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## UNIT 29 POLITICAL THEORY IN A GLOBALISING WORLD

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### 29.1 INTRODUCTION

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The disintegration of socialist states in European Europe culminating in the break-up of the mighty Soviet Union marks the triumph of liberalism over socialism, democracy over one-party rule and *laissez faire* economies over centralized economy. The bipolar world has given way to a unipolar world. In the wake of these developments, the world is witnessing fundamental changes in the form of liberalization, privatization and globalization. The trade barriers among the states are getting blurred and a globalized market is emerging. In centralized and mixed economies, the process of disinvestment and structural adjustments is leading to the shrinking of the public sector. How will these epochal changes manifest themselves in the form of newer concerns in Political Theory is an important question that needs to be considered.

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### 29.2 HOW DOES POLITICAL THEORY EVOLVE?

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At the very outset, we must understand as to how political theory emerges in any historical phase. For example, why did Plato advocate the idea of an Ideal State and the role of the Philosopher-King? Why did he propound his Theory of Education? Why did Thomas Hobbes give his theory about the State of Nature and the Social Contract? Why did he favour the idea of an absolute sovereign? Similarly, one may ask the question as to why Marx criticized capitalism? Why did he plead for socialism and communism? Why did Gandhi condemn the Western industrial society and consumerism that it promoted?

If we carefully consider all these questions, we will find that a political thinker does not write in a vacuum. He addresses himself to the basic concerns of his times. Every political theorist begins to feel agitated about certain maladies in the society in which he lives and wants to find out remedies for these maladies. Thus, Plato's Ideal State is his response to the rotten state of Athens in which he lived. He came to the conclusion that all rulers in the Greek city states were corrupt and incompetent. Therefore, he suggested the rule of the Philosopher king who would have reason dominant in him. He gave his theory of education to ensure that the future generations of Athens would have sound mind and sound body. Thomas Hobbes was worried at the violent and law-less conditions prevailing in sixteenth century England. He also saw the irrelevance of the theory of Divine Rights of Kings. Hence, he advocated the theory of social contract and favoured the idea of an absolute sovereign who could defend people's life, liberty and property. Similarly, Karl Marx was full of anguish at the miserable conditions of the working class in nineteenth century Europe. This class was suffering intense exploitation under capitalism. Therefore, he urged this class to rise in revolt and overthrow the capitalist system. He believed that in the socialist society, this exploitation would come to an end. Likewise, Gandhi saw the de-humanizing impact of industrialization which, he thought, was also causing immense harm to physical nature. He also realized the ill-effects of greed and consumerism that materialism promoted. Therefore, he advocated an humane political order based on truth and non-violence, a social order rooted in spiritualism and communitarianism and an economic order whose cardinal principles were bread-labour and trusteeship.

The above illustrations make it clear that every political theorist addresses himself to certain key issues and problems that the society of his times is facing. In short, *political theory in every epoch of history has been the response of the political thinker to the prevailing political and social conditions*. In fact, one can go to the extent of saying that all major political theories have emerged in situations when societies were standing at the cross-roads of history and had to make hard-choices. The era of globalization is undoubtedly a moment in history when societies have chosen (or have been forced to choose) a certain course for themselves whose consequences will be far-reaching. The question that must be considered and answered is: What will be the nature of political theory that will evolve in the era of globalization? How will political theorists respond to the phenomenon of globalization? What questions and concerns will be central to them? What impact will globalization have on state, society and the individual? What sort of local, national and international order (or disorder) will emerge as a consequence of liberalization, privatization and globalization?

