Bromley points out some of these differences among the Soviet
scholars. Some regard language and culture as fundamental features, others add to these
territory and ethnic self-consciousness, still others include in addition the peculiarities
of psychological make up ; a fourth group adds common origin and state affiliation and
a fifth group sees the essence of the ethnic communities only in specific psychological
stereotypes. Bromley defines ethnic group as a stable inter-generation totality of people
historically formed in a certain territory, who posses not only common traits, but also
relatively stable peculiarities of mentality, as well as awareness of their unity and
difference from all formulations of similar kind (self-consciousness) registered in the
self-name (ethnoim).

Some of the known definitions of ethnic groups, as mentioned above, make it clear that
there is no agreed meaning of the term “ethnic”. However each of them does refer to
some characteristics.

16.2.1 Characteristics of Ethnic Groups

As seen above among the observers, experts and even in general there is no agreed
meaning of the term ethnic. However various definitions do refer to some characteristics.
A review of the literature by Paul Brass suggests that there are three ways of defining
ethnic groups : in terms of objective attributes; with reference to subjective feelings; and
in relation to behaviour.

An objective definition assumes that though no specific attribute is invariably associated
with all ethnic categories, there must be some distinguishing cultural feature that clearly
separates one group of people from another. The features may be language, territory,
religion, colour, diet, dress or any of them. An objective definition is problematic in that
it is usually extremely difficult to determine the boundaries of ethnic categories in the
manner they suggest. A subjective definition carries with it the inherent difficulty of
answering the basic question of how a group of people initially arrives at subjective
self-consciousness. Behavioural definitions are really forms of objective definition since
they assume that there are specific, concrete ways in which ethnic groups behave or do
not behave, particularly in relation to and in interaction with other groups. Behavioural
definitions merely suggest that there are cultural differences between ethnic groups, and
the critical distinctions reveal themselves only in interaction with other groups. But the
existence of explicit codes of behaviour and interaction is rather more characteristic,
more pervasive and more evident in simple rather than in complex societies in which
people may establish their separateness with reference to specific attributes without
adopting an entirely distinct code of behaviour.

However, it is not the pre-eminence of the subjective over the objective or vice versa
but the linkage between the two, the complementarity of one with the other that facilitates
an understanding of the process of evolution and growth of an ethnic group characterised
by continuity, adoption, or change. Such a composit perspective has been provided by
the syncretistic. Taking a cue from the syncretists, Urmila Phadnis defines an ethnic
group as:

A historically formed aggregate of people having a real or imaginary association
with a specific territory, a shared cluster of beliefs and values connoting its
distinctiveness in relation to similar groups and recognised as such by others.
The definition suggests five major traits of an ethnic group: (a) a subjective belief in real or assumed historical antecedents; (b) a symbolic or real geographical centre; (c) shared emblems, such as race, language, religion, dress and diet, or a combination of some of them which, though variegated and flexible, provide the overt basis of ethnic identity; (d) self-ascribed awareness of distinctiveness and belonging to the group; and (e) recognition of the group differentiation by others.

What is important is the self-defined and “other-recognised” status. And it is this self-perception which is common in most of the definitions. Max Weber, for instance, defined ethnic group as:

Those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities in physical type of customs or of both, or because of colonisation and migration in such a way that this belief is important for the continuation of non-kinship communal relations.

Contemporary writers, both liberal and Marxists, also give significant importance to this self selection. Shibutani and Kwon, for instance suggest:

An ethnic group consists of people who conceive of themselves as being of a kind. They are united by emotional bonds and concern with the preservation of their type. With very few exceptions, they speak the same language, or their speech is at least intelligible to each other, and share a common cultural heritage. Since those who form such units are usually endogamous, they tend to look alike. Far more important, however, is their belief that they are common descent, a belief usually supported by myths of partly fictitious history.

Similarly, according to Bromley, “an ethnic group in the narrow sense of the word and in its most general form may be defined.... also by an awareness of their identity and distinctness from other similar communities. What emerges, therefore, is that an ethnic group encompasses the attributes of a presumed or fictive sense of relatedness” a kindred feeling which is perpetrated by myths and memories and reinforced by common understanding concerning the meaning of set of symbols.

We can therefore have a working definition of an ethnic group as: A group of people who share a feeling of people-hood based on real or fictional common ancestry, or real or presumed shared socio-cultural experiences or memories of shared historical past and focus on one or more symbolic elements of religion, language, dialect, race, tribe or nationality diffused as the epitome of their people-hood.

