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## **UNIT 77 CONTESTED IDENTITIES**

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### **77.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

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Based on a broad outline as mentioned above, the Unit will attempt to look into contesting identities among the immigrants and the diaspora and the inter linkages between them. It will look into identity formation historically as well as conceptually and provide 'real world' examples which will be helpful in understanding the concept. After you have gone through it, you will be able to:

1. Understand various forms of identities in their historical perspective
2. The role of identity in migration and diaspora formation
3. Various forms of identities like cultural, ethnic, political and linguistic identities
4. The new challenges emerging from the contested identities
5. The need for comprehensive policy to resolve the issues of contesting identities

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### **77.2 INTRODUCTION**

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When people migrate from one geographical area to another, they carry with them their physical self, their language, rituals, symbols, ethnic attires and food habits. All these unique attributes are subsumed under identity and find expression in their daily rituals and also while interacting with people of other identities. In fact, there is a close relationship between identity and culture. While culture is bounded in a geographical area and shaped by tradition and rituals, identity is the outcome of belonging to that particular culture and its

subsequent mobility. The individual members tend to internalise the aesthetics of identity and cultural practises in their daily rituals.

Identity is also self assertion of belonging to a particular culture, which is ascribed by the individuals themselves as well as by the society. It creates an image of belonging and becomes the main tool of survival for immigrants and the diaspora as they negotiate their social and political space in their immigration journey. Identity is, in fact, always in creative tension with itself, as it evolves and transforms and mutates to various other sub-identities. On the other hand, an identity becomes a contested identity when it comes in association or in confrontation with other identities and attempts to create its social and political space. And in order to achieve its objectives, identities negotiate, manoeuvres and repositions and sometimes confront other identities.

It was Theodore Schwartz who in mid-1970s used a catching phrase called 'migrants of identity' to describe the continual search by American youth for an identity that they found acceptable and authentic (1975: 130). The same analogy was later extended to transnational migrants and diaspora groups. In fact, "the diaspora experience is defined, not by essence of purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity: by a conception of "identity" which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity" (Hall 1990, p 235.).

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### **77.3 DEFINING IDENTITY: HISTORICAL AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE**

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Identity plays a critical role in a migrant and a diaspora's life as they negotiate their social, political, economic or transnational space based on it. It is a locus standi on which an individual or a group is known for its attributes that differentiate itself from others. But what exactly is identity? How it is formed, transformed and establishes itself in the long run? Before we set forth to answer some of these fundamental questions let's look at its various forms, as it has evolved over the millennia and centuries. When we talk about anthropological evolution of mankind, you must have heard about Homo erectus, Australopithecus, Neanderthal, Homo sapiens and various species and genus which evolved, branched off, and some of them became extinct. The categorization of these species and genus was based on certain features which were unique to each of them. This was probably the first attempt to identify these categories based on identity which was common to species and genus.

We, a Homo sapiens, are the only human tribe called Hominini, left on earth and enjoy unique identity. When mankind evolved and spread out to various geographical areas and continents, they were further categorised as Africans, Mongoloids, Caucasian based on certain phenotype features. As mankind began living in societies, their spiritual quest led to the birth of religions -Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam which was an identity creation based on religious beliefs. The formation of nation-states in the 18th century onwards further resulted in creation of newer identities based on ethnicity and nationality. The process of fission (breaking down of earlier identities into smaller identities) creates new identities based on ethnicity, nationality, ideology, language, culture and profession and is an ongoing process.

When these identity groups were living separately, there were fewer chances

of conflict arising from their association. However, as new identities multiplied and their interests clashed with each other, it created conflicting and contested spaces where they negotiated their social and political space. With natural resources being limited, there were attempts by various dominant groups to appropriate it and claim rights over it. The weaker or minority social groups were either left out or were deliberately deprived of some of these rights. The onset of globalisation, mass movement of resources and manpower and technological revolution in transport and communication further aggravated such claims. People started contesting their rights to resources based on identity and belonging. This led to discrimination and racial assaults based on ethnicity, nationality and religion and continue till date.