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### **29.3 BINARIES IN POLITICAL THEORY: LIBERALISM AND MARXISM**

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Before we spell out the nature of political theory in the era of globalization, it is necessary for us to understand the binary nature of *modern* and *contemporary* political theory out of which it will emerge. There are mainly two grand ideological designs in modern political theory: Liberalism and Marxism. The liberal political theory emphasizes democratic governance where the people can articulate their problems and choices. It stands for universal human rights. It is wedded to the promotion of common good and it holds two human values—Liberty and Equality—as primary; although liberty often gets priority over equality. Marxism, on the other hand, highlights the fact that all human societies are class-based societies consisting of the exploiters and the exploited. These two classes are constantly at war with each other and this war will consummate in a revolution leading to the final victory of the exploited class which will pave the way for the emergence of a class-less and stateless society. In short, modern political theory is concerned with universal goals

like Justice, Liberty and Equality. It attempts to identify the institutional structures of domination and tries to evolve strategies to demolish them.

It is, however, evident that these goals of liberal and Marxist theory were never realized, at least not fully. In liberal democracies, the participation of people remained only marginal and ruling power got concentrated in the hands of the political elite. This phenomenon has been aptly described as the "iron law of oligarchy". The socialist societies, on the other hand, witnessed excessive centralization of power in the hands of the communist party leadership. The exploitation of the workers not only continued, but in some cases it became more intense. The inequalities within liberal as well as socialist societies became more acute. Human rights did not reach the disadvantaged stratas of society in full measure. Thus, the grand utopian and normative vision of Liberal and Marxist theory aiming at liberty, equality and harmony remained unfulfilled. The inequalities among different countries also increased. These failures of Liberal and Marxist theory alike gave rise to the *New Right* and the *New Left* movements on the one hand and generated a sense of cynicism and nihilism, on the other.

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#### 29.4 MODERNISM AND POST-MODERNISM

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In recent years, an alternative to both these strands of modern political theory has appeared in the form of Post-Modernism. The post-modernists challenge liberalism for its *abstract* categories – categories like the universal rights of all people and emphasize the rights of *specific groups* – women, tribals, blacks and the colonial people etc. This has led to the emergence of *New Social Movements* which challenge specific forms of social domination based on gender, caste, colour and race. *Identity politics* has become the most crucial element in these movements. It also marks a shift from macro abstract political, social and economic issues to *culture*. The basic argument of identity politics is that individuals define themselves mainly as belonging to a given cultural group which perceives itself as disadvantaged and oppressed at the hands of groups which are privileged and dominant – males, upper castes, white races and the imperialist countries. The relevant binary categories in identity politics become "we" and "they". It is important to note that in practical terms, this new political theory of identity politics tantamounts to rejecting the Marxian category of "class" as a major tool of analysis. It, equally vehemently, negates liberalism's universal categories like "universal rights", "civil liberties" and "equality". Instead of the mega "class war" of Marxian variety, it emphasizes "local struggles". Instead of advocating power to the working class, it advocates empowerment of the local communities and specific cultural groups.

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#### 29.5 EPISTEMOLOGICAL SHIFT

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In epistemological terms, this new political theory of the "post-modernist" variety negates three basic methodological tenets of modern political theory: *holism/universalism*, *essentialism* and *reductionism*. It is difficult to explain the full import of these terms. Briefly, we may say that *holism* or *universalism* privileges the understanding of the *whole* rather than the understanding of the *parts* that constitute the whole. Thus, it talks in terms of macro instead of micro phenomena. *Essentialism* underscores the importance of comprehending the general essence of the phenomenon rather than the mere *appearance* of it. *Reductionism* in modern political theory refers to the tendency of reducing all analyses and explanations of a phenomenon to a *single* element or a single factor. For example, in classical Marxism all economic divisions and all social and political hierarchies are reduced to "class" and the "economic factor" is considered as the only factor that determines the course of history. Thereby, the role of "ideas" and "cultural identities" gets totally ignored or

considerably under-played in modern political theory. The post-modernist political thinking, on the other hand, not only highlights "*particularism*", but also emphasizes the relevance of *several* factors in comprehending a phenomenon. Instead of "elite" history (of Carlylian variety), it stands for "mass" history and subaltern studies. Instead of 'history from above', it is wedded to the idea of 'history from below'. Post-modernism also has its own specific emancipatory agenda. Rejecting modern political theory's thrust for a systemic change, post-modernism stands for the emancipation of specific groups. Likewise, instead of universal rights, it addresses itself to the rights of specific groups – women, gays, lesbians, tribals, aboriginals, blacks and other disadvantaged groups. In fact, one can notice similar modernist and post-modernist streaks in the process of globalization. On the one hand, its thrust is on globalization of capital and primacy of the market and on the other, it stands for localization of labour.

