

## **Can deep differences be accommodated?**

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### **Section 1**

The imperative of accommodating differences has assumed greater saliency in today's diversely different world. This is more so in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War when the popular creed of nationalism, especially of the ethnonational kind, with its totalizing project of constructing homogeneous nation-state becomes more pronounced. The “narcissism of minor differences”<sup>2</sup> which gives fodder to narrow, parochial and sometimes sectarian loyalties/identities as a reaction to and sometimes in conjunction to the nation-state's totalizing projects are equally totalizing in their orientations and persuasions. Not surprisingly, they often come into conflict with the state-nation building projects. At stake here is the challenge to make state-nation building more democratic, peaceful, stable and durable, which will help forge unity in the midst of diversities.

Michael Ignatieff, mindful of the recent bitter “ethnic cleansing” experience of the Bosnians, Croats and Serbs in former Yugoslavia that was unleashed by the “narcissism of minor differences”, writes in 1992 how even “the cosmopolitan order of the great cities—London, Los Angeles, New York, Paris—depends critically on the rule-enforcing capacities of the nation-states.”<sup>3</sup> In multiethnic societies marked by deep differences over conception of the good, norms, principles and ethics—informed by different ethnic, cultural, linguistic, racial and religious backgrounds—the “rules” of the state are interpreted from various vantage points. Hence, they come under suspect in certain circumstances. This is especially so when interpretation and enforcement of “rules” are considered to advantage some groups while disadvantaging other groups. When rectification measures do not come soon enough they easily get embedded into the institutional rules and policy designs of the state. This tends to antagonize inter-group relations leading to bloody riots and conflicts. The corollary to this is destabilization of social peace which in turn impedes progress and development of the state. The post-September 11 era shows us how “social peace” could easily be hijacked by “invisible enemies” of the state, who justify their cold-blooded acts as reactions to perceived historic injustices, discriminatory treatments, and wrongs meted out to them.

If conflicts have become enduring, and sometimes ineluctable, features of our modern social lived existence, it is our joint responsibility to manage and accommodate them. Given the increasingly dangerous turn identity mobilizations around ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious differences take, most states are engaged in finding means and ways to accommodate them before they assume unmanageable proportions. The imponderable question which confronts us is: can deep differences be accommodated?

In this paper I shall make out a case to answer this question in the affirmative. I shall argue that multicultural federal democratic mode is one of the most effective ways to accommodate deep differences. This is premised on the assumption that in a world of about 200 states encompassing more than 5000 ethnic groups, there can be no one single “imagined community” but multiple and overlapping communities of imagination.<sup>4</sup> Multicultural federal democracy facilitates institutional recognition and accommodation of immanent virtues of asymmetrical obligations among [un]equal communities in the public sphere. It does so by affirming the unequal circumstances in which communities are placed, by tolerating (or celebrating) their differences and giving them a “meaningful context of choice.”<sup>5</sup>

Central to this is my contention that “deep differences” are perspectival constructs or “imagined”—to borrow Benedict Anderson<sup>6</sup> (though he writes in a different context). The foremost task is to trace the caveats in which different identities emerge, evolve and get ossified before they break out into bloody riots and conflicts. Cross-time narrative that factors in past, present and future contingencies needs to be privileged hereupon. This is crucial if dialogic space were to emerge where the language of rights would give way to the language of minimal justice. I shall take the aid of both emerging theoretical discourse and selected experiences in India and around the world. I must admit at the outset, however, that an enterprise of this kind, drawing as it were from limited sources and experiences, could at best be deductive and suggestive.

## **Section 2**

In multiethnic countries like India the issue of accommodating diversely different communities and regions has been engaging national policy framers since the time of freedom struggle itself. For one thing historical specificity of the culturally diverse and plural nature of Indian society entails unsettling situations in which socioeconomic, political and cultural issues are seen from the vantage point of majority-minority framework. Here state-nation building becomes

problematic as attempts to forge a national identity are perceived to privilege a putatively majoritarian community. For another it has also been realized that if the “idea of India”—of a vibrant, inclusive and tolerant Indian nation-state—were to germinate, the imperative of affirming and giving institutional recognition to socio-cultural diversities must also cohere with the compelling demand of maintaining the “unity and integrity” of the nascent Indian nation-state.

