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# UNIT 21 THE ETHNO-NATIONAL CONFLICTS, PATTERNS AND DIMENSIONS

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## 21.0 OBJECTIVES

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This unit deals with the ethno-national conflicts, the causes for emergence; the various patterns; and their dimensions with special reference to certain recent cases of ethnic conflicts Bosnia, Rwanda, Burundi, Chechnya, Sri Lanka, Quebec, Pakistan, etc.

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- explain the meanings of nation, nationalism ethnic groups and ethnicity,
- define ethno-nationalism and ethno-national conflicts,
- describe the causes of emergence of ethno-national conflicts,
- discuss the various dimensions of ethno-national conflicts, and
- explain the implications of ethnic conflicts and also suggest certain preventive measures.

## 21.1 INTRODUCTION

Ethno-national conflicts pose one of the greatest challenges to international security in the post-Cold War world. Ethnic strife is not at all a recent phenomenon rather it has been an enduring factor of international relations. According to a estimate since 1945 alone, 10 million lives have been lost as a result of ethnic violence (Horowitz). The Cold War between the Soviet bloc and U.S. led western alliance had created a sense of stability among most of the world population by overshadowing various volatile issues. But the dissolution of the loose bipolar system has led to an ethnically fragmented multipolar international system and thereby aggravated insecurity among nations. The continuing spread of ethnic violence seems to replace the fear of the spread of communism as the central security concern among the western nations. This is probably because the rise of ethnic consciousness along with the demand for self-determination can assume dangerous proportions in a world where fewer than 10% of the 85 states are ethnically homogeneous. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, an American senator has warned, "the defining mode of conflict in the era ahead is ethnic conflict. It promises to be savage. Get ready for 50 new countries in the world in next 50 years. Most of them will be born in bloodshed". Ethno-national conflict, simply understood, is a manifestation of the enduring tension between the states that want to consolidate and expand their power and the ethnic groups the want to defend and promote their collective identity and interests. In case of most intense ethno conflicts protagonists want to establish their autonomy or independence. Ethno conflicts also arise when the subordinate groups strive to improve their status within the existing boundaries of a state rather than secede from it. For instance, in South Africa, the black community wanted greater control over state power. While the Tamils in Sri Lanka want to secede from the state itself.

## 21.2 TERMINOLOGY

Before examining ethno-national conflicts, let us study some important terms which are frequently used in dealing with this subject.

### 21.2.1 Nation

The most important term is 'nation' upon which the whole concept of ethno-nationalism revolves. 'Nation' writes Columbus and Wolfe, is a concept denoting a common ethnic and cultural identity shared by a 'single people'. It can be defined as a group of people who feel themselves to be a community bound together by ties of history, culture and common ancestry. That is nation is ethnically homogeneous.

Nations which are developed through particular historical process, spread over centuries have 'objective characteristics' which may include a territory, a language, a religion, or a common descent and 'subjective' characteristics essentially a people's awareness of its nationality and affection for it. However, unlike a state, a nation may exist beyond the geographical boundaries if they possess the above mentioned characteristics.

### 21.2.2 Nationalism

In simple words, nationalism is mainly the felling of unity and loyalty prevalent among the people of nation. Such a feeling seeks to defend and promote or in other words, it can be defined as 'a state condition of mind characteristic of certain people with a homogeneous culture, living together in a close association in a given territory and sharing a belief in distinctive existence and a common destiny.

Here, it is important to mention that the idea of nationalism and the ideal of nation state were not necessarily based on ethnicity. Rather they stressed the voluntary coming together of people in a state with shared culture. Yet in modern times, especially in the twentieth century ethnicity has come to be predominant. The aspirations of smaller ethnic groups are raised to the consciousness of nationalism, which in turn, can mobilise people to demand an independent nation-state based on ethno-nationalism.

### 21.2.3 Ethnic Groups

A nation-state may be composed of one or more ethnic groups. Ethnic groups are those groups that are composed of or share a distinctive and collective identity based on shared experience and cultural traits. They may define themselves or be defined by others, in terms of any or all of the following traits — life ways, religious beliefs, language, physical appearance, region of residence, traditional occupations and a history of conquest and repression by culturally different people.

### 21.2.4 Ethnicity

Ethnicity is a sense of ethnic identity or a feeling of belonging to a particular ethnic group. George de Vos defines it 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”. Further, according to Paul R. Brass, “Ethnicity or ethnic identity also involves in addition to subjective self-consciousness, a claim to status and recognition, either as a superior group or as a group at least equal to other groups. Ethnicity is too ethnic category what class consciousness is to class.”

For the formation of an ethnic identity — a combination of factors — common descent, a socially relevant cultural/physical characteristics and a set of attitudes and behaviour patterns is necessary. Common descent is the most significant factor. Apart from this, cultural attributes like religion, language, customs, social beliefs and practices etc. After form the basis of identity to consolidate such an identity the members of an ethnic group must also share ideas, behaviour, patterns, feelings and meanings. Moreover, they should also perceive that they share a common destiny. For instances, Tamils of Sri Lanka, Muslims of former Yugoslavia, etc.