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## **77.4 THE LEGACY OF PRE AND POST COLONIAL CONTESTED IDENTITIES**

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A false belief in identity and superiority of races was the brainchild of the British and European colonial conquest, beginning from the sixteenth century to nineteenth century. It defined colonial belief of the White supremacy over all others identities and their attempt to civilise the rest of the world. It gave rise to terminology like African barbarism and Asian Orientalism which were full of racial connotations and were degrading to other identities. A similar labelling was noticed among the Dutch settlers in Indonesia and Spanish colonial settlers in North America. A series of institutionalised racisms, dehumanisation, violent exploitation and subjugation had set in by that time. A precursor to these racial identities was seen earlier in the transatlantic slave trades in Europe and America which was based on differential identity. It was the beginning of racial segregation of the "White" and the "Black" identity across the continents which became the insidious bedrock of contested identities.

However, from the middle of the twentieth century the ideology of racial configuration began to change as more and more people began crossing international borders for employment and as part of the manpower supply chain. As of now, there are multiple identities living a simultaneous existence in the world, while some are tied to their home country, there are others who are tied to the host country; and some to both the sites of belonging. There have been ideological and institutional shifts as nation-states become more tolerant to diverse ethnic diversity and their simultaneous engagement to the country of belonging. The ethnic, linguistic and transnational engagements have become a preferred choice because of its advocacy by the civil rights movements and multiculturalism and the United Nations. In fact, the concept of dual identities and multiple engagements of the immigrants and the diaspora is considered as a legitimate and beneficial asset for the new social group as well as the receiving country.

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## **77.5 THE PROCESS OF IDENTITY FORMATION**

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The practice of identity-formation is a recent phenomenon which is considered to be late-capitalist and post-modern, though it has been in existence since centuries. But there is another school of thought that believes that identity-creation has become redundant in the age of globalisation. This is so because the new era is now characterised by creolization, compression, hybridity and

synchronicity of diverse ethnic identities. These ideologies and rituals have somehow tapered the intensity of identity impact. Moreover, identity has no impact if it does not involve mobility or fluidity of physical movement. The traditional anthropological definition of identity somehow fails to convey the fluidity of movement and migration. “A world of movement can be understood in terms of actual physical motion around the globe and also as an imagination: an awareness of movement as a potentiality and a vicarious knowledge of movement” (Rapport and Dawson, 1998: 4).

Looking at the large movement of people across the world, it has been argued that it is a quintessential phenomenon of the 21st century. More and more people are travelling across the globe for work and because of other compelling reasons like market forces, ideological conflict and environmental changes. Under such circumstances, the identity of migrants keep changing and transforming as they travel across various cultural zones. They also, depending on their numerical strength, impact the host country and also get impacted by them in turn, thus shifting their identity a bit left, right or centre or between conservative and liberal ideologies.

Based on identity, the issues of home and belonging are perennially contested among the migrant and the diaspora groups. But there have also been cases when identity assertion and contestation has been observed among the immobile population. It is expressed in the dominance of one particular ethnic group over the other. This was seen, for example, in the English ascendancy over the Irish, the Scottish and the Welsh and has been contested as a hegemonic practice of one group over the other. Likewise, the differences, diversity, pluralism and hybridity are also contested by the majoritarian social groups. In India, the Indian identity, it has been argued, was contested on the ground that there was no nation-state identity prior to British colonialism. It emerged only from the resistance to colonialism. The freedom struggle against British rule helped in strengthening the concept of Indian identity.

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## **77. 6 CONTESTING IDENTITIES: A CULTURAL CONSTRUCT**

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Contesting identity, it has been argued, also signifies practises and idioms in which social meaning is constituted, appropriated and transformed. In Europe and America for example, contested identities cannot be understood without the reference to the ‘White’s Supremacy’ and the ‘Black’s Subjugation’. It has led scholars to ask some fundamental questions as why in a given context, certain identities come to play in a given role. Are these concepts reinforced or challenged and contested by the political forces alone? In certain cases, some of the key concepts like belonging, cultural constructs, and identity are contested and appropriated by another group.

To create a new political identity, sometimes a dominant group takes recourse to cultural continuity and similarity with other minor ethnic groups in order to mobilise support. It is for this reason that the concept of multiculturalism has been contested by the Right wing politics leading to identity conflict, which is quite similar to race conflict, cultural conflict and gender conflict.

