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## UNIT 13 IMMIGRATION AND ETHNICITY

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## 13.1 INTRODUCTION

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The onset of the process of globalisation-economic, cultural and technological-has added, as never before, to the large-scale movement of people across borders and regions. Two issues have gained importance in the process. As large numbers of people are moving back and forth across national and cultural boundaries, it is having deep effects on the cultures and politics of the host countries. Immigration has become an issue of national and regional political stability and economic well-being. Secondly, people who are in the process of migration and immigration are of several types: investors; skilled and professionals; family members of those who are already living in the host country; labour and economic migrants; and refugees escaping civil wars and political persecution. Many of these immigrants enter the countries legally; others overstay their temporary tourist or work-permit visas; while a number arrive, say as 'boat people,' seeking refugee status.

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## 13.2 OBJECTIVES

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After reading this unit, you should be able to:

- delineate the ethnic diversity of Australia's population;
- discuss the relation between immigration and economic prosperity in Australia;
- understand the multicultural policies in 1990s; and
- comprehend the links between immigration, ethnicity and multiculturalism in the context of globalisation.

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## 13.3 ETHNIC DIVERSITY

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As you know, Australian society has been shaped more than any other modern country by

immigration and immigrants. Three aspects of the immigrant character of the society are important. (i) According to figures for 1995, some 22.7 per cent of Australians were first generation immigrants, a proportion which was much higher compared to other immigrant-receiving countries such as Canada and the United States. The percentage has not significantly changed in the last ten years. (ii) The first generation immigrants and their children are heavily concentrated in major cities; and they constitute more than half of the population in cities like Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth. (iii) In Australia, immigration, historically speaking, has served two main purposes: meet the need for labour force; and secondly, populate the vast empty territories.

There are certain characteristics to Australian immigration since the 1970s, when a non-discriminatory immigration policy was put in place.

- i) It is to be noted that in the era of 'white Australia' policy, most immigrants had come from Europe. Still however, others could not be prevented from entering the country. Since the 1970s, when the policy of 'white Australia' was replaced with a non-discriminatory multicultural immigration policy, the non-whites from Asia and Africa have come in large numbers. Today, people from more than 180 nationalities-speaking varieties of languages and practicing different faiths-are found in Australia.
- ii) A very large number of those who immigrated to Australia after 1945 had little formal education and English language skills. Since 1975, those with high level of education and professional qualifications are coming in large numbers. The immigration policies have favoured the educated, the professionals and those coming in with capital over others by granting more points to this category of immigrants. The point system, loaded in favour of the skilled and the professional, has been used to reduce the immigration of the so-called 'unwanted'.
- iii) Besides permanent immigrants, Australia has also become destination of a very large number of those who come on temporary basis. These are mostly tourists, businessmen and students. In recent times, higher education has become a big business in Australia. It is to be noted that some twenty-seven thousand students from India alone are studying in various Australian educational institutions.

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## 13.4 SOCIAL CONFLICT VS. SOCIAL COHESION

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Australian cities really look highly diverse. The question is whether the cultural diversity of Australian cities is leading to social conflict, say along racial and ethnic lines, or it could as well lead to social cohesion in a rapidly changing society? The above question has been debated for very long. Truth of the matter is, there is no straight answer to such a question. Common sense tells us that diversity can be a source of social conflict and tension. However, the economists tell us about 'cultural capital' which is harnessed from the experiences of diversity and is considered a positive input in the developmental process of a country.

In Australia, it is the economic dimension of immigration that has been intensely debated since 1945. There are two sets of arguments for and against immigration. One single most important argument has been that Australia needs immigrants to fill the labour shortages. Australia is a resource export dependent economy; and to harness the natural resources, it needs labour so that prosperity of the country and living standards of Australians could be maintained.

Then there is the contrary argument. Immigrants are blamed for declining standards of living, for unemployment and for poor economic productivity, and for wastage of public resources by way

of maintenance of social services for the immigrants and the poor. Immigrants are also blamed for bringing their specific tribal, religious and caste practices-say, forced marriages-which may be 'illiberal.' They are also blamed for bringing in 'authoritarian' values and practices which may pose a danger to the democratic culture of Australia.