It is striking to underline here that out of all the available options, the makers of India's Constitution came up with an ingenious “constructive constitutional” model which privileges the “multicultural path” of federal democracy.<sup>7</sup> The model affirms the liberal commitment to uniform citizenship rights. In the same token, it recognizes and upholds communitarian rights as a means to protect sociocultural diversity in India. This is done by differentiating communities based on caste, language, religion and tribe. The future unity and integrity of the Indian state on the one hand, and the stability, durability and success of its democratic structures on the other would depend on its ability to *hold together* these diverse communities. This would, in turn, depend upon its creativity in devising public institutional structures which would celebrate and recognize the specificities of diverse communities' aspirations and demands.

I consider stateness-democracy continuum in India as an important variable in explaining how successful such a multicultural federal democratic mode of accommodating deep differences would be.<sup>8</sup> In a situation marked by endemic scarcity of resources, the state would certainly continue to be both a site of contestation (for power) and a source of power (as it has the Weberian coercive monopoly of power). Notwithstanding the universal trend to “roll back the state”, it is equally imperative to “bring the state back in” and assign an autonomous and efficient distributional role. To be precise, the state and its institutional paraphernalia—viz., army, bureaucracy, executive, judiciary and the legislature—should be able to maintain its neutral, autonomous and integrative role if democracy were to deepen in deeply divided societies.

It is a truism that many of our present problems have their roots in the past and are inseparably bound up with our future. The issue of caste in India, for instance, which continues to define relations of hierarchy, of domination and subordination, is equally imbricated into modern day politics in as much as it is steeped in the past. This notwithstanding the possible ramifications it has for the future patterns of distribution of goods and services in India. The

dalits and other backward classes (OBCs), the historic victims of caste politics, have been demanding comprehensive affirmative actions from the Indian state with a view to put in place a semblance of *rectificatory justice* regime (say reparation or amending past discriminatory rules). While the antagonists of this demand see possible compromising of merit and foisting perpetual unequal social relations, protagonists considered it as minimal essential requirements to neutralize present disadvantages that the dalits and OBCs encountered. The latter demand institutional guarantees and safeguards to avoid possible replication of erstwhile discriminatory state policies by crafting inclusionary policies like reservation in public offices and institutions of learning (both in the public and private sectors). Of crucial importance here is the acceptance of the intrinsic value of cross-time narrative which would situate the problems of the dalits and OBCs within a historical continuum and address them accordingly.<sup>9</sup>

The future of social justice, a *sine quo non* for accommodating deep differences in India, will depend on the extent to which the Indian state and society could mitigate past wrongs and injustices (if at all they can not be completely redressed) by acknowledging and giving institutional recognition to the unequal circumstances in which different castes/communities are placed in. Central here is the imperative to inter-subjectively redefine rigid conceptualization of merit and equality *qua* equality before law. It is equally compelling to accept the truth that discriminatory and exclusionary treatments would reproduce themselves overtime till affirmative actions are seen as largesse of the state rather than as entitlements. Furthermore, there is a need to redress the past wrongs by assuring and providing both formal and informal guarantees that no institutional and policy designs of the state and society would replicate the past wrongs, and also to collectively ensure that erstwhile stigmatized communities realize their self-worth and contribute to the present and future progress of India *not merely on equal terms* but *as equals*. At stake here is the imperative to bring about structural transformation of the public sphere which would ensure *participatory parity* for multiple publics.<sup>10</sup> This is impelling in a stratified society like India where unequal social relations tends to leverage exclusionary mode of participation and representation by sidelining the subalterns. This can be equally applicable to the unassimilated peripheral tribal people, especially the Nagas and the *Zo people* (Chin/Kuki/Mizo) in India's northeast who had for long been claiming their historic rights and unique political situations. I shall come to this when I deal with the question of difference over nationality later.