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## 21.3 MEANING OF ETHNO-NATIONALISM

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After understanding the core words now we can easily comprehend the meaning and concept of ethno-nationalism.

Ethno-nationalism is a kind of sub-nationalism based upon ethnic identity of the ethnic groups. It is as vertical division of nationalism and excludes all those people from it who do not belong to same ethnic group. That is, it is an exclusive form of nationalism involving just one ethnic group. For instance, Muslims throughout the world constitute the nation. But they are further divided in two major ethnic groups (Shiya and Sunni) and many smaller groups called ‘Firkas’ like Khan, Sayyed, Kureshi etc. Any upsurge on the basis of particular ethnic group will be called ethno-national conflict. The Iran-Iraq war which lasted for eight years is an example of ethno-national conflict on the ‘Shiya-Sunni’ issue.

In short, ethno-nationalism is the nationalism of ethnic groups such as Muslim, Kurds, Latvians, Tamils etc., who define their nation in exclusive terms, mainly on the basis of common descent, race, culture, history and language. Here, the word, ‘common descent’ is the most important because merely by adoption of language and culture one can be included in that particular ethnic group.

Ethno-nationalism transcends the boundaries of state, religion sect and class. It seeks to fragment established nationalities and communities and create new ones using ethnic indicators. The symbolic and cultural aspects of ethnicity are important in themselves and often get politicised for the promotion of collective interests. Most ethno-national conflicts are for a larger share of economic resources and products and for a greater part in decision-making processes. According to Joseph Rothschild, “politicised ethnicity has become the most keen and potent edge of intrastate and interstate conflict and it asserts itself today dialectically as the leading legitimator or delegitimizing or political authority.”

There are two main approaches to the understanding of the new ethnic phenomenon. The primordialist approach to ethnic identities and ethnicity considers descent as the more important factor, for primordial loyalties can be activated more easily than rational principles and organisations founded upon them. The other approach is variously known as situational, subjectivist or instrumental. Its main emphasis is on the

perception of the members of a group of being different from others and on the implication of this for that groups present status or predicament and for its prospects for the future. These contending approaches are an aid to the explication of issues and to the understanding of contemporary reality.

Ethno-nationalism poses a threat to any state which does not have a common ethnicity or a shared identity and culture. Almost in all the plural societies are existing, the problem of ethno-nationalism is likely to pose a threat to the unity and integrity of the state.

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## 21.4 SOURCES OF CONFLICT

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There have been numerous attempts to explain the causes of the ethnic wars. One theory focuses on the role of mass passions or ancient hatred in driving ethnic violence. A second theory suggests that inter-ethnic security dilemmas are necessary for ethnic war to result, i.e. the fear of the ethnic groups that their interests are threatened may cause them to fiercely protect their interests. A third approach blames ethnic war on manipulation by belligerent leaders. However, scholars agree that all three factors — hostile masses, belligerent leaders and inter-ethnic security dilemmas are essential for ethnic war to result.

In fact, these factors are mutually reinforcing, belligerent leaders stoke mass hostility, hostile masses support belligerent leaders and both together threaten other groups creating a security dilemma (a fear of extinction) among them. This may result in conflict for survival or even domination among various ethnic groups.

It is important to note that any ethno-national conflict cannot be attributed to a single cause. Rather there is a combination of factors which are responsible for rise of ethno-national conflicts. These can be ethnically defined grievances, demographic threats, histories of ethnic domination, reciprocal fears of group extinction, defects political anarchy, etc. Horowitz argues that at least these six factors are present in every case of severe ethnic violence such as, former Yugoslavia, Sri Lanka, Rwanda, Georgia, Azerbaijan, etc.

The cause of ethno-national conflict can be understood as the factors threatening the sacredly preserved and maintained cultural identity of the certain ethnic groups. Such threats strengthen the group identity mobilise the groups to and promote their interests.

The certain causes responsible for rise of ethnic conflicts can be discussed as:

### 21.4.1 Economic

Perhaps the most important source of ethno-national conflict is related to the economic conditions. Two main factors can be identified — first, uneven development of the regions of a state and second, the economic discrimination perpetuated by the state itself.

The uneven economic development can further give rise to two kinds of situations. First, if one or more ethnic groups become economically prosperous it may consider other ethnic groups which are relatively backward as 'liabilities' and therefore may try to suppress or get rid of the latter. Second, if a particular ethnic group remains economically backward it may blame the other ethnic group's for its economic deprivation. In both these cases, the hatred may develop into ethnic conflict.

Next, in the case of economic discrimination the state may not only deprive a particular ethnic group equal opportunities of development as well as deny and share in economic resources. For instance, the economic development policies of the Iraqi government have adversely affected the economic interests of Kurds. The Mosul oil fields are located predominantly in the Kurdish region but Iraqi governments have consistently refused to consider demands that a share of oil revenues be devoted to Kurdish region development. Moreover during 1980's the Iraqi government devastated the rural Kurdish economy by destroying thousands of villages and forcibly relocating their residents. The policy was a response to Kurdish rebellions and support to Iranian during the Iran-Iraq war.