The issue of immigration has become a subject of heated debate since the second half of the 1990s. The rise of the One Nation party of Pauline Hanson and restrictive immigration policies of the government of Prime Minister John Howard has brought the issues of immigration and ethnic minorities to the fore in Australian politics. The One Nation party has blamed the immigrants for the economic ills of the country and the hardships faced by the white Australians during the period of economic 'rationalisation', that is economic restructuring along neo-liberal lines.

Is immigration to be blamed for the economic hardships faced by many Australians? Is there any empirical evidence that immigrants cause unemployment and add to the number of those who are poor? The conventional argument is that during the period of economic boom, immigration tends to rise but falls during periods of economic recession. Since the 1990s, Australian economy has been in the growth trajectory; but immigration has not risen to a perceptibly high level. Since the economy has been growing and immigration has been relatively low, obviously one cannot blame the immigrants for the hardships faced by ordinary Australians. Problem lies in the nature of economic restructuring which is producing, what economists call, 'jobless growth'.

It is true that there are not many worthwhile studies to show the impact of immigration on Australian economy. Few studies which have looked into the issue however conclude that immigration has generally a positive, at least a benign, impact on employment and the economy in general. This happens in many ways. Many immigrant professionals are employed at lower category of employment; and it is said that Australian labour market penalises rather than rewards cultural capital. As a result, many immigrants, more so if they happen to belong to ethnic minority groups, never reach the highest levels of corporate and bureaucratic structures. Many immigrants work at low wages and they raise the level of demand and consumption, and thus contribute to the creation of wealth, jobs and exports. During periods of economic recession, it is immigrants who suffer more in the form of low wages and lay-offs. There is sufficient evidence of racial discrimination in the Australian labour market which suggests that the Australian market economy does not adequately reward the cultural diversity and makes the 'coloured' immigrants suffer during periods of economic down-turn.

In other words, immigration and cultural diversity strengthens Australian economy; and if the economy responds fully to the potential of immigrant human capital, the economy can become stronger. It is however noted that in periods of domestic economic down-turns, immigration becomes a convenient target for all the economic and social ills of the Australian society. Political parties and politicians find immigrants soft target, and begin blaming them for rising social tension and national disunity. Immigrant ethnic groups are even branded as a threat to national security and national identity. Those who have been nurtured on racist and xenophobic propaganda fall prey to such rhetoric. Given Australia's long history of racism and xenophobia, there are many takers for such a prejudicial view of the immigration during periods of economic down-turn or a national crisis.

Since immigrants are heavily concentrated in major cities, urban Australia blames them for deterioration of the urban environment and social life. Immigrants are blamed for crowding the cities, and for causing things like urban pollution and waste. More notably, immigrants are held responsible for urban crime and violence, and practicing strange beliefs and rituals. Not only the

One Nation party but others also, such as the Australian Democrats and the Greens, have sought ban on migration to the cities.

In truth, there are more complex aspects to such a process: both public policies and social attitudes of the dominant white majority encourage ghettoisation of the ethnic immigrants. There remain low levels of public investment in infrastructure including in public education and transport in areas of ethnic immigrant settlements, and public policies to assist immigrants to adjust and assimilate in the host society remain woefully inadequate. Ghettoised ethnic immigrant communities continue to suffer from low levels of education, employment and wages. Over a period they become a permanent 'ethnicised under-class'. While they continue to service the dominant white upper-classes, entire communities get stigmatised. They are blamed for urban crime and violence, and their culture is considered as 'illiberal' and held as a threat to the 'democratic ethos' of Australia.

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### 13.5 ETHNICITY AND MULTICULTURALISM

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This calls for a discussion of multiculturalism not merely as a desired concept but as a public policy in societies that have become culturally diverse. The policy of white Australia was based on the assumption that new immigrants should shed their traits-cultural, linguistic, religious, dress, food-and become the same as Australians. The solution however was never that simple. Shedding past was impossible; besides no one knew what it is to be Australian. There were many religious and ethnic diversities among Australians themselves-catholics and protestants, English and Irish etc. Besides, under the assimilationist policy, there was no governmental initiative to meet the immigrant needs in areas of education, health, welfare and law and the labour market. The reason was plain and simple. Arthur Calwell, the architect of the post-Second World War immigration, had determined that nine of ten immigrants would have to be British; and that all immigrants must leave their 'cultural baggage' at the customs.