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## 29.6 GLOBALIZATION AND IDENTITY POLITICS

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Having discussed the Liberal and Marxist strands of modern political theory and having indicated how both of them have been challenged by post-modernism, it is now time to try to conjure up some of the contours of political theory in the era of globalization. Identity politics is emerging as one of the most central aspects of Political Theory. Two important dimensions of this question of identity politics are important. First, that identities are multiple: a woman has a gender identity, but she also belongs to a *caste*, a *religion*, a *community*, an *occupational group*, a *region* and a *linguistic group* etc. In fact, she has all these identities. What post-modernism tries to do is to privilege her gender identity over her other identities. While identity politics will remain relevant in the era of globalization, the issue as to which particular identity would become primary and which ones will become secondary will be contingent on the way globalization and market forces affect different segments of human society in different countries. Secondly, all identities are socially constituted and the way these get constituted in the era of globalization will determine the broad nature of political theory that will emerge.

There is another dimension of globalization. It will undoubtedly multiply the material desires and wants of the individual, but it will find it difficult to satisfy them fully. But even if we assume for the sake of argument that globalization will be able to satisfy all the material wants and desires of all the individuals, the question still remains whether it will be able to bring about the "good life". Here, Aristotelian emphasis on *nicomachean ethics* becomes crucial. Will globalization create good citizens; citizens who are virtuous, citizens who are moral beings. After all, it is only good citizens who would make a good state and it is only a good state which will make good citizens. As Aristotle has pointed out (in a different context) the state came into being for the sake of *life*, but continues for the sake of *good life*. This question has become extremely relevant in political theory in the era of globalization. How will globalization affect the virtues and values of *Justice, Freedom and Equality* which all human societies have cherished in all ages? Will it intensify Social Darwinism (survival of the fittest)? Will the degeneration of the environment lead to greater happiness or more miseries? These are some of the questions which will become increasingly relevant in political theory in the era of globalization.

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## 29.7 SYNTHESIS IN POLITICAL THEORY

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It is not possible to neatly state the exact nature of political theory in the era of globalization. However, if one were to rely on the logic of *dialectics* in *history*, then one can say with some degree of certainty that political theory in the era of globalization will exhibit at one level, a

synthesis of Liberalism and Marxism. At another level, it will exhibit a synthesis of modern political theory and post-modernist trends and tendencies. While the nature of political theory in the era of globalization will be contingent on the emerging *local*, national and global conditions, it will demonstrate some sort of amalgam of the *universal* and the *particular*, the *global* and the *local*, the *macro* and the *micro*, *unity* and *difference*, order and disorder and *community* and chaos. The issue of social justice might occupy the center stage in the midst of growing inequality and poverty that globalization necessarily entails. Democracy may become more participatory. The state may become weaker in some respects and stronger in other respects.

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## 29.8 WELFARE STATE vs. MINIMAL STATE

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We are aware that in the course of about last one hundred and fifty years, the earlier theory of state whose concern was only to maintain law and order (the police state) has yielded place slowly, but surely to a welfare state which has taken up wide ranging functions like health, education and well-being of the citizens. The critical question in political theory in the era of globalization is, whether or not the liberal and democratic state will continue to follow public policies aimed at the welfare of those who are suffering social and economic deprivation.

The present day welfare state has become what may be called a *maximal* state. It seems that in the wake of liberalization, privatization and globalization, some of the welfare functions of the modern welfare state may shrink. While the future state will continue to perform regulatory functions, its *distributive* functions, are likely to become less and less. In fact, the state might become (to use Robert Nozick's term) a *minimal state*. The philosophy of utilitarianism with its focus on the greatest happiness of the greatest number, which has been the linch-pin of the modern welfare state will no more remain the guiding principle of the future state. Given the individualist (Lockean) majoritarian underpinning of liberal democracy, the state will have to buy legitimacy for itself at periodic elections and, therefore, it will find it very difficult to altogether give up the welfare functions. Thus, we can say that political theory in the era of globalization will reflect the *structural ambivalence of modern state* and the tensions and paradoxes, pulls and pushes inherent in politics as it operates under the sway of market forces.