### 21.4.2 Political Discrimination

Most states have ethnically interspersed populations and discriminatory policies have often provoked ethnic unrest and inter-state conflict. Ethnic grievances can emerge if the ethnic groups are denied political access the right to exercise political control over the international affairs of their own region and communities. According to a study 80% of the politicised ethnic groups identified in 1990 lived with the consequence of historical or contemporary economic or political discrimination. And more than 200 of the 233 peoples identified in the study, had organised politically sometime between 1945 to 1980 to defend or promote their collective political interests against government and other groups.

### 21.4.3 Forced Assimilation

The assimilationist policies of the state constitute a direct threat to the ethnic identity of the group and develops resentment among the latter, which sooner or later may lead to an ethnic upsurge. By 'assimilation' we mean when minorities are made to forsake their old communal identities and adopt the language, value and behaviours of the dominant society see, for example, the Kurds in Turkey, who are repeatedly encouraged to assimilate into Turkish society. That is, the separate identity of the Kurds was rejected. Kurds were officially referred to as mountain Turks and were prohibited from teaching, writing or publishing in Kurdish.

### 21.4.4 Historical

The sense of a separate identity and grievances that result from imperial conquest and colonial rule can persist for many generations and provide the fuel for contemporary ethno-national movements. For instance, Myanmar, (formerly known as Burma), an ex-British colony has been locked in ethnic, conflict since its independence in late 1940s. The conflict began during the World War II when nationalist belonging to majority group attacked the British colonial army, which was recruited largely from ethnic minorities such as Karens, Chins and Kachins. Thousands had died in the ensuing struggle and the conflicts between minority people and Burma state have yet to be resolved.

### 21.4.5 Population Pressures

It refers to ethnic location, territory and environment which shape inter-group perceptions, competition and conflict. It is related to the settlement pattern of the groups, groups' attachment to the land and the relationship between ethnic groups and their physical settings respectively.

In Bosnia, for example, where before the collapse of Yugoslavia, all people identified themselves as Bosnian on census and survey forms. But after Bosnia attained statehood, there was a change in population settlement, the minority ethnic groups clung to boundaries that were ethnically exclusive and seemed to protect their ethnic identity. This formed the basis for further ethnic conflict in independent Bosnia itself, between Serbs and other minority ethnic groups. Other examples of ethnically based territorial claims which grew over the years as a result of demographic factors are those of Palestinians and Kurds.

### 21.4.6 Refugee Movements

Massive refuge movements further intensify demographic pressures and has the potential to spiral into regional crises. Refugees may increase population density and cause environmental degradation, land competition, disease, food shortages and lack of clean water, generating conflict and violence across borders. A current illustration is the Great Lakes region of Central Africa in which five countries (Zaire, Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda and Tanzania) are affected by the two million refugees who were displaced in the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. Using the refugee camps as their bases, armed. Hutu extremists have the potential not only to further destabilise Rwanda three main target, but in varying degrees, the surrounding countries as well.

Another example of nascent ethnic conflict caused by refugees found in India-Chakma refugees. Chakma refugees who are basically the citizens of Bangladesh fled to India due to starvation and military crackdown in their own country. These people settled even beyond the border areas and can be easily found in the metropolitan cities — Bombay, Delhi, etc. Not only this they forcibly shared the land and other economic resources. This brought changes into the settlement pattern of the locals and created a hatred for them (Chakmas). This abhorrence was one of the major causes of the Bombay riots in 1995.

#### 21.4.7 Massive, Chronic and Sustained Human Flight

It refers not only to the refugees the most identifiable human index of internal conflict but to a broader pattern of people on the move in the form of exodus of skilled professionals, intellectuals, artists and technicians and emigration of economically productive segments of the population such as entrepreneurs, businessmen, and traders these emigrates gradually sidelines the locals and cause frustrations among them. Thus, the roots for a ethnic conflict are laid down.

#### 21.4.8 State Collapse

Another factor which contributes to ethno-national conflict is the state collapse or simply political anarchy.

Contrary to the popular perception which views ethnic conflict as a cause of state collapse, certain scholars also believe that it is infact the other way round. "State collapse cause ethnic conflict". Ethnic nationalism is the pathology of the state. The process starts with the deterioration of the centre. This leads to factionalisation as societal loyalties shift from the state to more traditional communities that are closer to the people and that offer psychic comfort and physical protection. The further a state disintegrates the more potential there is for the ethnic conflict to spread. Probably, there can be no other perfect example of this than the collapse of Soviet Union. With the fall of Soviet Empire and Communism pent up ethnic tensions were released. Economic collapse and removal of party discipline made possible secession on basis ethnic identities, apart from ethnic clashes in Chechnya, Azerbaijan, Nagarno-Karabakh, etc.