In suggesting this definition we believe that while historical continuity is important, ethnic group formation depends on a mobilisational process in the course of which various symbols become important. But no particular attribute of ethnicity can assume stable importance. The various components which figure historically have by no means been uniformly involved over a period of time. Also ethnic groups are not necessarily monoliths. These may have vertical and horizontal differentiations in terms of social categories, occupational and class categories.
16.2.2 Ethnicity

From the above it becomes clear that in the present day context those groups which, in
given social context, consciously choose to emphasise their most meaningful primary,
extra familial identity on the basis of religious, racial, cultural, linguistic, national
characteristics, or a combination of any of them, are referred to as ethnic groups. The
number of such ethnic groups – sometimes referred to as peoples or nationalities – is
enormous the world over. How many are there is not easy to determine because there
are very few systematic treatises dealing with these matters. Stavenhagen suggests that
the educated estimates, based mainly on anthropological and linguistic criteria, would
place the number of nations, peoples, or ethnic groups at around five to eight thousand,
the real figure probably being closer to the latter. Our concern here is not with the
number of such groups but with the fact that these groups live in a specific number of
states into which the present world is divided. Accordingly with the entire land surface
(apart from Antarctica) now divided among states nearly all the states contain more than
one ethnic or cultural group within their borders and are thus heterogeneous or plural
societies.

The situation is particularly significant in numerous new states that have achieved
independence since the Second World War i.e. the post-colonial states in Asia, Africa
and the Caribbean. In most of the multi-ethnic states the world over, in recent years,
there has been a resurgence of ethnic and cultural demands and group consciousness
which is generally referred to as rise of ethnicity.

By ethnicity is generally meant that condition where certain members of a society, in
a given social context, choose to emphasise as their most meaningful basis of primary
extra familial identity, certain assumed cultural, national or sematic traits. It implies that
for a group associated around a common history and culture, their inheritance and the
nature of their projects appear as distinguishing feature differentiating this group from
the larger social formation in which this group is encased.

In political terms ethnicity is a sense of ethnic identity, which has been defined by De
Vos as consisting of the subjective, symbolic or emblematic use by a group of people
of any aspect of culture, in order to differentiate themselves from other groups or as
Paul Brass suggests, in order to create internal cohesion and differentiate themselves
from other groups.

Accordingly ethnicity, as Jyotindra Das Gupta, suggests, may be regarded as an enclosing
device which carves out a recogniseable social collectivity based on certain shared
perceptions of distinctive commonness often augmented by diachronic continuity.

While ethnicity implies historical continuity it can best be understood not merely as a
primordial phenomenon in which deeply held identities have to re-emerge, but as a
strategic choice by individuals who, in other circumstances, may choose other group
membership as a means of gaining some power and privilege. Therefore ethnicity may
be viewed as a device as much as a focus for group mobilisation by its leadership
through the selected use of ethnic symbols for socio-cultural and politico-economic
purposes. What is critical about an ethnic group is not the particular set of symbolic objects which distinguish it, but the social uses of these objects; and that ethnic loyalties reflect and are maintained, by the underlying socio-economic interests of group members. In crude form ethnicity takes the form of ethnocentrism.

Ethnocentrism is basically a psychological term which denotes prejudicial attitudes favouring one ethnic group and rejecting other. It can be related to “nationalism” and “racism” but its focus is strictly on the individual’s relationship with an ethnic group rather than with a “nation”. Ethnocentrism provides a general and perhaps even universal bases for a type of behaviour which also underlines nationalism and racism. It is essentially concerned with an individual’s psychological biases towards his/her ethnic groups, and against other ethnic groups. Favourable attitudes are projected about the “in group” and unfavourable ones about the “out group”. The intensity of ethnocentric attitudes and behaviour varies from the mild and peaceful to the belligerent and megalomaniac. In general, some form of political translation of the ethnic interests is necessary to move ethnic groups from a social space to a political space. And in recent decades this process has been gaining somewhat notorious significance having political and social implications including that for the stability and structures of governments. The reasons for this kind of transformation are several. Some of these you will read in the unit on ethnic movements.

16.3 ETHNICITY AND STATE

We have seen above that the overwhelming majority of societies today are multiethnic and multicultural. Many of these are also in trouble. Some have proven unable to create or sustain any strong sense of solidarity across ethn national lines. The members of one national group are indifferent to the rights and interests of the members of other groups. This is increased by international migration caused by economic factors. Yet there has been a tendency in most states to ignore or sidetrack the ethnic issue. Whereas most states are multiethnic, few acknowledge this fact and even fewer have made constitutional or other legal provisions for their multiple ethnicity. Even democratic states have argued that by providing equal rights and opportunities to all the citizens they have respected cultural specificities of particular ethnics. As Will Kymlicka points out, liberal democratic states have historically been nation-building states in the following specific sense; they have encouraged and sometimes forced all the citizens on the territory of the state to integrate into common public institutions operating in a common language. States have used various strategies to achieve this goal of linguistic and institutional integration. Citizenship and naturalisation laws, education laws, language laws, policies regarding public service employment, military service, national media, and so on. At the same time in the face ethno-nationalism states have also adopted necessary frame works in respect of ethnic groups. These strategies generally are summarised into broader categories of assimilation, pluralism and accommodation.