After 1973, the assimilation philosophy had stood discredited. No one, even the white immigrants, had left their 'cultural baggage' at the customs. Besides, with British and the larger white European sources of immigration having nearly dried up, the need for new immigrants could have been met only from Asia and Africa. Apart, there were many international developments including many declarations and conventions against racism and discrimination and in favour of freedom of individual and equality of cultures. Australia, being a member of the US-led Western alliance, had also to take responsibility for many of the refugees from Indo-China.

In addition, new ideas and theories in social sciences were emerging in response to the global political and cultural changes. As several societies were becoming culturally diverse, the meaning of the word 'nationalism' was beginning to change. In place of being 'exclusive', nationalism was being defined in 'inclusive' terms. It was not necessary to be British, white and protestant/catholic in order to be an Australian 'nationalist.' One could be of Chinese descent and a Buddhist and still be an Australian 'nationalist.' Australian indigenous communities were also beginning to demand full rights of citizenship besides asserting their traditional rights over land and resources. In place of assimilation of the kind described above, there was a felt need to appreciate differences and respect diversities. Thus multiculturalism was entrenched as a public policy by the conservative government of Malcolm Fraser (1975-83). Cultural programmes on radio and television in ethnic languages started and new education programmes for ethnic groups was launched.

The succeeding government of Bob Hawke redefined multiculturalism as being for all Australians. This was an important development, at least at the conceptual level. It meant that the dominant

white majority must rise above the nostalgia of 19th and early 20th centuries' white Australian experiences. The post-1975 'coloured' immigration is very much a part of the Australian 'national' history and experiences. In other words, multiculturalism is meant not only for immigrants and ethnic minorities, but also for the white Anglo-Celtic Australians. Such an enunciation of multiculturalism had three important dimensions: (i) cultural identity, that is the right to maintain cultural, religious and linguistic freedom in Australia; (ii) social justice, that is the right of all Australians to equality; and (iii) economic efficiency, that is the economic advantages that immigration and cultural diversity brings with it; and that this productive diversity is to be recognised and rewarded.

The Labor government of Paul Keating had made even more sincere an attempt towards building a multicultural society. Keating made a bold attempt to define Australia as an Asian country; and down-played its western cultural moorings. Keating had wanted to integrate Australia even more closely with the powerful Asian economies and work out a long-term strategic partnership with them for Australian security.

With the change from the Labor to the Liberal-National coalition government in 1996, multiculturalism began to change. The attitude of the government John Howard towards multiculturalism has since remained at best lukewarm. During his first term as prime minister, Howard hardly used the word 'multiculturalism.' He was indulgent towards the anti-Asian immigration propaganda and activities of the One Nation party and remained disdainful of the idea of a 'multicultural' Australia. He took Australia back to being a western nation, tightened immigration, and sympathised with the right-wing chorus against ethnic minorities as being the source of violence, crime, an economic burden, and endangering democratic culture and social cohesion of Australia.

Behind the policy vacillations of successive government, are some real issues calling for a clear political approach. (i) The question is not, 'what' it is to be an Australian, but 'who' is an Australian? Is only the white dominant majority Australian? White Australians themselves are diverse. There are divisions on grounds of religions, sects and nationalities; besides, many a times, these divisions run along economic and demographic lines. Simply look at the corporate sector, and one would discover as to who owns and runs the Australian economy. (ii) One also needs to ask, what is the meaning of 'assimilation'? A forced assimilation in a white Australia, which itself is ill-defined and was long ago discarded, is nearly impossible to realise. Assimilation could also mean when everyone broadly subscribes and enjoys rights of citizenship equally and equitably. (iii) Admittedly, in a multicultural society, individual rights of citizenship such as those of freedom, equality and property alone are not enough. As has been discussed in Unit 4, collective rights of ethnic and racial minorities are considered the bedrock upon which alone individual rights can be meaningfully built and sustained in a democracy. Communities help mediate the individual's relationship with the polity. If Australia is democratic and intends to remain a democratic polity, it has no escape from being multicultural in the genuine sense of the term.