#### 21.4.9 Persistent Cleavages Among Ethnic Groups

After the first World War — the creation of new states of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Romania on the ruins of Habsburg, Ottoman and Romanov empires reflected the triumph of principle of self-determination, but none of them was a nation state for all contained sizeable minorities. Further, even after all these decades cleavages between various ethnic groups were persisting. For instance, the former Yugoslavia was a unique multi-ethnic country with least homogeneity. The common unifying denominator was that were Slaves of the south. The major dividing factor was the religion, which was contained during the communist regime. There were six officially recognised 'Nations of Yugoslavia' Croats, Macedonia, Montenegrins, Muslims, Serbs and Slovans. Apart from nationalities there were ethnic minorities the largest being the Albanian and the Hungarians concentrated in two autonomous provinces of Serbia-kosovo and Vojvodina respectively. Among the ethnic groups 10 were officially recognised as "Nationalities of Yugoslavia". Albanians, Romanians, Ruthenians, Slovaks and Turks. The remaining ethnic groups were classified as "Other Nationalities and Ethnic Groups". Austrians, Greeks, Jews, Germans, Poles, Russians, Ukrainians, Vlachs and "Others including those who preferred to classify themselves Yugoslavia".

Next, taking the example of Myanmar, it is found that the ethnic identities are quite well developed and cleavages between various groups persist. In 1981, the country had a population of 35.3 million people, 28.3 million Burmans, 3.14 million Shan, 1.55 million Arakanese, 2.4 million Karen and smaller Tribal groups like Kachin, Cha, and Wa.

The Shan, Arakanese, Karen, Mon, Kachin, Cha and Wa have strong ethnic identities and substantial autonomy and their bonds with the central authority, even in the past were fragile and mostly national.

### 21.4.10 Complex of the Ethnic Minorities

In a multi-ethnic state, the ethnic minorities suffer from a fear complex whereby the prominent or the largest ethnic group is considered as ruler by the smaller ethnic groups. It may be possible that the combined population of smaller ethnic groups is more than the largest group. But the smaller groups perceive themselves as minorities and may complain about their suppression by the largest group.

Such a perception persisted in former Yugoslavia where Serbs were merely 36% of the population of the country but was generally regarded as the rulers of the country and thus, the exploiters of other ethnic groups. The Croats and Slovenes usually felt that the central political authority was vested with the Serbs who could use the state power to suppress the aspirations of other ethnic groups.

Due to this kind of complex the ethnic minorities fiercely guard their cultural identity. Moreover, they also fail to develop strong association with nation-state, as they identify the largest ethnic group as the rulers of the state. Rather they intend to break away at the first opportunity.

### 21.4.11 The Principle of Self Determination

The principle of self-determination once considered as essential for establishment of democracy, and break up of colonial empires like — Ottoman, Russian, etc. is now threatening the very existence of state system.

The principle of self-determination has now been frequently propagated to acquire a sovereign independent nation state for an ethnic group. In other words, it is a means to fragment an existing nation-state. The newly independent states created on the basis of self determination are not necessarily democratic countries. It may not grant equal rights to minority ethnic groups and thereby sow seeds for ethnic clashes at any time in future.

For instance, while the Baltic states, Estonia and Latvia have reduced Russians to second class citizens. In the case of Yugoslavia, the newly independent states are not democratic and follow the murderous policy of 'ethnic cleansing'. That is to say, in the post Cold War period, the principle of self determination may continue to create ethnic and nationality problems and haunts the newly independent states as well as their neighbours for many years to come.

These are some of the important causes of the ethno-national conflicts.

Sometimes, the end of Cold War is also associated as a cause of ethnic clashes, since there has been a major upsurge of ethnic conflicts. But, it is totally false to blame the end of Cold War for the rise of ethnic-national conflicts. This is so because the ethnic clashes were present not only during the Cold War but even long before it started. The only thing which needs to be highlighted is that before the fall of the Berlin wall, the communist order and bipolar systems had kept the lid on ethnic problems through the hegemony of ruling communist parties and imposed assimilation of all nationalities under party leadership. Police measures eliminated or diluted dissent while economic development was expected to eliminate the root causes of ethnic hatred.

In fact, during the Cold War both communism and capitalism underestimated the force of ethnicity, each sustaining its own myth about how their systems would erode ethnic bonds. Capitalists assumed that modern economic development through — education, urbanisation, and formation of a middle class would bring people together and make them more alike. A modern person it was thought, would naturally shed his ethnic/tribal identity.

Marxism, on the other hand maintained that ethnicity would be replaced by allegiance to a higher utopian ideal, a stateless society, in which there would be full equality. If there were no class division, it was thought, there would be no need for group rivalry.

But, the things have not turned out to be simple as clear from the growing number of ethnic clashes.

## 21.5 PATTERNS OF ETHNIC MINORITIES

An important fact of the international politics that ethnicity is a world-wide reality. That is, ethnic identities are widely prevalent.

Said and Simmons (1976) presented the statistics of 132 states of the world. The data of these states are classified as out of 132 states, 12 states (9.1%) have one ethnic group of population, 25 states (18.9%) have one dominant ethnic group comprising half the population. In 53 states, the population comprised of five or more significant ethnic groups.

According to Walker Connor, (1971), "pre-dominant modern states are multi-ethnic". He referred to the above data and stated that only 12 states in the world can be described as nation-states and can be considered as free of ethnic conflict, 50 states contain a nation or a potential nation" (i.e. those with a single dominant ethnic group).

It has been pointed out that the nation is a matter of self-awareness or self-consciousness and ethnicity involves subjective beliefs. Thus, a nation is a self-conscious ethnic group.