16.4 ASSIMILATION AND INTEGRATION (MELTING POT MODEL)

While most states in the world are polyethnic and multinational, they have at one time or another attempted to create a national identity amongst its citizens, and have tried to
undermine any competing national identities, of sort which national minorities often possess. The nation-state ideology proclaims national unity and the homogeneity as a supreme value. This value-one-nation-one state-can only be achieved by a process of policies designed to rapidly assimilate, integrate, or incorporate the non-dominant ethnics and nationalities into the dominant mould. The idea behind these assimilationsit policies is that culturally distinct ethnics will simply disappear and melt out in the wider society – the United Nations. This is, therefore, also known as Melting Pot approach. Melting Pot, originally coined by the Anglo-Jewish writer Israel Zang – will in his play of the same name, produced in New York in 1908, the term referred to the manner in which immigrants who came to the United States at the end of the nineteenth century were encouraged to think of themselves as Americans, gradually abandoning their cultures of origin until, as in the action of the melting-pot, they eventually became fully a part of the bright new alloy. Through a process of assimilation, then, facilitated by the state, all developed into Americans sharing a single common culture.

Supporters of the policy of assimilation suggest that in a multinational state, the agency of state needs to follow a policy of absorption and assimilation as a prerequisite for nation-building. Otherwise, constituent nationalities would demand a major say for the group in the political system as a whole; or control over a piece of territory within the country; or they may demand a country of their own with full sovereignty. Some observers, however, do not suggest absorption in the majority culture. According to them, since socio-cultural identities are particularistic and, therefore divisive, they must be eviscerated, if not completely replaced, by forging new identities based on secular, universal principles. Thus there are two ways suggested by integrationists. One, hegemonic type which recognises only one primordial identity as legitimate. Here the national culture is that of the dominant cultural mainstream; other cultures are to be dissolved in it. Assimilation into the mainstream culture is the authentic measure of nationalism and patriotism of minorities. The second is uniformity pattern that assumes that older identities will gradually disappear and a new man (democratic and/or socialist man) with an overarching political identity will emerge and all citizens would have the same relationship with the state.

In general the integrationist approach implies the recognition of the individual’s rights, obligations and privileges with the differentiated corporate entities being given a low premium and the assimilation of the entire state population into a common identity. But the experience shows that while individual rights and liberty, equality and fraternity are very important and represent a major achievement in human history, they by themselves are not sufficient to deal with ethnic issues. Both theoretical arguments and empirical evidences support this contention.

In theoretical terms, making the state and nation commensurate with each other reduces practically to a subject-condition all other nationalities they may be within the boundary. Accordingly, as Acton points out, to the degree of humanity and civilisation in that dominant body which claims all the rights of the community, the inferior races are exterminated, or reduced to servitude, or outlawed, or put in condition of dependence. In history, there had been attempts at various points to “clean up” the ethnic map by genocidal measures. In recent past such “clean up” measures were carried out against
Jews and Gypsies under Hitler, Crimean Tatars, Volga Germans, and Chechen Igush under Stalin; both Tutsi and Mutu in Rwanda and Burundi, overseas Chinese in certain parts of South-east Asia, Kurds in Iraq etc. This has been done also by brutal unilateral expulsions (Asians from Uganda, Germans from most of East Central Europe etc.) Population exchanges by agreement or carried out as a result of fear has been another method of bringing about uniformity in the ethnic map as in the case of Mellenese, from Turkey and Turks from Greece; Macedonian Bulgars from Greece and Hellenes from Bulgaria; most Hindus and Sikhs from Pakistan and many Muslims from India; practically all Jews from the Arabs from the area which became Israel. But what all this has lead to?

It is also found in history that the creation of relatively homogeneous national cultures out of diverse ethnic groups by state usually takes centuries and even then leaves ethnically distinct enclaves, as in modern France and Spain. It has been pointed out that it required four hundred years for French to become the national language of France after its adoption as the official language of country in 1539. And even today, language and dialect differences remain important in the country in such regions as Breton and Languedoc. Even in U.S.A., the complete assimilation leading to the disappearance of ethnic identities and solidarities, which was much discussed in the earlier part of the present century, has not in any simple sense taken place.

As for integration through modernisation, it is now a thoroughly discredited proposition. The experience of proliferating separatist movements seeking autonomous existence has become commonplace, especially provoked in many instances by galloping modernisation. In effect, the opposite hypothesis is now held to be true; namely that “modernisation in multi-ethnic states tends to activate assertions for self-determination. Even after the so-called socialisation of property relations and attempt to transcend the ethno-nationalistic aspirations by class solidarity in Marxist oriented socialist states ethnicity prevails”.

