

Chapter- 3

Democracy and Diversity

STUDY NOTES**A Story from Mexico Olympics**

During the Medal Ceremony of the 200 metres race which was held in 1968 Olympics at Mexico City, two African-American athletes Tommie Smith and John Carlos raised a black-gloved fist during the playing of the US national anthem. They had won the gold and bronze medals respectively. With this gesture, 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 pictures shown below depict an important landmark in the history of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States.



Differences, Similarities, Divisions

The story from the Mexico Olympics shows an example of social divisions and social inequalities. But in society, there are other forms of social divisions that exist. As you have learned in the previous 2 chapters, regional, linguistic and religious differences have created social divisions.

Origins of Social Differences

The social differences are mostly based on the accident of birth. For example, people around us are male or female, they are tall and short, have different kinds of complexions, or have different physical abilities or disabilities. But some of the differences are based on our choices. For example, some people are atheists i.e they don't believe in God or any religion. While some people believe in God. There are various other choices such as choosing what to study, which occupation to take up and which games or cultural activities to take part in.

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.

Overlapping and Cross-Cutting Differences

Social differences imply a state when people are discriminated or one class/group is given preference over the other, due to the difference in their social, economic or racial inequality. Overlapping and cross-cutting are the two types of social differences.

When one kind of social difference becomes more important than the other and people start feeling that they belong to different communities, this is known as **overlapping differences**. It results in social division and disintegration. For Eg, in India **Dalits** face this type of discrimination as they belong to poor families.

If social differences cross-cut one another, it means that groups that share a common interest on one issue are likely to be in different sides on a different issue. For example, the Northern Ireland and the Netherlands both were predominantly Christian but divided between Catholics and Protestants.

Politics of Social Divisions

The combination of politics and social divisions is very dangerous and explosive. Democracy involves competition among various political parties. If they start competing in terms of some existing social divisions, it can make social divisions

into political divisions and lead to conflict, violence or even disintegration of a country.

What can be the range of outcomes of politics of social divisions?

In Northern Ireland, the difference between the two major sectors of Christianity i.e 53% of Protestants and 44% of Roman Catholics took the form of politics. The Catholics were represented by Nationalist parties who demanded that Northern Ireland be unified with the Republic of Ireland, a predominantly Catholic country. The Protestants were represented by Unionists who wanted to remain with the UK, which is predominantly Protestant. Later on, it took a drastic form which ended by taking the lives of hundreds of people.

In Yugoslavia, political competition along religious ending ethnic lines led to the disintegration of Yugoslavia into six independent countries. At the same time, every expression of social divisions in politics does not lead to such disasters. But, it affects voting in most countries, especially in India.

Three Determinants

3 Factors are crucial in deciding the outcome of the politics of social divisions:

1. The outcome depends on how people perceive their identities. If people see their identities in singular and exclusive terms, it becomes very difficult to solve.
2. 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. It depends on how the government reacts to the demands of different groups.

In a democracy, the political expression of social divisions is very normal and can be healthy. This allows various disadvantaged and marginal social groups to express their grievances and get the government to attend to these.