Several studies have shown that cultural diversity does not by itself produce social disharmony and conflict. These studies have found higher degree of tolerance in suburbs of high migrant density than in other suburbs. While there are always exceptions to this rule and incidents of discrimination and violence do occur for a variety of non-cultural reasons, Australia has remained by and large free of any large-scale ethnic conflict and violence. At the same time, the contrary trend cannot be denied either: ethnic and racial discrimination and violence against minorities, especially by the white supremacist elements, is on the rise.



Many critics argue that the real problem lies in the fact that multicultural policies are formulated and implemented in a half-hearted manner. Mere celebration of diversity in speeches and symbolic acts is not enough. Multiculturalism needs to be embraced more deeply and sincerely not only by the ethnic minorities but as much, if not more, by the majority. Multicultural programmes and policies are mostly cosmetic and superficially celebrative of the cultural diversity. They need to become substantive. Instead of focusing on 'life styles', only if multicultural policies had sought to improve the 'life chances' of the immigrants through socio-economic amelioration, things would have been far better. Moreover, what is needed is the effective political empowerment through participation and representation of ethnic minorities and indigenous communities. This precisely is a challenge for all multicultural democracies.

A major criticism from the left viewpoint on multiculturalism has been that the very concept and policies of multiculturalism has been a clever ploy to essentially contain the ethnic minorities, and segregate them lest they begin politically mobilising on issues of common concerns. In other words, multiculturalism is all about preserving the white Anglo-Celtic character of the Australian society. Multiculturalism is intended to 'empower' even more the white Australia and ingenuously 'dis-empower' the non-whites. Besides, if issues like poverty, income inequality, urban segregation and lack of political participation at the level of local governance are tackled in the public political arena, and not treated as specific ethnic minority problems, governments could have strengthened both multiculturalism and democracy. Wherever governments have done it, they have not faced high levels of minority alienation and multiculturalism has flourished.

During the Labor government of Paul Keating, there was a debate and recognition of the need for a 'liberal multiculturalism.' Ever since the government of John Howard, immigration and rising cultural diversity of Australia however is seen as brewing of social disharmony and a threat to the so-called Australian 'national' identity. Multiculturalism is seen as part of the problem and recognition of any minority rights as 'appeasement'. Large sections of public have turned against immigration and immigrants. Fears of Australia becoming a nation of 'ethnic enclaves' and 'tribal loyalties' rather than a unified, monochromatic 'British' nation are no more than the 'white man's' fantasies about the past and the present, rather than being based on some concrete historical evidence. If multiculturalism is considered a wrong answer, then one really does not know what solution the Australian state has in mind.

A discernible change in the immigration policy came about in the 1990s. Immigration was seen earlier as fulfilling important economic purposes; now it is seen mostly in cultural terms. To deal with economic recession and high rates of unemployment, the government of Paul Keating had since the early 1990s reduced immigration intake. It had also introduced the controversial measure of English language tests for immigrants, and denied many welfare and unemployment benefits to the immigrants for the first six months of settlement. This had broken a central tenet of multiculturalism which allowed immigrants the same social rights, excluding the right to vote, which come with citizenship for all Australians. Under Howard, two other institutional aspects of multiculturalism were further banished: Bureau of Immigration, Multiculturalism and Population Research (BIMPR) was closed down and the Office of Multicultural Affairs was removed from its influential position in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet and was converted into a small section in the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA). Besides, immigrants are required to wait for years before they become eligible to receive some of the welfare services; and funds have been slashed for many of the multicultural programmes.

Ethnicity intersects in more than one ways with class, gender and culture. The process of economic 'rationalisation', including privatisation of many of the welfare services, has deepened poverty

and economic inequality and made these services inaccessible to many immigrant ethnic groups. These problems have particularly adversely affected the immigrants and ethnic minorities with low levels of education and skills. It is true that under economic 'rationalisation', immigrants with higher educational and professional qualifications-and the floating point system under the new immigration rules-have done better in terms of employment and income. However, many professionals, including medical doctors, from non-English speaking countries do not get their degrees recognised and thousands of them are awaiting qualification recognition while, at the same time, rural Australia suffers from lack of sufficient medical practitioners.

Discrimination works in devious ways. Those from non-English speaking background or those who are non-white suffer varieties of discriminations on racial and ethnic grounds irrespective of their class and income background. In one study it was found that engineers of West Asian cultural background did not get the required jobs despite holding degrees from some of the well-known British universities. An important point for consideration here is that many immigrants continue to exhibit characteristics, including in terms of their employment and income levels and overall reception, of an under-class.