Consequently the explicit assimilationist assumption embedded in the idea of the “nation-state” is losing currency though it continues to be popular among politicians and administrators in a number of countries. In western liberal democratic countries ethnic groups in the last thirty years have successfully challenged the “Anglo Confirmity” model. Assimilation and the operation of the “melting pot” process are, of course, still occurring. There is evidence, for example, that the American born children of immigrants regard English as their first language but, at the same time, they and their parents are living in increasingly segregated neighbourhoods. A change in orientation to the ideal of assimilation, however, has taken place. In general, since the 1960s, much liberal opinion has swung away from the belief that assimilation of minorities is a necessary process in the building of a nation, towards the view that a pluralistic society is more desirable.

### 16.5 PLURALISM

As a result of movements from ethnic groups, increasing concern for human rights and in view of the consequences some states have faced as a result of imposing majority values on minorities in many states multi ethnic states, there is emerging a recognition
of the danger of the chauvinism of the majority community and the sectarianism of the minorities. The trend, therefore, is towards recognition of the diversity and accepting the values of pluralism. Pluralism implies that people have learned to look at the world from different perspectives that they have learned to accept other cultures, other languages and other beliefs, and to respect the right to be different. Thus many, since the 1960s, have moved away from policies seeking to assimilate and to greater or lesser degrees made room for differences, along the lines of the British Policy of integration as set out in the so called “Jenkins formula” (after the British politician, Roy Jenkins). He said, “I do not think we need in this country a “melting pot” which will turn everybody out in a common mould, as one of a series of carbon copies of someone’s misplaced vision of the stereotyped Englishman… I define integration therefore, not as a flattening process of assimilation but as equal opportunity, coupled with cultural diversity, in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance.

Pluralism is widely seen by academics and policy makers as a liberal policy enabling racial and ethnic groups to preserve their own heritage and distinctiveness. Pluralism, as Paul Brass suggests, is a “system that contains a multiplicity of social, cultural, economic, and political groups and that does not permit the imposition of the ideas, values, culture or language of a single group to be imposed upon the others”. The pluralist perspective thus entails the recognition of corporate sectors along with individual rights and privileges and envisages for diversity a role in the development of the personality of the state. This diversity associated with pluralism, according to Roberts and Clifton, is manifest in three domains: cultural, socio-structural, and psychological. The basic assumption behind pluralism is that cohesion and coordination of national efforts can be more feasible in a framework of accommodative responsiveness; that the diversities are not inconsistent with the convergence of common ideals, interests and apprehensions, and that even when specific manifestations of the articulation of diversities are wholly inconsistent with national interests, the existence or continuation of such sub-national loyalties should not be taken as anti-national. The corollary of this view is that the raison d’etre of a nation-state disappears if its power structure does not reflect its multiethnic character.

As regards implementing pluralism in practice, there are various devices that are available to states. These include the creation of ethnically separated electorates; proportional or compensatory representation in government; devolution of power to ethnically homogeneous territorial unit; establishment of veto power and checks and balances on ethnically relevant governmental decision; introduction of ethnic quotas in bureaucratic and legislative bodies; provision of compensatory social and economic benefits to low status minorities; and the creation of constitutional or statutory guarantees or ethnic blindness or evenhandedness in the use of governmental power. All these devices have their own pros and cons and their utility and effectiveness depends on the specificities of each case. However, for general understanding, these have two aspects; one relating to policy formulation, and implementation and the second relating to political structures. Important in the policy arena are questions with regard to language and education; allocation or distribution of resources; and group or community rights. In structural terms an important issue is of share in political power. The most talked about policy in terms of pluralism these days is that of multiculturalism.
16.5.1 Multiculturalism

The term multiculturalism covers different forms of cultural pluralism. Right from the beginning celebrated by some and rejected by others, multiculturalism has been controversial because of its real or perceived (in) compatibility with the traditional notion of national unity: As a discourse, multiculturalism can broadly be understood as the recognition of co-existence of a plurality of cultures within the nation. The basic spirit behind it is that immigrants should be free to maintain some of their old customs regarding food, dress, religion, and to associate with each other to maintain these practices.

Liberal multiculturalism, as a theory of ethnic and cultural identities and their links to political institutions, which has been developed most elaborately by the Canadian political philosopher Will Kymlicka, postulates that ethnic identity is the main source of cultural self-identification and the principal form of political mobilisation in democratic and multiethnic liberal states. Ethnic identity is the main basis for political solidarity and, subsequently, the most tenacious political grievance and must be therefore recognised, i.e. institutionalised on all levels of government: grouping along ethnic cultural lines. According to Ana Devie, it is an ideological position according to which formal types of recognition and (especially) access to privileges are predicated on membership on an already defined cultural group.