Further, the ethnic or ethnically motivated unrest is found as a common phenomenon in different countries respective of their difference on the levels of development, economy, proportional ethnic composition and polity. Connor points out that in three blocks of the world, i.e. the First World, (Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Italy, Netherland, Switzerland and United Kingdom); the Second World (Soviet Union, China, Czechoslovakia, Laos, Romania, Vietnam, Yugoslavia, etc. ) and the Third World (Burma, Burundi, Chad, Ethiopia, Guyana, Iraq, Kenya, Malaysia, Pakistan, Philippines, Sudan, Turkey, Uganda, etc.) experienced ethnic unrest.

The ethnic identities and demands are also the degree and intensity of ethnic conflict, vary with varying political, social and economic conditions. Yet, Pauline A Baker and John A. Ausink in their articles "State collapse and Ethnic Violence. Towards a predictive Model" have attempted to present a theoretical model of the various ethnic-national conflicts.

First state analyses the root causes of ethnic conflict, including the historical background, socio-economic composition and environment that predispose a society towards fragmentation. Stage 2, addresses recent trends of precipitating events that lead from fragmentation to friction, such as discriminatory government policies, collapsed empires coups d' etat, or political assassinations. Preventive action would be most effective if it were taken at this stage or before.

A society is poised to go in one of the two directions as it enters the stage third the transition, which can occur violently or non-violently. A violent track at this stage is likely to lead a full-scale conflict between or among the ethnic group or ethnic group or state. At this stage the state transformations is underway. It is usually in this phase that the international community is involved militarily i.e. for the purposes of peace-enforcement or peace building. In State 4, the state is transformed it has moved towards disorder or a new political order. If there is a violent transformation, it may result in military victory, ethnic, domination, war-Lordism, or on-going conflict (as in Somalia). If there is a non-violent transformation, it may result in elections, peaceful partition, conflict resolution, and new state structures. (As in South Africa).

Stage 5 represents the outcome, a phase, that is depicted by a continuum bounded at one end by a chaos, and at the other by constitutionalism. Obviously, there are several intermediate authoritarian or democratic outcomes, such as military rule, a one-party state/a representative federal system. But this is not the end of the process. A country could move up and down the continuum, until it reaches equilibrium. Or it could revert to an earlier stage, if the peace is too fragile and the institutional core is too weak to sustain it. This happened in the case of Angola, as 'backslide' from a non-violent to violent track, after the 1992 U.N. elections were rejected by rebel forces and the war resumed.



## 21.6 DIMENSIONS OF ETHNO-NATIONAL CONFLICTS

Usually ethnic-national conflicts acquire the following dimensions such as ethnic domination, ethnic secession, demand for autonomy, peaceful ethnic self-determination or even, the most inhuman of all, ethnic cleaning. However, it needs to be understood that these cannot be strictly compartmentalised rather all the above dimensions are mutual and interlinked.

### 21.6.1 Ethnic Domination

To begin with, ethnic domination is a common dimension of the ethnic-national conflict. It represents the inherent demand and desire of particular ethnic group to acquire and retain its control or domination over other ethnic groups.

In Rwanda, and Burundi for example, the conflict among two tribes for domination has resulted in grave ethnic crises.

The basic problem in Rwanda springs from the composition of its 8 million population. The entire population is tribal belonging to three tribes — Hutus, Tutsi and Twa. About 90% belong to the backward Hutu tribe whereas 9% are from the advanced Tutsi tribe. Just 1% are pygmies, also called Twa. It is said that Tutsis are aliens had settled in Rwanda and Burundi about 4 centuries back, having migrated probably from the region of the Nile. Under the Belgium rule, the tribal feuds were kept under control. But the Tutsis had established their hold over the economy of the country and turned the Hutus almost into slaves. After independence, the Hutus, constituting an overwhelming majority in the country rose in revolt against the domination of the Tutsis. This is the root cause of the tribal conflict in Rwanda. Similarly, in Burundi, also there have been bitter clashes between Hutus, which account for 84% of the population, and the Tutsis which constitute the remaining 15% of the population.

Recently in 1994, a genocidal war between Hutu and Tutsi broke out after the killing the immediate cause of Rwanda President Juvenal Habyarimana, and Burundi President Cyprien Ntaryamira, both of Hutu tribe when their plane was shot down at Kigali, the Rwandan capital in April, 1994. This plunged Rwanda into an ethnic conflict, later Burundi also got involved.

### 21.6.2 Ethnic Secession

If any particular ethnic group feels that its collective interests cannot be promoted outside the territories of the existing state, then it demands secession from the state. In this case, the principle of self-determination is claimed by the ethnic group wishing to secede.

There are many examples of ethnic secession — the most prominent in recent cases being the disintegration of Soviet Union and Yugoslavia.

After decades of subordination, several nationalities in USSR found that they could not any more reconcile their interests with the once mighty Union and seceded as soon as the political centre became fragile. However, in case of Yugoslavia, the principle of self-determination was taken to an extreme, Slovenian and Croatia sought and attained violent separation from a perceived Serb dominated Yugoslavia on this principle. The same theme was used by the Serb in Croatia and the Serbs and Croats in Bosnia-Herzegovina for their recognition as independent entities. However, while Soviet Union collapsed without any bloodshed, Yugoslavia failed to check the bloody ethnic conflicts that followed its disintegration.