But identity is elusive and has always remained an enigma as diaspora keep

trespassing one boundary after another. But despite their mobility, there are some inherent characteristics which define them and differentiate them from others. It asks some fundamental identity questions as 'who' they are 'what' they are and how they associate with other groups. As a result of this, identity becomes a marker between I and We versus He/She and they.

It was Erikson (1968) who defined identity as "a subjective sense of sameness and continuity - a process located in the core of an individual as well as in the core of a communal culture. It is an unconscious process that creates 'identity consciousnesses in an individual or a group of people. Berger and Luckman (1970) on the other hand saw identity as a reality of everyday life, which is shared with a common set of meaning. It is both subjective as well as social and is expressed through lifestyle and culture. In fact, differential culture is one of the basic markers that differentiate one identity from the other.

In a diaspora or an immigrant's life, these differential identities are sometimes challenged in the host country. For example in Britain in 1959, the Sikhs were banned from work because of their use of turban and they had to fight a bitter battle to retain their rights (Beetham 1970). In the 1960s in Britain there was an attempt of 'bussing' Asian children in schools outside the cities meant exclusively for immigrants and was responsible for racial discrimination in education, housing and employment. In order to overcome these differential treatments to immigrants, Roy Jenkins in 1966 emphasised the process of 'integration' instead of assimilation to mainstream them into Britain's social milieu. According to him, assimilation was a flattening process while integration meant empowerment, acceptance of diversity and mutual trust (Jenkins, 1966: 4). In a sense, it was an attempt to accept and respect other identities in a multicultural society.

While some of the host countries have practiced racial discrimination in one form or the other, the immigrants, on their part, have also been unable to overcome their narrow identification particularized identity. For example, in spite of having migrated to multicultural societies, the Indians continue to retain their caste identities. While it was no longer possible to practice caste rituals in its purest form in the host countries and at modernised workforce, it nonetheless was replicated in one form or the other. As a result of this, caste-based community organisations were formed at the industrial sites of Britain and solidarity between the same-caste identities became more pronounced. It was, in fact, re-inscribed in a cultural milieu of the host country. Like in their home country, their caste identity was equally differentiated, heterogeneous, and variable and contested space.

Unlike India, in Europe and elsewhere in the world, new forms of belonging, citizenship and identities emerged in the post-war era as new nation-states were formed and new nations were established. The incessant migration of people across nation-states was responsible in creating new identities based on citizenship and through the process of inclusion and exclusion. In some cases, new immigrant groups were instrumental in challenging the citizenship laws as was witnessed in Germany and Britain.

In some cases, immigrants were denied citizenship rights because of their differential identity. For example, the Turkish immigrants in Germany have

been historically and culturally part of it since long time, but many of them did not enjoy citizenship rights. Because of their sizable number, the Turkish immigrants began demanding inclusion of Islamic studies in the local schools based on Islamic identity. Incidentally, their argument was not based on religious identity but on the principles of immigrant inclusion and Universal Human rights. A similar case was also seen in Britain where Islamic immigrants demanded religious freedom to pursue their education system. These incidents were responsible in bringing a change at the institutional and ideological levels and in transforming their national identities. It also added legitimacy to immigrants' own culture and identity.

The individual identities of immigrants and diasporas, over the period, is also responsible in the formation of collective identities, which is well recognised and codified in human rights. These identities have been able to create new solidarity groups, which are mobilised based on their individual identities, thus leading to the formation of multi-level identity politics. As a result, new institutions were established and the legal framework of inclusive politics evolved. The allocation of rights and identities to different groups has also been responsible in diffusing the concept of citizenship in countries where immigrants and diaspora form a sizable population.

There is yet another feature of identity creation, as seen in the immigrants and diaspora, as it naturalises a group in a particular identity based on language, kinship, homeland, nation and territory. It means that one cannot help but need to have an identity to lay claim to social, political and economic rights. It has been observed that to achieve such claims, ethnic and national identities are mobilised both in the host and home countries of the diaspora.