The first country to officially adopt such a multiculturalism policy at the national level was Canada in 1971. But it has since been adopted in many other countries, from Australia and New Zealand to Sweden, Britain, the Netherlands and elsewhere. It reflected a concern to make the liberal democracies of the West more sensitive to the existence of cultural pluralism within the boundaries of the nation state, which had till then been considered to be culturally homogeneous, extension of liberal principles to those sections of the society which had been disadvantaged and thereby excluded from the polity. It is a significant moment in the extension of liberal principles and can be considered a further development after the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s in the U.S.

In countries like Canada and Australia, Multiculturalism consists of four broad meanings. First it is a descriptive term which suggests that the country is composed of numerous cultural groups thus making it a polyethnic society. Secondly, it is an ideology based on perception about the way the society should be organised. This implies an acceptance that migrants will want to maintain their language and cultural traditions and that it will continue across several generations. Thirdly, multiculturalism suggests a principle for social policies which assumes government responsibilities for removing structural advantages and implementing policies which ensure equality and access. Fourthly, it means a set of special institutions which are designed to implement the principle of participation, access and equity. In short, the policy is based on the premise that the support of the cultural identities of diverse ethnic groups within, accompanied by exchange and interaction among them, will facilitate the integration of society as a whole.

This multiculturalism, as Anne Yeatman points out, is likely to intensify rather than to decrease over time, and the social scale over which social organisation is dispersed is likely to become increasingly global in character. Multiculturalism in this context refers simply to the empirical reality that the participants in bounded fields of social organisation
are by cultural and linguistic affiliation multi-ethnic, and to what follows from this, namely the communication within these fields of social organisation has to assume inter-cultural features with all that this implies for the protocols and procedures of social organisation. When differences of ethnicity, cultural history, sexuality and gender have entered the constitution of social movements and dynamics of social change, neither assimilation nor exclusion can be legitimate processes as far as state response is concerned. This comes from the policy of multiculturalism.

Multiculturalism is viewed as unproblematic harmony, achieved via the balancing of individual choices. The basis for this is that to be an equal member of any society, not only must we have equal rights, but our identities must be given equal value. And as our ethnic background informs these identities, our cultural heritage cannot be ignored or scorned without damaging our sense of personal dignity.

Multiculturalism, however, is also facing criticism from some quarters. Some feel that policies of multiculturalism were threatening the social homogeneity considered vital for maintaining a stable social and political order. Basically multiculturalism is seen as divisive because special programmes are funded for migrants. There also is widespread fear that today’s immigrants will remain ghettoised and that as a result society will become increasingly balkanised. According to them this approach risks perpetuating intolerance between ethnic communities and also promoting favouritism and inequalities. Such consequences would also, according to them, be offensive to the liberal and egalitarian elements of western culture. It is also suggested that governments have no place in promoting ethnic diversity, since this is seen to undermine important liberal pluralist values and to encourage social and political conflict.

There is also criticism from the left deriving critical insights from political economy arguing that multiculturalism is a state ideology whose function is to lessen the inevitable class and labour conflicts that arise from the process of capital accumulation. By its stress on social cohesion, multiculturalism mystifies and obscures accumulation the underlying structural features of social and economic inequality, and class exploitation at work. Nevertheless, instead of fostering social cohesion, multiculturalism has often produced the opposite.

In this context, some also see multiculturalism as the ideal form of ideology of global capitalism. According to this view, the attitude which forms a kind of empty global position, treats each local culture the way the coloniser treats colonised people as ‘natives’ who are to be carefully studied and respected. That is to say, the relationship between traditional imperialist colonialism and global capitalist self-colonisation is exactly the same as the relationship between Western cultural imperialism and multiculturalism, in the same way that global capitalism involves the paradox of colonisation without colonising. Nation-State metropolis, multiculturalism, involves, patronising Euro-centrist distance and/or respect for local cultures without roots in one’s own particular culture. In other words, multiculturalism is a disavowed, inverted, self-referential form of racism, a racism with a distance – it respects the others identity, conceiving the other as a self enclosed ‘authentic community towards which, the multiculturalism, maintains a distance
rendered possibly by his privileged universal position. Some of the commentators representing the ethnic groups have also felt the multiculturalism as mere tokenism; that is it only promotes symbolic ethnicity or those aspects of non-anglo ethnic cultures which did not threaten the anglo-saxon dominated status quo.