Another example of ethnic secession of Chechnya, a tiny republic of Russia. The Turkish speaking Chechens constitute a particular tribe, professing Islam. Their religious links with the Ingush and Avars, the largest group in Dagestan go beyond the causes and link them with several other Muslim ethnic republics like Tatarstan, and Bashkortastan in other parts of Russia and with the neighbouring countries like Turkey, Iran and Azerbaijan.

Superficially, it may appear that the Chechen issue is of recent origin. But historically it has been pointed out that the Muslim tribes in the caucasus region had never been an

integral part of the Russian polity. The Czars of Russia had invaded the mountainous regions in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries but could not subjugate these territories effectively. The Chechens had rebelled after 1917. Russian Revolution but were temporarily subdued. Again they had been on warpath during world war II and hence incurred the wrath of dictator Stalin who had disposed more than half of the population of Chechnya on the charge of collaborating with the Nazis.

In 1991, the Chechens declared independence along with several other republics of the former Soviet Union. Russia refused to recognise Chechnya and troops were ordered to depose the general Dzhokhar Dudayev, the President of Chechnya. This plunged it in a civil war.

An important fact which needs to be stated that secession on the basis of ethnic identity had hardly ever achieved its desired goal instead it creates a vicious circle. There are numerous instances to prove it. First of all, take the case of Pakistan which separated from India on the basis of two nation theory i.e. the Hindu and Muslim population of pre-independence India constitute two different nations and cannot stay together.

Pakistan which aimed to establish a homeland for Muslim in South Asia, today has smaller population of Muslim than India, and in 1971 itself, a large portion of Bangla Muslims had succeeded from Pakistan.

Similarly, the armed conflicts in Georgia, Bosnia and Croatia have shown that the breakaway groups which subscribe to the exclusivist concepts of nation are likely to become embroiled in war with other ethnic groups living on the same territory and are also likely to have difficulty in establishing control over the territory they claim.

### 21.6.3 Demand for Autonomy

Sometimes the ethnic groups may simply demand more autonomy within the boundaries of the state.

For instance, in Pakistan the Muhajir Quami Movement (MQM) demands the separation of Karachi and other predominantly Urdu speaking Mohajir majority areas from Sindh constituting a fifth province of Pakistan or even an autonomous state. The ethnic confrontation between the Mohajirs, the Urdu speaking Muslim immigrants who came to Pakistan from India at the time of partition in 1947 and local Sindhi population is a much persistent phenomenon.

The Mohajirs who were economically and educationally better off than the Sindhis gave tough fight to Sindhis for jobs and business. However, with the emergence of middle classes from among the local ethnic communities, the position of privilege that the Mohajirs enjoyed, eroded gradually since 1971, Mohajirs were increasingly alternated from the government services. Further with the secession of East Pakistan leading to the emergence of Bangladesh, every ethnic community in Pakistan became conscious of its identity, while Mohajirs realised that they alone had no identity of their own.

Here it is important to know the ethnic composition of Sind. Over the last several decades, Sind has become a cauldron of various ethnic communities which have immigrated into the area, due to social and political factors. Sind has a population of 19 million, and chronically Sindhis constitute less than half of the population. While six million are Mohajirs and Punjabis, four million are Baluchis and half a million are Pakhtuns.

So it was quite natural that the interests of the Mohajirs clashed with those of other ethnic groups. This resulted in outbreak of Mohajir-Sindhi riots, Mohajir-Pakhtun riots etc. in 1980s' the Mohajirs formed their own organisation (MQM) and have vigorously demanded an autonomous region of their own.

In 1994, about 1,200 people were killed in Karachi due to intra-muslim sectarian and ethnic violence between Mohajirs and Sindhis, Shias and Sunnis and the Mohajir factions.

### 21.6.4 Peaceful Ethnic Self-determination

It is also seen that some ethno-national conflicts are fought democratically, in such cases, there is a political dialogue and not an armed conflicts on the basis of referendum

different ethnic groups decide whether to stay in the same territory or to secede. Quebec, for example, is the second largest province of Canada, having 82 % French-speaking population. On the basis of language identity they wanted to secede from English speaking Canada. But the population chose to adopt a democratic way instead of weapons and held a referendum in October 1995. In this referendum, the French-speaking province of Quebec chose by a slender majority not to secede, while unity supporters won 50.6% votes as compared to 49.4% of separatists. In other words, the Quebecers bid to break away was lost by just 50,000 votes.

Though the referendum may not be the end of the struggle for separation yet for the moment it gave a sign of relief to the protagonists of international peace and security.

### 21.6.5 Ethnic Cleansing

Ethnic cleansing is the most dreaded dimension of ethno-national conflict. It is a 'cleaning operation' carried out by one ethnic group of the other ethnic groups. In this type ethnic conflict, the indigenous ethnic group launches a genocide and/or expulsion of the foreigners (those who not originally belong to that state). Bosnia Herzegovina, for instance, which declared its independence from Serb-dominated Yugoslavia, late in December 1991, will go in history for the magnitude of its human tragedy. Ethnic Serbs in Bosnia not only captured two-thirds of Bosnia territory, they also started an ethnic cleansing programme that caused death, destitution and the forced eviction of a large number of Bosnian Muslims.