In Iraq, the new coalition government headed by the Shiites also has this onerous task of establishing a democratic state, which will be both inclusive and just. Given the longstanding participatory exclusion that the Shiites faced under Saddam Hussain's Baathists regime (from late 1960s down to 2003), and the bitter sense of personal exclusion that they encountered in matters pertaining to their religion, it would be tempting for the new government to chart out exclusionary policies and resort to *retributive justice*. This is precisely where, as Eric Davis has incisively pointed it, the role of scholars, practitioners of politics and laymen to dig out historical memories “of a more tolerant and politically inclusive Iraqi nationalism”<sup>11</sup> of the pre-Baathist era becomes crucial. The future of democracy, peace and stability in Iraq, and for that matter in all deeply divided societies, would largely depend upon concerted efforts to build state beyond the pluralist, tolerant and more inclusive mode where every community freely interact as *equals*.

The role of political parties and visionary political leadership would be of crucial importance here. The deepening and sustenance of democracy would be indissolubly link with state-building in Iraq or elsewhere in transitional states. Political parties and their leaders need to learn the art of coalition-building, of envisioning a broad spectrum of power-sharing, and above all of institutionalizing democratic structures of decision-making by putting premiums on consensus and accommodation of diverse/conflicting interest. Democracy, it must be remembered, is not all about manufacturing consent and consensus; it is also concerned with creating social, economic and cultural conditions for articulating dissent and tolerance. To be precise, the sequencing of stateness and democracy needs, as Francis Fukuyama reminded us, careful thought. The state can germinate in deeply divided societies only when it is seen as democratic, inclusive and tolerant of diverse cultures and identities rather than being exclusionary, narrow and parochial in its orientations and character.

Of equal importance here are civic associations which cut across ethnocultural and religious divides. What is needed is, as Ashutosh Varshney pointed out in his insightful article on the Hindu-Muslim conflicts in India, not just a casual, *everyday form of engagement* (*quotidian* ethnic associations which basically take care of intra-ethnic concerns) but broad-based and organized civic *associational forms of engagement* which would facilitate inter-ethnic engagements.<sup>12</sup> The latter can begin with say by creating a cricket, soccer, trade or business club which would draw members from different religious communities. Post-Godhra Gujarat recently shows how such an *associational form of engagement*—in the form of establishing a cricket club

with members drawn from Hindus and Muslim boys—could help bridge, if not transcend, deep ethnic differences. Accommodating deep differences calls for active and concerted effort to identify moderates within each community. Once identified they should be engaged and involved in building civic associations around shared interests—of peace, harmony, welfare and development. If India were to avoid narrow, sectarian and grotesque religious violence and construct a vibrant secular ethos in the future, it would have to make creative use of these associations to begin with. These associations may then be used as public platforms to reason and discuss/debate not only inter-religious groups' agenda but also intra-group practices which need to be attended to.

To be sure, it has been widely accepted both by theorists and practitioners of politics that differences—be it ethnic, racial, culture, language and religion—are irreducible; they tend to magnify and be magnified if not accommodated/managed in its incipient stage. Being deeply perspectival constructs, they draw upon both the “given” and existing “material” sources to chart out their own trajectories which may at times culminated into bloody riots and conflicts. Ted Robert Gurr and his team in *Minority at risk* project has established that 18 of the 24 minorities in Western democracies which resorted to violence protest or terrorism between the 1950s and 1980s took 13 years of incubation time before they finally burst out.<sup>13</sup> Evidently, conflicts which arise out of such deep differences could be managed and accommodated peacefully before the “bubble burst”, as it were. Indeed, the *Human Development Report 2004* titled *Cultural liberty in today's diverse world* prepared by the United Nations Development Programme convincingly debunks illusionary fears that promoting cultural liberty destabilizes states or impedes progress and development. On the contrary it proved that promoting cultural liberty enhances human development.

Fredrik Barth's idea of “tradition of knowledge”<sup>14</sup> is relevant here. Culture, for him, is embedded in a tradition of knowledge which broadly comprised of shared lore, images, concepts, ideas and practices; it is shaped by processes of reproduction and flux. Hence it is taught, learned, borrowed, created, and discarded in dialogical relationship with the “other.” At the heart of this idea is that human beings are, according to Michael Walzer, essentially “culture-producing creatures” to “make and inhabit meaningful worlds” of their own creation vis-à-vis “others.”<sup>15</sup> The emotional appeal of culture and identity lies in the fact that they are both intimately personal and public. To flourish and develop, culture and identity needs “public

recognition”; misrecognition and the failure to give recognition can be agonizing as it can inflict or cause harm to the image of the “self.”<sup>16</sup> This becomes especially problematic in postcolonial states where state-nation building is often driven by the project of constructing a “national” identity around a putatively majoritarian community which often overrides minorities' cultures and identities. Contrariwise, monistic authenticity which informs such project tends to founder also in cases where the postcolonial state practices are seen to perpetuate the imperial state's agenda of promoting a minority identity in preference over the majority. The case of Ethiopia is a striking example here.