As noted above, it is true that many Asian professionals and businessmen have done extremely well, and this includes the millionaire immigrants from Hong Kong. But then one really needs to ask the question, for how many generations they will continue to be described as immigrants? It is also true that immigrants from countries such as Greece, Hungary and Korea have done better in the small-business sector than say Arabs and Muslims in general. The multicultural discourse in Australia to begin was highly symbolic and celebrative. As it began to face hard issues, requiring a resolution in the public policy arena, it began to be diluted and down-graded. Restrictive and discriminatory immigration measures, withdrawal of social safety programmes and the rise of racism and xenophobia all combined together mean that ethnic and racial minorities are confronted with conditions which may lead to their social, economic and political disenfranchisement.

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## **13.6 IMMIGRATION AND ETHNICITY**

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Australia is a country of high immigration. According to the data provided by the International Organisation of Migration, immigrants currently represent some 20 per cent of the total population of Australia. Since 1945, over 6 million people have arrived as new settlers in Australia. In the 50 years (1945-95) of planned post-War migration, about 5.9 million migrants arrived in Australia besides the 600, 000 who came under humanitarian programmes for the displaced and the refugees. In the same period, Australian population rose up from 7 to 19 million, and had reached 19.6 million by 2001-with one in every four Australians being born overseas. Data indicates that about one million migrants arrived in each of the five decades following 1950: about 1.6 million between October 1945 and June 1960; 1.3 million in the 1960s; 960 000 in the 1970s; 1.1 million in the 1980s; and 900 000 in the decade of 1990s.

Number of settlers arriving in Australia between July 2001 and June 2002 had totalled 88900; and the number has remained more or less steady since then. They have been drawn from more than 150 countries; with most of them born in New Zealand (17.6 per cent), UK (9.8 per cent), China (7.5 per cent), South Africa (6.4per cent), India (5.7 per cent), and Indonesia (4.7 per cent).

Available data also indicates that immigration has been reduced and subjected to tighter control since the early 1990s, notwithstanding claims made by different governments of pursuing a more 'liberal' or a less 'restrictive' policy. There are certain notable features of the way immigration is

being managed. (i) Australia remains a high regulatory country, for the net permanent migration is even more limited. (ii) Immigration policies and quotas are based on 'national interest and need', and migrants are chosen from two broad categories of 'skill' and family streams. The programme planning level set by the government ensures that shift towards skilled immigrants continues with at least 58 per cent of new immigrants selected from the 'skill' stream. (iii) Immigration from within Asia is not as overwhelming as conveyed through official announcements and media reporting. According to a survey made in June 2000, of the 23.6 per cent resident population born overseas, only 5.6 per cent was born in Asia, 2.5 per cent in Oceania, and 1.2 per cent in West Asia and North Africa. (iv) The Australian immigration authorities do admit that with economic globalisation, business immigrants often do not intend to stay in Australia permanently. (v) The intake under the humanitarian programmes for the year 2002-03 that covered refugees, displaced persons etc. was fixed at 12000. (vi) The one to two per cent average annual increase in population over the previous decade indicates that the growth is more on account of the natural increase than net overseas migration. (vii) Lastly, the immigration policies and patterns compared with the grant of non-business visitors' visas indicate that in the year 2000-01, more than 3.2 million such visas were granted offshore. Temporary visitors and tourists are a major source of foreign exchange earnings. The data for 1997-98 shows that international visitors to Australia consumed A\$12.8 billion worth of goods and services which represented for that year 11.2 per cent of the total export earnings--the fourth largest contributor after mining, manufactures and agriculture.

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### **13.7 ETHNICITY, IMMIGRATION AND GLOBALISATION**

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Australia's reliance on resource exports for its economic growth and decent living standards for its population had come to an end in the 1970s with growth rates in industrialised economies becoming low and unpredictable and prices of commodities becoming even more vulnerable in the global market. In the last quarter of the 20th Century, Australia has, in its own way, responded and adjusted to the global economic changes-rapid growth of finance markets, increased mobility of capital, and the shift from labour-intensive factory production to high-technology information industries. The adoption of economic 'rationalism'-the Australian term for 'neo-liberalism'-has produced new kinds of jobs and patterns, and has changed the way of living and thinking of Australians.