**Check your progress 1**

- Note:
- a) Write your answer in about 50 words.
  - b) Check your answer with possible answers given at the end of the unit

1. Define Identity and its role in Diaspora formation.

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2. How an identity is formed and sustained in the long run?

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## 77.7 ASSIMILATION AND INTEGRATION OF CONTESTED IDENTITIES

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To accommodate new immigrant groups in its fold, a large number of Western countries have adopted various processes. They have tried to mainstream them in their national identity which is based on language, culture and national laws. In general, these countries have taken recourse to the processes of assimilation and integration. In case of hard assimilation, the homeland identity of the diaspora is supplanted by host country identity leading to their complete assimilation which is generally achieved by the second generation. In case of permanent culturalism, it is the homeland identity which is retained and given prominence to at the cost and exclusion of adopted country identity. A large number of immigrant receiving countries do not favour this kind of assimilation as it leads to ethnic enclaving, segregation and isolation of the immigrant community.

The process of soft assimilation of immigrant identity, on the other hand, is tolerant to ethnic diversity and attempts to integrate them gradually over a period of time. While integration is the ultimate objective of the assimilatory process, it is often voluntary on the part of immigrants and diaspora and with their informed knowledge of the adopted country's culture, education, language and legal framework. The process of soft assimilation celebrates hybrid identity and encourages migrants to embrace the adopted country's lifestyle, while still allowing them to retain their homeland identity. The soft assimilation, in a way, is a win-win situation both for the immigrants as well as the receiving country. This is so, because both live in a symbiotic relationship and are able to enjoy the best of both the worlds.

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## 77.8 IDENTITY POLITICS

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As identity is a political status and a process as well, it gives rise to politics of identification. This happens when a new social group jostles with each other for political space in democratic governance. Identity politics on the other hand looks at identity, as a category which could be mobilised for political reasons. This has been evident in electoral democracies where social groups identify themselves closer to political ideologies. In fact, no diaspora or immigrant ethnic group could live without identity as their very existence depends on it. By virtue of its definition, such identity groups problematise the notion of political allegiance, citizenship and rights as they straddle across national boundaries.

While an identity group could be privileged, they at the same time could stand condemned because of their existence in two different political worlds. One is the world of the adopted country to which their existence depends and the other, their home country, to which they feel intimately connected. The world they 'come from' becomes the source of their identity. This is in quite contrast to their differing politics of identification.

The politics of identity also makes a diaspora an extension of nationalistic discourse of their homeland. This could be seen in the creation of pressure groups by the diaspora in their adopted country, as among the Jews and Indian diaspora in the USA. Sometimes, they also work in opposition to their existing homeland to bring political change as seen among the Cuban diaspora. Here,

their identity becomes a rallying point for political engagement: both in the home and host countries. The notion of identity, in fact, shares a multifarious relationship with both the countries. This is probably the main reason that a diaspora cannot afford to ignore its identity as it plays a critical role in their political negotiation. They have to take into account how they are similar and different from the native majority in order to negotiate their identity claims.

But there is yet another group of diaspora who is neither tied up with the home nor the host country. This has been observed in the case of radicalised British Muslims of Asian descent. They are known to show a deterritorialized allegiance to universal umma at the cost of home and host country. They deny the existence of specificity and locatedness and claim atypical identity which is different from other social groups. So, in order to distinguish their identity, the diasporas sometimes set the boundary and mark it prominently. And if necessary, they accentuate their identity to seek favour for their personal interest.

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## 77.9 RACISM, HOLOCAUST, GENOCIDE AND DISCRIMINATION

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The assertion of identities, that of the natives, the diaspora and the immigrants have been at the core of major conflict. It has led to political retaliation, violent repression, imprisonment and expulsion of some of these communities. Based on identity discrimination, there have been anti-Semitic racism, fascist class warfare and fatal and systematic institutionalized violence in some of the countries. In Germany, the Nazi-designed and SS-orchestrated holocaust led the killing of over six million European Jews in the late 1930s and early 1940s. At times, communities have been forcefully expelled from the adopted country based on identity discrimination, as in the case of South Asians in East Africa and more particularly Indian-Ugandas who were expelled by President Idi Amin in 1972 because they were considered ethnically “impure” bodies. At times, new immigrant groups are negatively racialised and pejoratively described as unwanted foreigners called *étranger* and *ausländer*.