Recently, in an arresting piece Merara Gudina traces how the “creation of modern-ethnic empire-state” in Ethiopia continues to be chained by the imperial project of *Makinat* (pacification) started by Tewodros since the 1850s.<sup>17</sup> *Makinat* “involved evangelization of the local population, institutionalization of a new system of political control, and imposition of a new political class, culture and language on the indigenous population such as the Oromo.”<sup>18</sup> This implies that Amharic, the second majority ethnic community, trumps Oromo (the majority indigenous community) as a contingent corollary of this imperial policy. In fact, the dominance of Amharic was so palpable that in the 1960s 'Ethiopians were led to believe that the “true” Ethiopian was one who spoke Amharic, listened to Amharic music, believed in the Amhara-Tigray religion, and wore Amhara dress; to be “authentic,” Ethiopians sometimes had to alter their names and hide their true identities.’<sup>19</sup> In the 1990s, with the ascendancy of the Ethiopian Revolutionary People's Democratic Front (ERPFD), the idea of *Ethiopia Tikdam* (*Ethiopia First*) is sought to be anchored by the principle of self-determination rights which is purported to apply equally to “every Nation, Nationality and People in Ethiopia” (vide Article 39.2 of Ethiopian Constitution of 1995).

Interestingly, fourteen administrative units were created on the basis of ethnicity and language under ERPFD (in power since 1991), each of which however was given numbers instead of ethnic labels. The creation of “Southern Nations, Nationalities, Regional State (SNNRS)” in southern Ethiopia is a case in point.<sup>20</sup> It is being argued that such postimperial state's design could not part ways with the imperial agenda of privileging a particular ethnolinguistic group, i.e. Amharic. The ninety-odd ethnolinguistic groups in Ethiopia frontally led by the Oromignas (Oromos) are now demanding for redefinition and specification of language, culture and national policies of the state, if at all the notion of *Ethiopia Tikdam* were to

be realized. It is contended that the current official and constitutional stand of giving generalized self-determination rights to all the ninety-odd ethnolinguistic groups without clearly specifying contingent and relevant state roles to give matching resources confounds the already hapless and unequal inter-tribal equations. It is further argued that perseverance with such a generalized and ill-defined role of the state would encourage inter-tribal suspicion and exclusions making them vulnerable to civil war. This may not be an illusionary fear where public resources are available in a limited scale. Inter-tribal competition over scarce resources and public posts/services could be accelerated in a situation clearly marked by cross-cutting ethnic boundaries and cleavages in Ethiopia. The principle of self-determination may gel well with the agenda of establishing multiethnic confederation in Ethiopia, but in the ground it has got to grapple with possibilities of reviving, and sometimes accentuating, historical and traditional animosities/rivalries.

Indeed, the issue of reconciling the demand of ethnic minority groups for self-rule within the framework of shared rule has been a nagging constitutional problem faced by multiethnic states.<sup>21</sup> In India the principle of linguistic self-determination was espoused by the Indian National Congress since the 1920s to hold the diverse ethnolinguistic groups together. After independence, two Commissions—The *Dar Commission, 1948* and the *State Reorganisation Commission, 1953 (SRC)*—were appointed to look into the viability of affirming this principle. The two Commissions were unequivocal in their reports that linguistic criteria can only be considered when the overriding concerns of the “unity and security of India” and “administrative convenience” are in place. In fact, the SRC was formed in the wake of massive ethnolinguistic mobilisations in different parts of India which culminated in the “strike unto death” of Potti Sriramulu, a prominent Congress leader in Telangana region (now in Andhra Pradesh) in 1952. To be sure, the intensely emotional outburst and divisive forces such mobilisations unleashed led to the realization that the nascent Indian nation-state was indeed skating on a “thin ice.” Reluctant recognition of ethnocultural and linguistic diversity was the contingent outcome. Balveer Arora and Nirmal Mukarji aptly underlined the ramification of this, thus:

*The reluctant recognition of diversity resulted in the lack of a coherent policy frame for its integration...policy shifts resulted from often violent pressures and protests from below, and political expediency frequently became the guiding principle. Asking ethnolinguistic groups to prove that they were important enough to be institutionally recognized was perhaps the most counter-productive method for promoting national unity ever devised.*<sup>22</sup>

If we contextualize this *reluctant recognition* within the initial euphoria of post-Partition era especially by revisiting the ideational premise of the Hindu nationalists, it would be understandable. In fact, the Hindu nationalists considered that the question of nationality in India was settled in favour of a Hindu nation with the creation of Pakistan for the Muslims in the late 1940s.<sup>23</sup> However, the liberal nationalists' project of building a multicultural democratic fabric in India, which finally prevailed over the Hindu nationalists' project, impels putting in place group-differentiated rights by recognizing the import of language, religion, caste and tribe identities in India's Constitution. The 'Indian exceptionalism or Indian model' of sustaining what Rasheeduddin Khan calls the *bouquet* approach (unity in diversity), necessitates asymmetric federal arrangements which recognise the virtues of 'asymmetrical obligations among unequals' prevalent in Indian society.<sup>24</sup> This was more compelling in the 1950s and 1960s when the Punjabis, Telegus, Tamils, Meiteis, Mizos and Nagas, among others, questioned the idea of Indian nationhood and embarked upon parallel totalizing projects of their own.

It is a self-evident truth now that a series of linguistic reorganization of states in India in the 1950s and 60s backed up by the three language formula (via the Official Language Act, 1963) help stymied further ethnolinguistic state reorganization to a considerable extent. Privileging regional languages (now numbering 22) alongside Hindi (as official national language) and English (as an associate official language) ensures accommodation, protection and promotion of “multiple identities in a single state.”<sup>25</sup> However, the terms and conditions of recognition continue to be contested as more regional minorities are demanding recognition. The recent refusal to give recognition to and incorporate Mizo language into the Eight Schedule of India's Constitution is a case in point. For one, the nature of federalism in India—what Alfred Stepan calls “holding together federalism”—necessitates recognition of multiethnic identities.<sup>26</sup> Continued overriding concern for, and preoccupation with, issues of “security and unity” and “administrative expediency” implies the establishment of a constricted ethnofederal polity in India which seldom satisfies irredentist demands of ethnocultural minority groups.<sup>27</sup> This explains why the Nagas and the Zo people in India's Northeast are, inter alia, negotiating the terms of ethnofederal polity by claiming their inherent self-determination right to unify contiguous territories in Northeast India and the adjoining areas in Bangladesh and Myanmar. They claim that they have been involuntarily incorporated into India's territory and hence their right to determine their future destiny must be restored. The Indian nation-state, perched as it

were on the logic of preventing ethnic power centre (s), took over seventeen years to recognize the “political” nature of the Naga issue (when it finally recognised it in 1964).

To be sure, the politics of territoriality engenders deep divisions within multiethnic societies where ethnocultural and territorial boundaries increasingly overlap with one another. The bitter reaction and counter mobilization undertaken by the Meiteis in Manipur in the wake of the ceasefire agreement that the Government of India undertook with the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isaac Swu-Thuingaleng Muivah) in June 2001 “without territorial limits” was a stark reminder to this. The Meiteis were staunchly against the purported move of the Nagas to unify their contiguous areas which would slice out a major part of the state. Evidently, the historic rights claim of the Nagas to maintain their territorial integrity was seen as possible dismemberment for the Meiteis.<sup>28</sup> In the same vein, the demand of the Kurdish for autonomy in Iraq was seen not only by the Saddam Hussain regime but by the Turkish government as an attempt to dismember the Iraqi and Turkish states. Today, land and territory has become a bitter site of contest and negotiation. Both are now considered as cultural symbols crucial for the survival of one's collective identity and rights. This also explains why in Nigeria intermittent territorial reorganization of states were undertaken as federal institutional responses to self-determination rights of its 250-odd ethnic groups while at the same time bringing the “Government closer to the people.” The creation of 'three regions at independence in 1960 to four regions in 1963, 12 states in 1967, 19 states in 1976, 21 states in 1987, 30 states in 1991, and 36 states in 1996' showed that Nigeria, the most populous and most diverse multiethnic country in Africa, reinvents itself to accommodate diverse ethnic and territorial identities.<sup>29</sup> The two commissions/panels, viz. Willink Commission 1957, and the Panel on Creation of States, 1976 under whose broad guidelines the series of state reorganizations was carried out, reinforced this idea that national integration is best promoted by privileging the “history and wishes of the people” over “administrative convenience” in a multiethnic state, not *vice-versa*.