Economic 'rationalism' brought a major change in the way state was perceived by average Australian and the functions it had performed for most of the twentieth century. Social scientists had often used the expression 'Australian Settlement' to denote the way the settler society had evolved, politically and socially, over the last two hundred years. 'Australian Settlement' denoted conservative norms, egalitarian values, community life including family values, state protection and church guidance, etc. Once the logic of market was accepted as the sole reason that would and should shape human life, it destroyed the 'Australian Settlement.' Once market ethics of competition, individualist pursuits of materialist gains and profit motive replaced the values of 'Australian Settlement,' the vulnerable sections of the society found themselves in want of necessary state and societal protection. With market forces shaping the economy, politics and the cultural ethos, ordinary Australians had to fend for themselves.

An aspect of economic 'rationalism' has been the bipartisan consensus on its need. It was the Liberal government of Malcolm Fraser that had begun the process of economic restructuring. Economic adjustment led to high cost of living, cutting down of wages, high rates of unemployment and a boost to private investment. As state's protectionist and mediatory role declined, the Fraser government sought to wriggle out by developing and further exploiting the mineral and energy



resources. However, dependence on mineral exports could not rescue the economy after the collapse of commodity prices in 1982. Bob Hawke after 1983, with labour unions as constituents of the ruling Labor Party, worked out corporatist solutions that combined economic restructuring with some social safety features. With state controlling the labour unions through various corporatist control mechanisms, the autonomy of labour union declined. But there were trade-offs between the state and the unions. Wages fell but more jobs were created. In return for production agreement, the business had to adjust and compete with foreign investors in a more deregulated financial market. However, a more open economy, Australia was only learning to live in a competitive global economy. The rapid increase of foreign borrowings and a persistent trade deficit had placed the Australian dollar at the mercy of foreign speculators and investors in the 1980s. The rising foreign debt and poor export performance by late 1980s had created the spectre of Australia being described as a 'banana republic'. The challenges of economic restructuring and its consequences went beyond the economic aspects of efficiency, productivity and value-added exports.

It was a cultural shock for many Australians to know that Australia was not a 'European' economy; that it has been an inefficient economy importing most of its advanced technology to support a small population that has all along lived off the exploitation of natural resources. Dependence on natural resource exports, over the decades increasingly to Japan, China and the Asian 'tigers', did not go down well with the belief that Australia is the Western developed country. The central principle of the 'Australian Settlement' viz. a strong state would always protect the living standards of its population gave way to market logic making political parties and people to adjust to the harsh realities. At the ideological-political level, the ascendance of the right wing economic ideas also gave a setback to many other traditional notions. Business and professional class, benefiting from liberalisation process, worked in concert to press for new policies and values. Export producers attacked the remaining system of tariffs and guaranteed wages. The opponents of public welfare criticised the culture of 'dole dependence' which had partly benefited the poor among the ethnic communities, and persistence of large unproductive bureaucracies. Others criticised the system of state arbitration and wage determination as an unhealthy nexus between labour and the state bureaucracy. Right-wing ideologues and politicians rose to blame the immigrants and ethnic minorities for all the ills of the society, and a threat to Australian culture and identity.

For a while the leading political parties for fear of electoral set-backs had resisted these ideas. However, by late 1980s, the ruling Labor Party was the first one to appropriate neo-liberalism in a significant way. By then, many of the economic problems had only aggravated. New patterns of trade and investments had not resolved the problems of trade deficit and external debt; worst, it had brought more speculation and speculative capital in the financial sector, made economy more vulnerable to external shocks, sharpened income inequalities and had worsened the employment situation. The saving grace in the situation was that the Labour government was still mediating economic changes with some minimum social guarantees and measures.