In addition to ethnicity, religious identities too have been the cause of major conflicts and have led to bloodshed and massacre of innocent people. The partition of British India into India and Pakistan was based on religious identity. When India became independent from the British colonial rule in 1947, over 15 million people belonging to various regional-linguistic groups, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Punjabis and Bengalis were killed in both the countries. Such a process of ethnic cleansing, it has been argued, is the principle characteristic of postcolonial, post-World War II, when nation-states were formed based on religious-ethnic divisions.

The root cause of religious-ethnic differentiation however was the result of the British colonial census which defined and divided people based on religious and ethnic lines. It was also the cartographic restructuring after World War I, which led to the formation of a nation-state based on ethnic-religious formation. The hostilities between warring groups continued through the twentieth century with the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, the geographical dispute between Albania and Yugoslavia and between Greece and Turkey. The hostilities continued to exist and were practised not only between these nation-states but also against immigrant groups like Franco-Maghrebi in France and Turkish



Gastarbeiter in Germany. They became easy targets of racism based on ethnicity, religion, nationality and class. Similarly, the prejudices and discrimination against Vietnamese "boat people" and Haitian refugees was based on identity and continues till date. Likewise, in the wake of 9/11 terror attack, Arabs and Muslim immigrants became target of racial and religious persecution across the world and more specifically in the US, which was based on phenotype identification.

Conceptually speaking, the term race, from which the term racism has emerged, has no scientific validity. It was based on the 18th century anthropological classification of Linnaeus, Blumenback, Buffon and others who based their categorization on phenotype characteristics including the skin colour and the types of hair of the individuals. Incidentally, the term became popular and found expression in the works of popular thinkers of the time including John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, Hume, Immanuel Kant and Hegel. In the 19th century, the concept of race became a pseudo-science and found expression in the works of Comte de Gobineau's *On the Inequality of Races*. While the earlier conception of race was biological, it was Franz Boas who, with scientific evidence, showed that race is a cultural construct and a product of culture, history, language and power relations between the communities. Identity, like racism, created and sustained a hierarchical relation of power among various groups based on artificial distinction.

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## 77.10 CONTESTED IDENTITIES IN INDIAN DIASPORA

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The Indian diaspora is one the largest ethnic groups outside the country of its origin. While being acculturated in the host country, they show marked social and religious behaviour which is quite similar to their country of origin. As mentioned earlier, the Indian diaspora is not a monolithic social formation and is known for its diversity, heterogeneity and its own peculiarities. While social identity based on caste system has lost relevance in some of the countries to which Indians migrated centuries back, the recent migrants, on the other hand, show a close affinity to caste system quite similar to that prevalent in the country of origin. It has been argued that they try to replicate similar social and religious identities in their host countries as they had experienced in the country of origin.

While caste could be a prominent determinate of Hindu society, there are other identities which have become equally powerful. For example regional-linguistic identities like Punjabi/Sikh diaspora, Gujarati diaspora, Malayalee diaspora, Telugu diaspora occupy prominent places in the host country based on their regional-linguistic affiliation. These identities also become a major political marker when the diaspora home country faces major issues based on these identities. It also gets reflected in the politicisation of these issues amongst the diaspora. For example, the bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh into Andhra proper and Telangana led to a similar division in the Telugu-speaking diaspora and the formation of new social and political groups based in new identities.

The Indian diaspora is also further divided based on profession and their skills. For example doctors and engineers who migrated to the more developed economies of the US, the UK and Australia in the 1960s and 1970s are now quite different from the IT professionals of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. Some of the examples of profession-based identities include Indian American Physician Association (AAPI), Silicon Valley Entrepreneurs (TIE)), taxi workers and domestic workers (Andolan and Awaz). Some of them are also divided based on the trajectory of migration and settlement.