In *holding together federal systems*—as obtained in India, Ethiopia, Iraq, Nigeria or elsewhere—recognition and accommodation of autonomy demands of minority groups especially those having territorial underpinnings should be premised on a people-centric approach. This is to suggest that asymmetric federal arrangement of giving unequal powers/autonomy packages to different units of the state should minimally be seen as an extension of the subsidiarity principle of social justice.<sup>30</sup> In other words, it should be premised

on the condition that people of a specific locality know best what specific autonomous spheres of activities/powers and resources they should be endowed with and be given constitutional recognition. When ethnocultural and linguistic boundaries overlap and irredentist movements gain momentum, they should immediately be accorded political solutions. These may take the form of envisaging an expansive sharing of powers via elite incorporation or by creating special representative structures and incorporating what I call *home-grown autonomous institutions*<sup>31</sup> which give voice and power to the people. 'India's disordered democracy'—to borrow Pratap Bhanu Mehta—could not have managed and accommodated irredentist movements in its Northeast frontier had it not been for its innovative structures like the concept of sub-state structure under 244A for Meghalaya in 1969, special status by guaranteeing autonomy under the Sixth Schedule of India's Constitution [Article 244 (2)], and incorporating special customary and traditional rights under Article 371.<sup>32</sup> Of late these special structures are increasingly seen as institutional measures to deepen centralization, crafted as they are in the top-down autonomy model.

What we need is a bottom-up autonomous institutional structure which can link multiple publics with the state. Interlinking of autonomous institutional structures and the construction of *multiple publics* having civic obligations to common constitutional principles and norms of the state would be crucial in the future. This may be more challenging in transitional societies where the rupture between the state and society is conspicuously wide and identification of the people with the state's institutions at large is thin. “Constitutional patriotism” of the Habermasian kind may founder in deeply divided societies because of initial difficulty in taking-off, yet it would be crucial in holding different constituents and people together. What is needed here is a constitutional and political engineering of sorts which would serve and accommodate peoples' aspirations/demands. In other words, it should have the minimum critical mass to recognize and accommodate peoples' self-understanding about their culture and identities while at the same time capable of converting peoples' legitimate grievances into supporting linkages of peoples and institutions to maintain “unity” of multiethnic states amidst diverse diversities.<sup>33</sup> I have argued elsewhere that serious rethinking should be made to involve traditional autonomous institutional structures.<sup>34</sup> This would not only imply resuscitating homegrown autonomy models but also ensuring that such autonomous structures do not perpetrate exclusive ethnic base/homelands. Granting of autonomy should ensure balancing of particularistic ethnic demands with the

protection of ethnic minorities within a demarcated autonomous region. Expansive sharing of powers and institutional protection of minority rights should be embedded into such schema.

Another idea which has increasingly gained ground in recent years is non-territorial federal accommodation of ethnic minorities which are spread across intra-state and inter-state boundaries. Under this scheme, liberal cultural autonomy packages in the form of special linguistic, cultural and identity rights are to be ensured for such ethnic minorities. The Saami and Laap Councils in Scandinavian countries are illuminating examples of the non-territorial mode of autonomy.<sup>35</sup> Intrinsic to this is the idea of 'shared sovereignty' which makes such arrangements contingent upon the willingness of two or more states. Recently, the Saami model is also being suggested for the Nagas in India's Northeast.