Be that as it may, the social consequences of nearly two decades of economic adjustment were fully manifest in the 1990s. With labour market deregulation and withdrawal of welfare schemes, some of the societal features and norms had begun disappearing, such as freedom from economic insecurity, secure jobs in factories, and rural communities living off agriculture, and the perception that immigration is necessary to work the economy. Now more jobs came as temporary and transient employment opportunities in high technology and service sectors. The loss of resource-based process jobs particularly affected middle-aged migrants, who were the bread earners for their families, and had long ago come into the country to settle close to the heavy industrial

factories in all major cities. The closure of manufacturing plants in small towns also placed further strain on nearby rural populations, who saw schools, hospitals, shops and banks close down as farming population declined. Younger population found itself in temporary and transient jobs and had become migratory taking up whatever and wherever they could find jobs. Deregulation had removed thus not just the institutional framework that bound individuals into relations of mutual obligations but the values that had sustained the social solidarity. Collectivist spirit had given way to unbridled individuality and its materialist pursuit, which were now aided and abetted by the state. By the beginning of the 1990s, there was no one to defend the 'Australian Settlement'.

The rise of neo-conservatives meant the demise of all forms of collectivist endeavours. In the 1990s, Paul Keating, in his own way, had attempted a fusion, assigning to the government new tasks of mediating economic restructuring and the pressing social needs. The strategy proved politically costly as social safety measures affected only either the top 10 per cent or the bottom 10 per cent of income earners. In 1996, the conservative John Howard appealed to those, whom he called 'Middle Australia', who had bore the brunt of economic adjustment without getting any benefit from it and won the elections. Once in power, he embarked on a further round of economic changes: more trade liberalisation, relaxation of the environmental safeguards, increased deregulation of the financial sector, liberalisation of labour market, higher rates of taxation on average Australian, and tough immigration laws and a denunciation of multiculturalism. Abandonment of many more public commitments, further cuts in public expenditure, sell off of more public assets and retrenchment in public service and more tax burden on the consumers ensued after the 1997 economic crisis in South East Asian countries.

Changes of political and ideological nature are part of the economic restructuring processes in the 1990s. Howard has sold neo-liberalism in a right-wing nationalist-populist fashion. In a combative nationalistic mood, he has precluded any need for Australia to acknowledge its past colonial mistakes and racial prejudices. Any guilt for the injustices done to the Aboriginal population in the past has been dismissed out of hand. He has refused to renew his predecessor's apology for past wrongs, curtailed the Aboriginal land rights; and even has shunned the use of the term multiculturalism. He has not endorsed but neither has he condemned the exclusive and insular nationalism that came to be propagated in the late 1990s by Pauline Hanson.

In short, globalisation in both its economic and cultural forms has worked upon the Australian nation-state now for about quarter of a century. Both the leading Labour and the Liberal parties bowed to the process of globalisation, with Labour attempting to mediate the change with some social safety features and adhering to the values of diversity and inclusiveness. The Coalition of Liberal and National parties under Howard has pushed globalisation in a more populist-nationalistic vein, glorifying individuality and material achievement.

Economic liberalisation has had a direct bearing on Australian population. Whatever be the other factors, economic dislocation has also contributed to slow down the increase in the population. There were 13.5 million inhabitants in the mid-1970s; by 2002, Australia had a population of about 19 million. Economic changes and dislocation of the past nearly 20 years has uprooted many. In many respects, the new technologies have increased the constraints of distance and space. Migration from the hinterland to the cities for jobs and education is now pushing the same categories to go even abroad. Relocation of economic activities has made Tasmania and South Australia stagnate while Queensland and Western Australia grew more rapidly. However, the concentration of population in the south-eastern corner of the continent has remained the dominant feature. Sydney approached 4 million by the late 1990s and Melbourne 3.5 million. Sydney and Melbourne have also been the destinations of both internal migrants and immigrants. The

overwhelmingly European composition of population in other centres and cities contrasts with the multicultural cosmopolitan character of these two cities. The urban social base of cosmopolitan cities, which are also the financial and economic centres, is multicultural and shall remain so. However, the logic of party and electoral politics allows political elites to denigrate multiculturalism.