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## 77. 11 RELIGIOUS IDENTITIES

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There are various factors which are responsible for the formation of identity groups. In addition to ethnicity and culture, religion has been a powerful marker in identity formation. In fact, mediaeval period history is replete with conflict, crusade and conversion and continues to draw salience in the post-modern world, with the re-emergence of powerful religious identity groups. While each religious group self-ascribed to a particular religious belief, the immigrant receiving countries also, at times, unwittingly play truant to the process of identity imposition. For example, in the beginning of 20th century, all South Asian immigrants to the US were classified as “Hindoos” . This was despite the fact that it included people from diverse faiths. It played a key role in identification and subsequent racialisation. It also created a framework for the immigrants to live and act a particularised identity as marked by the receiving country.

A strong sense of religious belonging and identity has also been observed among the Indian diaspora in recent years. The resurgent Hindu nationalism has become a powerful marker based on religious-identity. These diaspora groups equate their religious affiliation with their national affiliation based on the premise that India is the only country to which Hindus could identify with, unlike the Muslim and the Christian diasporas who have multiple sites of identification. This however seems to be a twisted logic based on religious identity and identification as belonging to a nation-state is based on citizenship rights rather than religious identification. Israel, probably, is one exception where identification and belonging is based in Jewish ethnic belonging rather than to a multicultural nation-state ideology.

Religious identities also produce political mobilisation to gain recognition, political mileage and to promote its cause. The Hindu American Political Action Committee (HAPAC) and Hindu American Foundation (HAF) in the US have been instrumental in promoting Hindu political candidates in the US election. This has been responsible in creating cleavages within the Indian diaspora as it includes other religious groups like Muslims, Sikhs and Christians, vying for political representation. These “contestation is reflective not only of internal cleavages such as class, religion, nations and sexuality but also of ideological orientation and aspirations (Mishra 2018, 217).

Religious identities have also produced differential racialisation experience for the diaspora and distinct response to such racialization attempts. The post -9/11 racial backlash against the Muslims and Sikhs was responsible for mobilisation of immigrants on religious ground. The Muslims of South Asian origin and Sikh diaspora formed a coalition, articulated their interest and exerted pressure on policy makers.

The above incidents also show that during a crisis, social groups coalesce their identity and form strong identity-based organisations to thwart threats to their identities. There are enough qualitative data which suggest that threat perception and the fear of racial attack leads to higher levels of pan-ethnic identification. In fact, multicultural institutions in the United States have been used by Hindu groups to promote politics primarily based on a Hindu religious identity, despite the diversity of religious faith among the Indian immigrants (Kurien, 2007).

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## 77.12 POLICY FRAMEWORKS FOR RESOLVING THE ISSUES OF CONTESTED IDENTITIES

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While every diaspora and immigrant groups try to safeguard its interest, stay relevant and promote its culture, host countries, on its part, have come out with policy framework to integrate them in the mainstream. We have already discussed culturalism, assimilation and integration of these minority communities in some of the host countries. One of the primary motives of the host countries is to safeguard its own security measures as these groups have been behind civil unrest, political upheaval, human rights violation, human trafficking and also in drugs business.

In order to resolve the issues of contesting identities, some countries feel a moral responsibility to educate them and bring them closer to the mainstream. Giving political rights through the process of naturalisation has been one of the major policy decisions in some of these countries including the US, the UK, Canada and Australia.

During the course of naturalisation, it has been observed that while the first generation immigrants show reluctance to the process of integration, the second generation, who were born in the host countries, are readily mainstreamed because of their identification with the host country. It has been argued that it is attachment to the home country that keeps the first generation migrant socially and politically distant from the host country.

As assimilation and integration are purely political issues, some countries have shown willingness to include new immigrants in their electoral process. But not all immigrant groups show equal enthusiasm to such overtures. For example, in the 2002 California election, it was observed that the voting percentage of Latino and Asian immigrants were much lower than the White immigrants. In fact, “the role of ethnoracial identities in democratic participation has been an enduring and intractable issue for American democracy, and immigrant and minority communities have always negotiated these identities while striving to find a place in social and political arenas (Mishra, 2018, 207).

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## 77.13 CONCLUSION

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As discussed earlier, contested identities are a natural byproduct of the human migration process. When people of different identities cross cultural borders and confront other identities, conflict and altercation come in creative tension to negotiate social and political space. Sometimes identities create their own enemy as it excludes itself from other identities, thus depriving itself of the progressive and encompassing ideologies. While identities are binding, they are also self-limiting as it stops its further expansion. In order to survive, sometimes a particularised identity has to be tolerant to its internal diversity. Nonetheless, identity has its merit as it helps minority and marginalised communities to negotiate and manoeuvre political and social space for itself.