Multiculturalism, thus is facing serious challenges, not only from society and extreme right parties and groups, but also from the luke-warm attitude of governments and policy makers particularly after September 11, apprehensions and perceived security concerns. The criticisms, however, are ill founded and have no empirical substance. The fact, as Will Kymlicka, points out is that none of the policies related to multiculturalism involve encouraging groups to view themselves as separate and self governing nations. On the contrary they are intended precisely to make it easier for the members of immigrant groups to participate within the mainstream institutions of the existing society. Immigrant groups are demanding increased recognition and visibility within the mainstream society. In short, these multiculturalism policies involve a revision in terms of integration.

There are few (if any) examples of immigrant ethnic groups mobilising behind secessionist movements, or nationalist political parties, or supporting revolutionary movements to overthrow elected governments. Instead, they have integrated into the existing political system, just as they have integrated economically and socially, and have contributed enormously to the economic, political, and cultural life of the larger society. This must be seen as an impressive achievement. Providing the example of Canada, Kymlicka suggests that on every major indicator of integration, immigrants integrate more quickly in Canada today than they did before the adoption of the multiculturalism policy in 1971. They are more likely to naturalise, to vote, to learn an official language, to inter-marry and have friendships across ethnic lines. If we examine immigrant multiculturalism in other Western democracies, such as New Zealand or Britain or Sweden, we would find a similar story. In each case multicultural accommodations operate within the context of an overarching commitment to linguistic integration, respect for individual rights, and inter-ethnic co-operation. And these limits are understood and accepted by immigrant groups. Thus, immigrants ethnic groups integrate more quickly in those countries which have official multiculturalism policies (like Canada and Australia) than in countries which do not (like the United States and France). And these immigrants are not only institutionally integrated, but also active participants in the political process, strongly committed to protecting the stability for mainstream institutions and to upholding liberal-democratic values. In short, there is no evidence at all that multiculturalism is promoting ‘balkanisation’ or ‘cultural and linguistic apartheid’ or ‘partial citizenship.’ On the contrary, the evidence – while still preliminary – shows that multiculturalism is doing what it set out to do: namely, to promote better and fairer terms of integration for immigrant groups.

16.6 POWER SHARING

One aspect of ethnicity particularly in cases of ethnic groups concentrated in certain territories has been that minorities have typically responded to majority nation building to maintain or rebuild their own societal culture, by engaging in their own competing
nation building. For that they raise the question of ‘self –determination’ by which they generally mean “power to shape their own destiny”. The proposition that every people should freely determine its own political status and freely pursue its economic, social and cultural development has been understood in many ways. It may be internal and external and its components range from simple self government at one extreme to full self-government at the other. Many observers have suggested and many states accept that the middle way to keep ethnic groups satisfied without fears of successionism is to make them share power. Two popular mechanisms of power sharing are federalism and consociationalism.

16.1.1 Federalism

The words federal, federation, federalism etc. have etymological roots in the Latin term “foetus”. It means alliance, association, compact, contract, league, treaty, union etc. As a mechanism of governance federalism divides powers between the central government and regional sub-units (provinces/states/cantons) where ethnic or national minorities are regionally concentrated, the boundaries of federal subunits can be drawn so that the national minority forms a majority in one of the sub-units. Under these circumstances, federalism can provide extensive self-government for a national minority, guaranteeing its ability to make decisions in certain areas without being outvoted by larger society.

Thus, federalism means the distribution of powers and responsibilities to appropriate political levels and types of institutions, both up and down the scale, so as to combine representation and authority, union and diversity, organisation and freedom.

It is in this context that in reconciling ambivalent demands for unity and diversity in multiethnic societies federations possess some advantages over either unitary or confederal system. As a compromise, a federal system by distributing authority between central and regional governments makes possible complete political unity for certain functions and regional autonomy for others. Compared to unitary institutions, regional claims which, if resisted, might provoke harsh resentments representing a greater threat to national unity, provides some safeguard to regional groups in the protection of their own special interests, and reduces the risk of the monopoly of power by an autocracy or a bureaucracy. Compared to confederal institutions or to inter-governmental cooperation, federal governments enable positive centralised policies, not dependent on unanimous regional agreement with regard to those functions assigned to the central government and in addition are more likely to provide a focus for the development of a common nationality.

The federal idea, then, is above all an idea of a shared sovereignty, responsive to the needs and will of the people both as individual citizens and as members of ethnic/social groups. In the words of U.S. Chief Justice Roger B. Taney. The power of the general (central) government and the state, although both exist and are exercised within the same territorial limits, are yet separate and distinct sovereignties, acting separately and independent of each other within their respective spheres.

Historically, the most prominent examples of federalism being used in this way to accommodate national minorities are Canada and Switzerland. The apparent stability
and prosperity of these countries has led other multination countries to adopt federal systems in the post-war period (e.g. Yugoslavia), or upon decolonisation (e.g. India, Malaysia, Nigeria). Even though many of these federations are facing serious difficulties, we are currently witnessing yet another burst of interest in federalism in multination countries, with some countries in the process of adopting federal arrangements (Belgium, Spain, Russia).