### Section 3

The explosion of information technology in this age of *globalization*—to borrow Thomas Courchene—means that both centrifugal and centripetal forces could be mobilized and harnessed equally with ease. While on the one hand there are attempts to construct narrow, parochial and sectarian identities to legitimize claims for distinct identities and putting them in “civilization boxes” to justify “the clash of civilizations”, there are equally impelling reasons and need to transcend these splintered and fragmented identities if we were to usher in a peaceful, stable and secure world.<sup>36</sup>

What is needed is a mechanism to process and transform these identities embodying deep differences into supporting linkages for the state. This should be premised on the realization that ‘a multicultural democracy requires for its sustenance *not isolated islands and multiple cultural solitudes but communities living together and participating as equal partners* in the national political life.’<sup>37</sup> It is imperative therefore to determine what and under which conditions these diverse identities can be recognized and thereby accommodated. Can we have a universal principle of self-determination rights for ethnic minorities? Given the sweeping effects of globalization on different social groups we are going to encounter more of the birth and mobilization of ethnic minorities in the foreseeable future. The greatest threat and challenge to the unity and integrity of the modern state will come from territorially concentrated minorities, also popularly known as “nations without states.” It is imperative to manage and address their

problems in their very incipient stage. It should be our joint responsibility and common endeavour to craft institutions which promote peace.<sup>38</sup>

To sum up accommodating deep differences calls for affirmation of asymmetrical contemporary realities of our social lived existence. If differences are irreducible, we have to accept the compelling desires of peoples and groups to remain different. In the meantime we need to emphasize that in our difference and separateness we are not in categorical opposition to one another but remain in dialogic relation to one another.<sup>39</sup> This implies that we need to think beyond the integrationist model which is being enacted out by assimilating diverse cultures and identities into one compact, homogeneous whole. The coexistence of “multiple nations within a nation-state” in this age of *globalization* demands learning to live and let others live, sharing our diversely different experiences and weaving our dreams together to make this world a better place to live in.