The proliferation of new states from the disintegration of Soviet Union and break-up of many nation-states due to resurgence of internal conflicts in the aftermath of Cold War has produced vast numbers of displaced. Humanitarian crises have become commonplace, and refugee a familiar figure. So have instances of humanitarian interventions including by Australia, which only means that intervening countries must agree to receive the displaced. Australia had to do it in the case of East Timorese. Added to it is the growing number of less welcome category of economic migrants who are victims of economic dislocation and deprivation in their home countries. In the 1970s, as Australia adopted the policies of non-discriminatory immigration, it had also taken refugees from Chile and Central America. It took refugees from East Timor and the "boat people" from Vietnam. However, by 1980s, a 'compassion fatigue' had set in. Given the economic hardships faced by a large proportion of Australian population, the anti-immigration feelings were successfully exploited by vested political groups. This is how the annual immigration targets have been regularly trimmed and greater preference came to be given to those bringing in capital and professional skills. At the same time, economic restructuring demands additional human resources to work up the economy which has made successive Australian governments to look for skilled category immigrants, whatever be their source of national origin.

In the wake of acts of terrorism in US on 11 September 2001, immigration and refugee problems are being seen increasingly from the perspective of national security. For the government, the hard-line nationalism fits snugly with the borderless world of the globalisation. The 'others', whosoever they may be, are once again being demonised as posing a threat to the Australian territorial integrity and political and cultural security. Maintaining national sovereignty and protecting national borders were the reasons given for the government's hard-line policy towards the asylum seekers on board the Norwegian ship Tampa in 2001. It is not the number of asylum seekers—who represent less than 0.01 per cent of all arrivals in Australia—but the political virulence and popular fear psychosis, which is out of all proportion to the actual number of arrivals, which is noteworthy. Howard government has 'securitised' the immigration and refugee question by enacting what is called the 'Pacific Solution' that involves long period of detention and quarantine beyond and out of Australia on a couple of islands in the Pacific. Strip-searching, tough prison terms, and curbing the human rights of 'arrivals' have become a part of the 'securitisation' of immigration and refugee policies. Since majority of those arriving illegally in Australian waters since 1999 are from Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, detainees have been often conflated with 'terrorists'. As a result, detention has acquired a new military and defence rationale. The Australian participation in the US-led military intervention in Iraq, the Bali bombing of October 2002 which led to the death of many innocent Australian tourists, and rising incidents of violence involving right-wing elements and ethnic minorities, especially Australian Muslims, all portend the dangers and challenges of abandoning multiculturalism.

In conclusion, immigration, ethnicity and multicultural character of the Australian society are all closely linked; and the manners in which immigration, ethnic rights and multicultural policies are framed have important implications for Australian democracy, social cohesion and economic development.

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## 13.8 SUMMARY

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Australian society has been shaped more than any other modern country by immigration and immigrants. Immigrants have served two main purposes: meet the need for labour force; and secondly, populate the vast empty territories. Immigration policy in Australia had been discriminatory during the 'white Australia policy' when most immigrants came from Europe. It is only from the 1970s that a non-discriminatory policy has been in place. Besides permanent immigrants, Australia has also become destination of a very large number of those who come on temporary basis. These are mostly tourists, businessmen and students. There are two sets of arguments for and against immigration: one, that says Australia needs immigrants to fill the labour shortages so that living standards of Australians could be maintained and the other, that it is the immigrants who are to be blamed for the deteriorating standards of living, unemployment and poor economic productivity. Even though immigration and cultural diversity strengthens Australian economy, in periods of domestic economic down-turns, immigration becomes a convenient target for all the economic and social ills of the Australian society. Over the years, the Australian government has become more tolerant redefining multiculturalism as being for all Australians. But Multicultural programmes and policies are mostly cosmetic and superficially celebrative of the cultural diversity. They need to become substantive as Australia is a country of high immigration.

Australia has been involved in dealing with the refugees and resultant humanitarian crises. This meant that Australia had to agree to take in refugees from countries like East Timor who are victims of economic dislocation and deprivation in their home countries. Also, in the wake of acts of terrorism in US on 11 September 2001, immigration and refugee problems are being seen increasingly from the perspective of national security.

Thus immigration, ethnic rights and multicultural policies are framed have important implications for Australian democracy, social cohesion and economic development.

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## 13.9 EXERCISES

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- 1) What explains the ethnic diversity of Australia's population?
- 2) Is immigration leading to the decline of economic prosperity in Australia? Discuss.
- 3) What do you understand by a multicultural Australia? Critically discuss the multicultural policies of Australia in the 1990s.
- 4) How has Australia adjusted to globalisation in terms of social welfare and justice?

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## SUGGESTED READINGS

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