While it is said that in multiethnic societies in terms of constitutional arrangements need for autonomy points to some form of federalism in which there is duality of sovereignty and powers of both government levels, are coordinated; critics have sometimes suggested that federal institutions, involving divisions of power, legalism, rigidities, and technicalities, simply create clumsy obstructions in the affairs of the state. Some say that the result in shared fields often seems to be immobility and indecisiveness; substantial policy change often seems to require a high degree of consensus or a massive exertion of political will. Citizens who seek responses and decisions from governments face complex procedures and must put up with the duplication, uncertainties and delays of divided jurisdiction. Federalism to such critics seems to be the enemy of policy that is planned, comprehensive, coherent, uniform and content.

In answer to such criticisms, Daniel J. Elazar says that this view is based on a widely accepted but erroneous understanding of what constitutes efficiency in government. The understanding is based on hierarchical thinking about governmental organisation. We are now coming to realise that such thinking is not only outmoded but simply wrong. The hierarchies that appear to be so neat on paper do not work in practice. Sometimes the application of a great deal of coercion gets them to work for a while but we have seen the results, neither fair nor efficient by any reasonable standard. Elazar further points that if one begins as a monist, assuming the desirability and feasibility of achieving one pattern of thought and behaviour for every one, then federalism is indeed inefficient and even wrong because it enables the perpetuation and even the entrenchment of differences. If one begins as a pluralist, seeing the world as a heterogeneous place and properly so, then one must make a different evaluation of federalism as a means to protect and entrench liberty. Thus, monistic, Jacobin and Marxian views have constantly rejected federalism as wrong in principle even if they have had to compromise with reality and accept the temporary existence of pluralism. Federalist views, by contrast, embrace pluralism and seek means to protect it.

The general understanding today is that federal government presents a practical constitutional way of winning support for political and economic integration from a heterogeneous population. Federalism works because it transfers the target of political mobilisation from the national to the provincial centres: shifts conflicts in homogenous provinces to inter-ethnic divisions, and gives ethnic groups local autonomy. Thus it provides the common ground between the centraliser and the provincialist. Whether a federal system succeeds or fails, however, depends in large part upon the attitudes of participants, both governments and citizens. It is not simply a question what is provided in the constitution but what is in practice understood and implemented. Needless to say, the experiences of limited successes and failures suggest that for an effective resolution of ethnic issues through federalism it is important that an autonomous region should
enjoy effective control over matters which are primarily of local concern, within the overall framework of the fundamental norms of the state. Of course autonomy is not equivalent to independence, and autonomous governments should not expect to be immune from the influence of central government. At the same time, however, the state must adopt a flexible attitude which will enable the autonomous regions to exercise real power, precisely when that exercise to power runs, counter to the state’s inherent preference for centralisation and uniformity.

16.6.2 Consociationalism

While federalism is a reasonably accommodative mechanism to ethnic aspirations, it does not provide a total solution. The mere fact of federalism is not sufficient for accommodating national minorities – it all depends on how federal boundaries are drawn, and how powers are shared. Also federalism can only serve as a mechanism for self-government if the national minority forms a majority in one of the federal sub-units. To take care of these aspects another mechanism suggested and being practised by some states is consociationalism.

Consociationalism or in Arend Lijphart’s phrase consociational democracy is based on the idea that identity, not interest, is the mainspring of political behaviour, that conflict of identities is dangerous, and that, therefore, it is better to freeze and accommodate differences between groups than to permit their resolution through competition. In the context of the politics of nationalism and ethnicity it provides a model of government which allows for the peaceful coexistence of more than one nation or ethnic group in the state on the basis of separation, yet equal partnership rather than domination by one nation on the other (s). It is thus not only an alternative to the principle of “one nation, one state” but also to systems of “hegemony and international colonialism.”

Arend Lijphart, who coined the phrase “consociational democracy” starts with outlining the important characteristics of culturally plural democratic states where, according to him one or the other form of consociationalism is in practice such as Switzerland, Belgium, Lebanon (until the mid 1970s), the Netherlands and Austria. Basic elements of consociational democracy, include:

1) A “Grand Coalition” in the government of the state, consisting of representatives of all the segments (i.e. nations, or ethnic groups). This is otherwise known as “elite accommodation” since it is the leaders (elites) of the segments who come together at the centre of the state to settle disputes.

2) A proportional representation electoral system, and a proportional system for sharing public expenditure and public employment amongst the segments according to the size of each.

3) A “mutual veto” system whereby a segment can veto government decisions in matters of vital concern to it.