## References

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  - <sup>2</sup> Following Michael Ignatieff, who borrowed the term 'narcissism of minor difference' from Freud, I shall employ here in the same sense to refer to a phenomenon wherein the smaller the real difference between two peoples the larger it is bound to loom large in their imagination. See Michael Ignatieff, *Blood and belonging: Journeys into the new nationalism* (Toronto: Viking, 1993), p.14.
  - <sup>3</sup> See Ignatieff, *ibid.*, p.9.
  - <sup>4</sup> See United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2004: Cultural liberty in today's diverse world* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004).
  - <sup>5</sup> See Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural citizenship* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).
  - <sup>6</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991 revised edition).
  - <sup>7</sup> See Gurpreet Mahajan, *The Multicultural Path: Issues of Diversity and Discrimination in Democracy* (New Delhi: Sage, 2002).
  - <sup>8</sup> See especially J.P. Nettl, "State as a conceptual variable," *World Politics*, Vol.20, no.4, July, 1968, pp.559-92 and Francis Fukuyama, "'Stateness' first," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol.16, no.1, January, 2005, pp.84-8.
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- <sup>15</sup> Walzer cited in Gurpreet Mahajan, "Indian exceptionalism or Indian model: Negotiating cultural diversity and minority rights in a democratic nation-state," in Will Kymlicka and Baogang He (eds), *Multiculturalism in Asia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp.288-313. Cf. Michael Walzer, *Spheres of justice: A defense of pluralism and equality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), p.313.
- <sup>16</sup> Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," in Amy Gutmann (ed.), *Multiculturalism and the politics of recognition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp.75-106.
- <sup>17</sup> Merera Gudina, "Ethnicity, Democratisation and Decentralisation in Ethiopia: The Case of Oromia," *Eastern Africa Social Science Research Review*, Vol.23, no.1, January 2007, pp.81-106.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p.87.
- <sup>19</sup> Teshome G. Wagaw, "Conflict of ethnic identity and the language of education policy in contemporary Ethiopia," *Northeast African Studies*, Vol.6, no.3 (New Series), 1999, pp.75-88.
- <sup>20</sup> On this see especially Data De'a, "Clans, kingdoms, and "cultural diversity" in Southern Ethiopia: The case of Omotic speakers," *Northeast African Studies*, Vol.7, no.3 (New series), 2000, pp.163-88 and John W. Harbeson, "Ethiopia's extended transition," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol.16, no.4, October 2005, pp.144-58.
- <sup>21</sup> See Daniel J. Elazar, *Exploring Federalism* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1987) and Ronald L. Watts, *Comparing federal systems* (Kingston: Queens University Press, 1999, 2nd Edition).
- <sup>22</sup> Nirmal Mukarji and Balveer Arora (eds), *Federalism in India: Origins and development* (New Delhi: Vikas1992), p.9.
- <sup>23</sup> Christophe Jaffrelot, "Composite culture is not multiculturalism: A study of the Indian Constituent Assembly Debates," in Ashutosh Varshney (ed.), *India and the politics of developing countries* (New Delhi: Sage, 2004), pp.126-49.
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- <sup>25</sup> Balveer Arora, "Adapting federalism to India: Multilevel and asymmetrical Innovations," in Balveer Arora and Douglas V. Verney (eds.), *Multiple identities in a single state: Indian federalism in comparative perspective* (Delhi: Konark, 1995), pp.71-104.
- <sup>26</sup> See Alfred Stepan, "Federalism and democracy: Beyond the U.S. model," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol.10, no.4, October, 1999, pp.19-34 and Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, "Toward consolidated democracies," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol.7, no.2, April1996, pp.14-33.
- <sup>27</sup> See Henry E. Hale, "Divided we stand: Institutional sources of ethnofederal state survival and collapse," *World Politics*, Vol. 56, No.1, January 2004, pp.165-93 and H Kham Khan Suan, "Stateness-democracy continuum in the Hill Areas of Manipur: Critical reflections," unpublished paper presented at an international seminar on *State and democracy in India: Critical reflections*, organised by the Centre for Political Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, 23-24 March 2006.
- <sup>28</sup> See Sanjib Baruah, *Durable disorder: Understanding the politics of Northeast India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005).
- <sup>29</sup> Henry E. Alapiki, "State creation in Nigeria: Failed approaches to national integration and local autonomy," *African Studies Review*, Vol.48, no.3, December 2005, pp.49-65
- <sup>30</sup> Peter Pernthaler, "Asymmetric federalism as a comprehensive framework of regional autonomy," (pp.472-93) and John McGarry, "Federal political systems and the accommodation of national minorities," (pp.416-47); both in Ann L. Griffiths (ed.), *Handbook of federal countries*, 2002 (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press 2002), pp.472-93.
- <sup>31</sup> The case of the *Yehzabo* (of the Nagas) and the *Zomi Council* (of the Zo people in Manipur) in India's Northeast are illuminating cases in point. The former envisages innovative and indigenous supra-Naga tribal autonomous parliamentary structure by drawing members from the village, regional and national levels. The latter is a representative body which draws its members from different Zo tribes. Both are endowed with supreme powers vis-à-vis matters pertaining respectively to the Nagas and the Zo people.
- <sup>32</sup> See Pratap Bhanu Mehta, "Review: India's disordered democracy," *Pacific Affairs*, Vol.64, no.4, Winter 1991-92, pp.536-48 and H Kham Khan Suan, "Salvaging autonomy in India's Northeast: Beyond the Sixth Schedule way," *Eastern Quarterly*, Vol.4, no.2, 2007, pp.5-16. Also see H Kham Khan Suan, "Asymmetry in local democracy: An overview of North-East India's experience," *Indian Journal of Federal Studies*, 2, 2003, pp.103-28.
- <sup>33</sup> Jyotirindra Dasgupta, "Community, authenticity, and autonomy: Insurgence and institutional development in India's Northeast," *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol.56, no.2, May 1997.
- <sup>34</sup> See especially Suan, "Asymmetry in local democracy," and "Salvaging autonomy in India's Northeast", *ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Hurst Hannum, *Autonomy, sovereignty and self-determination: The accommodation of conflicting rights* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992 Second Printing)[1990].

<sup>36</sup> See Amartya Sen, *Identity and violence: The illusion of destiny* (London: Allen Lane, 2006) and Samuel P. Huntington, *The clash of civilizations and the remaking of the world order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

<sup>37</sup> Mahajan, "Indian exceptionalism or Indian model," *ibid.*, p.313 (emphasis added).

<sup>38</sup> Nancy Burmeo, "The import of institutions," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol.13, no.2, April, 2002, pp.96-110.

<sup>39</sup> Iris Marion Young, "Politics of difference," in Gurpreet Mahajan (ed.), *Democracy, difference and social justice* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp.434-47.