The Serbian campaign to 'cleanse' a territory of another ethnic group, which gruesome and tragic, is historically speaking neither new nor remarkable population removal and transfer have occurred in history more than is generally acknowledge.

The Nazi campaign were an ethnic cleansing as these intended to remove Jews from territories of the Reich. The German term 'Judenrein' clean of Jews, was used to designate areas from which all Jews had been deported. The cleansing combined elements of deportation, expulsion, population transfer, massacre and genocide. Altogether about six million European Jews were murdered between 1935 and 1945.

Hitler also carried out a 'reverse cleansing' in his effort to consolidate the Reich. Ethnic Germans (Volksdeutsche) were in effect cleansed from Eastern Europe as they were recalled and resettled in Hitlers occupied territories especially western Poland. By spring 1942 more than 700,000 Germans had been transferred to German territories.

However, the largest and most sweeping ethnic cleansing in history — the removal of over 10 million Germans from Eastern Europe was taken by the U.S., the U.S.S.R. and Britain on August 2, 1945 in Potsdam. Though exact figures are not available, but it is estimated that nearly 12 million Germans were cleansed from Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Rumania and Yugoslavia after World War II. Later, the Czechoslovakia government with Stalin's consent expelled 25,000 to 30,000 Hungarians by the end of 1945. In 1946 there was an agreement for "population exchange" between Hungary and Czechoslovakia which allowed for the eventual exchange of 31,000 Magyars for 33,000 Slovaks.

#### Check Your Progress 1

**Note:** i) Use the space below for your answers.

ii) Check your answers with the model answers given at the end of the unit.

1) Mention at least five sources of ethno-national conflict.

- i) .....
- ii) .....
- iii) .....
- iv) .....
- v) .....

2) How does the complex of ethnic minorities lead to ethnic conflict?

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- .....
- .....
- 3) Mention five dimensions of ethno-national conflicts.
- i) .....
  - ii) .....
  - iii) .....
  - iv) .....
  - v) .....
- 4) What do you understand by following terms. Give one example of each.
- a) Ethnic Secession  
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  - b) Ethnic Cleansing  
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  - c) Ethnic domination  
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## 21.7 IMPLICATIONS OF ETHNO-NATIONAL CONFLICTS

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The ethno-national conflicts, as already said, have dangerous repercussions. This former Secretary General of United Nations Boutros Ghali said in his Agenda of Peace "... If every ethnic, religious or language group claimed statehood there would be no limit to fragmentation and peace, security and economic well-being for all would become even more difficult to achieve."

The implications of ethno-national conflicts are discussed as follows:

- 1) It disturbs the international peace and security to a great extent. The ethnic groups usually adopt large scale terrorism and war and cause large scale death, decay and destruction.
- 2) Ethno-national conflicts possess the potential to destabilise any pluralistic society, as it makes all other ethnic groups conscious of their ethnic identity and the need to along then to promote their exclusive interests. Not only this, the ethnic groups once they consolidate their identity aim to suppress other ethnic groups.
- 3) It causes large scale refugee problem who fall prey to severe ethnic hatred and suppression flee to safer areas. At the beginning of 1993 it is estimated, about 63% of the worlds 42 million refugees were fleeing from ethnopolitical conflicts and repression.
- 4) Even if the ethnic conflict may be contained but the scars remain and the ethnic groups continue to feel insecure, and develop feelings to acquire and maintain dominating position even in peaceful times.
- 5) The mass-migrations and human flight created by the ethnic crisis does not help to end the problem. Instead, it increases the range of the ethnic conflict. As the mass movement of refugees to a particular territory increases demographic pressure on

the land and environment and disturbs the ecology and economy. These in turn created a volatile situation in the new territory also.

- 6) Further, there is no escape from the fact, that once the divisive principle of ethnic self-determination is accepted the breakaway states which would come into existence are likely to be 'sociologically monolithic.' Infact, according to a scholar Etizoni, "Ethnically based breakaway states generally result in more ethnic homogeneity and less pluralism, meaning that they after lack deeper sociological foundations of democracy". The absence of pluralism has the potential to create a predisposition towards further fragmentation.
- 7) Almost in all the major ethnic conflicts, external powers have to interfere. It creates the disturbances in the regional power balance and also threatens the security of those countries which are in the vicinity of the strife-torn state.
- 8) Ethno-national conflicts pose a grave threat to the sanctity of the nation-state system.
- 9) It not only halts the development process but even puts it off the track as much of the power and resources of state and international agencies are spent to curb these uprisings.
- 10) The motive of certain ethno-national conflicts as 'ethnic secession' or ethnic cleansing to form 'ethnically pure or stable states' is nothing but a mirage. As the war so succession in Yugoslavia and later ethnic cleansing in Bosnia shows. Henry Kissinger has been very critical of the international recognition granted to Bosnia and calls it an "irresponsible mistake". According to him "It is important to understand that Bosnia has never been a nation. There is no Bosnia ethnic group or specifically Bosnia cultural identity ... where Croatia and Slovenia had their own identity. Bosnia was a Yugoslavia in microcosm. It is a mystery why anyone could think that Croats and Serbs unwilling to stay together in largest Yugoslavia, could be induced to create a joint state in Bosnia-Herzegovina, together with Muslims they had hated for centuries".