It would be a hasty assertion to contest that all contested identities can live in harmony because the very process of creating conducive conditions is a power

relation in which an influential identity group supersedes the minority identity. It is the identity of nationality and citizenship that has become a powerful marker as other identities including ethnic, religious, and cultural and other identities are subsumed under it. When two nations are at loggerheads, it's the two national identities which are pitted against each other. As these contested identities cannot be eliminated in a multipolar and multicultural world, there have been progressive attempts towards conflict resolution and to minimise the friction through policy measures and other initiatives including bilateral and multilateral talks between the stakeholders of diverse identities.

### Check your progress 2

Note: a) Write your answer in about 50 words.

b) Check your answer with possible answers given at the end of the unit

3. What role does assimilation and integration play in mainstreaming a diaspora group?

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4. Write a short note on the religious identity in the Indian diaspora.

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### SUGGESTED READING

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Clifford, J. (1997). *Routes: travel and translation in the late twentieth century*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press

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## 77.14 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check your progress 1

1. Identity is a locus standi on which an individual or a group is known for its attributes that differentiate it from other identities. When people migrate from one geographical area to another, they carry with them their physical self, their language, rituals, symbols, ethnic attires and food habits. All these unique attributes are subsumed under identity and find expression in their daily rituals and also while interacting with people of other identities. In fact, there is a close relationship between identity and culture. While culture is bounded in a geographical area and shaped by tradition and rituals, identity is the outcome of belonging to that particular culture and its subsequent mobility. The individual members tend to internalise the aesthetics of identity and cultural practises in their daily rituals.
2. Identity is a cultural attribute and is formed based on a sense of belonging and identification with a particular ethnicity, culture, religion or nationality. It is ascribed by the individuals themselves as well as by the society. It creates an image of belonging that becomes the main tool of survival for immigrants and the diaspora as they negotiate their social and political space in their immigration journey. Identity is, in fact, always in creative tension with itself, as it evolves and transforms and mutates to various other sub-identities. On the other hand, an identity becomes a contested identity when it comes in association or in confrontation with other identities and attempts to create its social and political space. And in order to achieve its objectives, identities negotiate, manoeuvre and reposition itself to confront other identities.

### Check your progress 2

1. Assimilation is the process of acceptance and incorporation of a minority group in the majoritarian mainstream. It is considered to be a flattening process while integration means empowerment, acceptance of diversity and mutual trust between two or more ethnic groups. In a sense, it is an attempt to accept and respect other identities in a multicultural society. In case of hard assimilation, the homeland identity of the diaspora is supplanted by host country identity leading to their complete assimilation which is generally achieved by the second generation. In case of permanent culturalism, it is the homeland identity which is retained by the diaspora and given prominence at the cost and exclusion of the adopted country's identity. A large number of immigrant receiving countries do not favour this kind of assimilation as it leads to ethnic enclaving, segregation and isolation of the immigrant community. The process of soft assimilation of immigrant identity, on the other hand, is tolerant to ethnic diversity and attempts to integrate them gradually over a period of time. While integration is the ultimate objective of the assimilatory process, it is often voluntary on the part of immigrants and diaspora and with their informed knowledge

of the adopted country's culture, education, language and legal framework. The process of soft assimilation celebrates hybrid identity and encourages migrants to embrace the adopted country's lifestyle, while still allowing them to retain their homeland identity.

2. A strong sense of religious belonging and identity has also been observed among the Indian diaspora in recent years. The resurgent Hindu nationalism has become a powerful marker based on religious-identity. These diaspora groups equate their religious affiliation with their national affiliation based on the premise that India is the only country to which Hindus could identify with, unlike the Muslim and the Christian diasporas who have multiple sites of identification. This however seems to be a twisted logic based on religious identity and identification as belonging to a nation-state is based on citizenship rights rather than religious identification. Israel, probably, is one exception where identification and belonging is based in Jewish ethnic belonging rather than to a multicultural nation-state ideology.



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