4) Autonomy for each segment, either through a territorial government in a federal or devolution system, or through institutions (e.g. educational) which confer some self-government on the segment.
One key idea in consociationalism is that the composition of representation in governing bodies should mirror the ethnic composition of the electorate. By focusing on ethnic differences as the difference to be represented, and therefore as the important cleavage in political system, Joane Nagel suggests, other potential sources of conflict become submerged. Van den Berghe notes, “an essential corollary of ethnic proportionality in Consociational Democracy is the muting of class conflicts. To the extent that ethnic sentiments are politicized, class consciousness is lowered”. This observation suggests a rationale for elite emphasis of ethnicity on politics. It also suggests ethnic differences as a mechanism for the construction of ethnic differences which is open to challenge.

Barry and Steine and Obler have criticised Lijphart for presenting more of a description of varyingly successful cultural elite cooperation than a theory of stable plural political accommodation. At theoretical level, Barry’s arguments against the relevance of consociationalism are: (a) Ethnic divisions are more inflammatory than church-state and working-class issues. (b) It is more difficult for ethnic group leaders to keep their followers in line than for leaders of religious and class groups. (c) The interests of ethnic groups are clearer than those of religious and class groups and, therefore, less negotiable. (d) Ethnic divisions raise secessionist issues that religion and class do not. He argues especially both the depth of ethnic feelings and the phenomenon of outbidding, amply demonstrated in countries with elections dominated by ethnically based political parties (such as Guyana, Sri Lanka, Northern Ireland, and Nigeria) and the occurrence of “communal massacres” in the Indian subcontinent, Indonesia, Cyprus and Northern Ireland – both suggest the futility of consociationalism in such situation.

To work consociational system, McGarry and O’leary point out, at least three fundamental conditions are required to be present. First, the rival ethnic segments must not be unreservedly committed to immediate or medium-term integration or assimilation of others into their nation or to the creation of their own nation-state. Nationality conflicts appear to have an irreducibly zero-sum character. Preventing ethnic communities from developing full-scale and exclusive national consciousness requires political elites either to downplay the state’s national identity, which may prove very difficult. Second, successive generations of political leaders must have the right motivations to engage in conflict regulation and sustain the consociational system. Their motivations may be self-interested or high minded, but without them there is no prospect of producing a consociational arrangement. Third, the political leaders of the relevant ethnic communities must enjoy some political autonomy themselves, so that they can make compromises without being accused of treachery. If they lack confidence because they are outbid by external irredentists or by rival leaders in the capital city – they will not be prepared to engage in hard bargaining.

16.7 SUMMARY

Modern societies are increasingly confronted with minority groups demanding recognition of their identity and accommodation of their cultural differences. The groups concerned with identity are generally known as ethnic. In contemporary political usage the terms ethnic and minorities are generally used interchangeably to describe groups which share
a common language, race, religion or national origin other than that of the dominant group in a state. In that context the overwhelming majority of societies today are multiethnic and multicultural.

While ethnic cultural diversity is not a new phenomenon, over the last few decades the world has been witnessing a marked ethnic and ethno-cultural revival, that is ethnicity. All over the world there is an increased awareness of individual cultural identity. Around the world, multination states are concerned with dealing with the issue. However, in view of ethnic movements becoming militant and some states facing even disintegration, need for policies to tackle with the phenomena of ethnicity has started receiving serious attention of societies, states and scholars.

At the international community level it is now expected that not only universal individual human rights apply to minorities, but also there is a need to respect specific minority rights as well. Traditionally the policies of the states have been to assimilate diversity within the unity of the nation. This they have called process of integration, nation building etc. In a variety of ways governments have been actively encouraging and pressurising ethnic groups to integrate into common educational, economic and political institutions operating in the national language. There has now been an acceptance for pluralism and adoption of policies to respect pluralism both as societal reality and accommodate minority aspirations through multiculturalism, minority rights, federalism, consociationalism etc. Of course for many, assimilation in the old sense remains the ideal.

Ethnicity, ethnic discrimination, accommodation, religious intolerance and tolerance, as such continue to be important issues of contemporary world. In many cases despite the provision of non-discrimination and equality in matters of state policies and programmes, a gap persists between the legal precepts and actual practices. There is however, an emergence of consensus that in a plural society there must be adequate measures for the safeguards of the ethno religious minorities, though the nature and extent of safeguards and mechanisms may differ from society to society and from one context to another.

16.8 EXERCISES

1) What do you understand by Ethnicity? Describe its basic characteristics.

2) Critically evaluate the Policy of Assimilation adopted by some states to integrate ethnic groups.

3) Assess the policy of Multiculturalism as a means to accommodate Ethnic minorities.

4) Analyse the role of Federalism and Consociationalism in Multiethnic societies.