



Introduction

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Chapter 3: Democracy and Diversity

Chapter 3: Democracy and Diversity

Introduction

Most of the countries today have multi-religious, multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic societies. Maintaining such a vast diversified population is a challenging task for any nation. Today, in even democratic countries, many people are discriminated on the basis of caste, class, skin colour, religion or language. Social differences are created in a society when a majority community tries to suppress a minority community.

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Introduction

Some countries where social differences existed or exist are Sri Lanka (division between Sinhalese and Tamilians), Belgium (between French- and Dutch-speaking populations) and USA (Blacks and Whites). Social differences in many countries may lead to social division.

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Incident of two US athletes who protested at Mexico Olympics in 1968:

Tommie Smith and John Carlos, the US athletes received their medals wearing only a pair of black socks with no shoes to represent Black poverty. The black-gloved and raised clenched fists were meant to symbolize Black Power. They were responding to social divisions and social inequalities. With this gesture their intention was to draw international attention to racial discrimination in the United States.

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Incident of two US athletes who protested at Mexico Olympics in 1968:

Peter Norman wore a human rights badge on his shirt during the ceremony to show his support to the two Americans. The medals were taken back from Tommie Smith and John Carlos because the International Olympic Association held both of them guilty of violating the Olympic spirit by making a political statement.



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Origin of Social Differences:

Social differences may originate because of the following reasons:

- **Most social differences are based on the accident of birth. For example, people may be tall, strong, weak, girl or boy.**
- **Some social differences emerge because people choose to follow certain practices or principles. For example, a person may be an atheist or may be a feminist. Some people may convert to another religion.**

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Origin of Social Differences:

- All social differences do not result in social divisions. Sometimes, even people belonging to different religions may have common interests.

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Overlapping and Cross-cutting Differences:

- There are overlapping and cross-cutting social differences in society.
- When social differences overlap with each other, they become social divisions. Social differences overlap when one community apart from facing discriminations is denied economic benefits and education and thus remains backward.

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Overlapping and Cross-cutting Differences:

- An example of overlapping social differences was the difference between the Blacks and the Whites in America. While the Whites were rich and educated, the Blacks were poor and uneducated. There was a deep polarisation of a population. Similarly, in Northern Ireland, Catholics are poor and denied any educational assistance, while Protestants are rich and provided educational assistance.
- It is easier to bridge cross-cutting differences. Overlapping differences are serious and can threaten the unity and diversity of a country.

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Overlapping and Cross-cutting Differences:

- **Cross-cutting social differences take place when the communities are not polarised. For example, in the Netherlands, class and religion cut across each other. People of both communities-Protestants and Catholics-are rich and poor; it is not that only one community is poor. Therefore, the differences are cross-cutting.**
- **Migration of people in homogeneous countries (when the population of the country mostly belongs to the same ethnic group) has made societies more diversified.**

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Impact of Social Divisions on Politics:

Social divisions may lead to conflicts and violence resulting in the disintegration of a country. This can be seen from the example of Northern Ireland.

- The population of Northern Ireland is divided into Protestants and Catholics. While 53% of the population is Protestant, 44% is Catholic.**
- The Nationalist parties which represented Catholics demanded their unification with the Republic of Ireland which is inhabited mostly by Catholics.**

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Impact of Social Divisions on Politics:

- The Unionists represented the Protestants who wanted to remain with UK.
- This social difference transformed into a social division. Thousands of people including the security forces were killed in conflicts between Unionists and Catholics. It was only in 1998, that a peace treaty was signed between the Nationalists and the government of UK.

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Impact of Social Divisions on Politics:

- The situation was different in Yugoslavia. Political conflicts along religious and ethnic differences finally led to its breakup.
- However, social divisions may not always lead to the disintegration of the country. People belonging to different communities and castes vote for the people belonging to their own community. Many parties also work for the development of only one community. This however does not lead to the disintegration of countries.

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Three Determiners:

Three factors play a vital role in deciding the result of the politics of social divisions. These are

- If people in a country view their identity as singular and exclusive, it becomes extremely difficult to maintain the unity of the country. On the other hand, if people view their identity as multiple and in national interests, the unity of the country is never threatened.

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Three Determiners:

- It also depends on how the political leaders of the country represent the demand of any community. If the demands of any community do not threaten the provisions of the Constitution and are not at the cost of any other community, the diversity of the country is maintained. In Yugoslavia, the leaders represented the demands of their communities in a way that it finally led to the disintegration of the country.

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Three Determiners:

- Another important factor depends on how the government responds to the demands of various pressure groups. If the political leaders agree to the demands of the communities and give them rights and powers, then the unity and the diversity of the country can be maintained; for example, Belgium.

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Three Determiners:

Therefore, we see that each social division does not threaten the unity of the country. The struggle against injustice may become violent sometimes, but dealing with such issues democratically goes a long way in maintaining the integrity of the country.

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