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## 21.8 SUGGESTIONS

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After studying the intensity of the ethno-national conflicts, it would be wrong to suggest that these can be managed within a short span of time still some measures can be suggested to curb this problem. The only way out is to strengthen the values of pluralism, multi-nationalism and mutual tolerance. The leading political elites have no choice but to grant not-only their cultural rights, as Soviet Union did in ample measure, but also their basic right is to have a truly responsive and democratic government.

Another essential thing is to replace the 'principle of self-determination' with the principles of "fuller representation responsiveness and democracy". Once such a state is established an ethnic group or nationality would not have any legitimate claim to secede or demand an independent state. To prevent ethnic crises from emerging there is the need to foster the culture of consensus-making and political tolerance, among various ethno-political groups.

Next, in case of ethno-national conflicts, the external powers should maintain distance from ethnic politics. Usually, the external powers they support one ethnic group against the other, this only aggravates the problem instead of resolving it. The exploitation of different ethnic groups by the superpowers has virtually led to the grim situation of present day conflicts like in — Afghanistan, former Yugoslavia, Kurds, etc.

The foreign powers if they wish to assist should stress more on cease-fire and peacekeeping alone and stay from assuming the role of 'broker'.

Finally, the governments in multi-ethnic states should strive for balanced economic development so that certain ethnic groups do not prosper on the cost of other ethnic groups.

To conclude with the words of Boutros Ghali in his 'Agenda for Peace' "Respect for democratic principles at all levels of social existence is crucial, in communities within states and within the community of states. Our constant duty should be to maintain the integrity of each while finding a balanced design for all." Otherwise, if steps are not

taken to curb the tendencies of ethno-national conflicts, then the world may be in store for decades of instability unlike that has been witnessed in the past 50 years.

### Check Your Progress 2

Note: i) Use the space below for your answers.

ii) Check your answers with the model answers given at the end of the unit.

1) Discuss five implications of ethno-national conflicts.

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2) Suggest some measures to curb ethno-national conflicts.

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## 21.9 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit, we have studied the concepts of nation, nationalism, ethnic groups, ethnicity, ethno-nationalism. We have also studied the causes of ethno-national conflicts, their patterns and dimensions. Finally, the implications of such conflicts have been examined followed by certain suggestion to curb or prevent the rise of ethnic tendencies.

The concept of nationalism in its perverted form has produced before the world. Such conflicts have the potential to destabilise almost all the nations of the world and plunge the international system in an era of insecurity and break-ups.

But if state government machinery acts judiciously and actively, develops economic resources, creates feeling of security and participation among the ethnic groups. In addition if people develop mutual tolerance and believe in universality of humankind and overlook the differences on the basis of race, religions language etc.

Finally, if international community learns to maintain its distance in ethnic conflicts, yet helps to promote peace in affected areas. This problem can be curbed to a great extent before it assumes dangerous dimensions.

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## 21.10 KEY WORDS

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**Autonomy** is a political arrangement in which an ethnic group has some control over its territory, people and resources but does not have independence as a sovereign stage.

**Assimilation** is a strategy for accommodating ethnic minorities that gives individual members incentives and opportunities to subordinate their identities to the language values and lifeways of the dominant group.

**Ethnic Cleansing** is the systematic elimination of ethnic minorities from a given territory using such means as terror, expulsion and murder.

**Ethno Nationalists** are large, regionally concentrated groups of people with a history of political independence or autonomy who seek to re-establish their autonomy. Those who want complete independence are called separatists.

**Genocide** is mass process by which leaders organise the energies and resources of their followers to pursue common political objectives.

**Plural Societies** consists of a number of ethnic groups each with distinctive collective identity and interests who are not ranked or stratified in relationship to another.

**Pluralism** is a strategy for accommodating ethnic minorities that recognises their individual and collective right to preserve their language, values and lifeways in existence with those of the dominant groups.

**Cleavages:** In stratified societies, status, power and wealth are unequally distributed among groups according to their ethnicity. These socially maintained distinctions in stratified societies are called cleavages.

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## 21.11 SOME USEFUL BOOKS

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George de Vos and Lola Romauncci Ross (ed) *Ethnic Identity: Cultural Continuities and Change*, Mayfield Publishing Co. California 1975.

Kumar Rupasinghe and Khawar Mumtaz (ed), *Internal Conflicts in South Asia*, Sage, New Delhi, 1996.

Paul R. Brass, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison*, Sage Publishing, New Delhi, 1991.

Ted Robert Curs and Barbara Harff, *Ethnic conflict in World Politics*, West View Press, Oxford 1994.

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## 21.12 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

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### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) See Section 21.5
- 2) See Section 21.5.10
- 3) See Section 21.7
- 4)
  - a) See Section 21.7.2
  - b) See Section 21.7.5
  - c) See Section 21.7.1

### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) See Section 21.8
- 2) See Section 21.9