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## 29.9 THE BLURRING OF STATE SOVEREIGNTY

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We know that one of the key elements of state, as it is understood in Political Theory, is sovereignty which implies that the state is internally *supreme* and *externally independent*. The state in the era of liberalisation will be one in which sovereignty will no more remain as sacrosanct as earlier. The world will increasingly become a global village and a global market. In this scenario, the external aspect of state sovereignty will get compromised at best and will become a myth at worst. In several respects, the state will not remain externally independent. It will have to tailor its behaviour according to the norms decided globally for all the states either by world organizations like the IMF, the World Bank or the United Nations or by the various global coalitions and regional groups – *a la* European Union. The way UN weapon inspectors have been sent to carry out inspection in Iraq to make sure that it does not possess any weapons of mass destruction is a case in point. The way global peace-keeping forces are controlling the belligerence of states in different parts of the world or the way some ramshackle global coalitions are trying to tame the behaviour of certain states illustrates the diminishing external sovereignty of the state.

Another dimension of sovereignty relates to the internal supremacy of the state over all individuals and groups. This Austinian theory of sovereignty, which is a monist theory has already come under attack at the hands of pluralists. In the era of globalization, this attack will increasingly manifest in the form of denial to the national majority, the claim to be the sole legitimate expression of sovereignty of the people. The internal sovereignty of the modern state will be replaced by more diffuse sovereign power of the state, on the one hand and of its constituent entities on the other, in the form of rights of different social groups and the rights of the federating units.

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## 29.10 ROLE OF WTO, MULTI-NATIONALS AND NGOS

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The role of the state, its internal supremacy and its monopoly of power to take decisions on political, economic and social issues is being jeopardized by the ever expanding role of the multinationals. The structural adjustment that states all over the world are being compelled to make under the aegis of the WTO regime and the World Bank has led to a situation where no state can claim to be internally supreme today as it was earlier. Political Theory in the era of globalization, will have to address itself to these shifts. The modern state is also being compelled increasingly to follow the dictates of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). This is, particularly, so in matters relating to collective security, human security and human rights. In addition to the environmental issues, the questions of ecological balance and sustainable development have become extremely relevant. Even the use of violence by the modern state against its own citizens is becoming increasingly open to outside and inside scrutiny by agencies like the *Amnesty International*, *Asia Watch*, UN Commission on Human Rights and People's Union for Civil Liberties. Right to Information and Right to Development will acquire the status of fundamental rights.

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## 29.11 STATE VS. CIVIL SOCIETY

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Civil society is a civil association. Here, society or community is viewed as a service organization which enjoys autonomy, both from the polity and the economy. In its extreme form, the theory of civil society is becoming a non-state or even an anti-state variety of liberalism. The role of civil society is becoming important in the wake of participatory democratic theory. Some groups in the civil society are demanding increasing public access to justice and greater transparency in decisions taken by the various organs of government. Here, the issues of the rule of law and good governance entailing citizens' right to information also become important. All this has brought the community and civil society to the center stage displacing the state in some conventional spheres of its activity. Political Theory in the era of globalization will have to address itself to the phenomenon of autonomous market, shrinking state and assertive civil society, Increasing Public Interest Litigation (PIL) has driven various organs of government to the wall in many respects. For example, *Narmada Bachao Andolan* being spearheaded by Medha Patkar and Arundhati Roy, *Chipko Movement* of Sunder Lal Bahuguna, the People's Union for Civil Liberties, Lok Satta, Association for Democratic Reform and Transparency International are all directed at keeping the various organs of government in reasonable limits. NGOs are emerging as a countervailing power vis-à-vis the state. The seriousness of the problem of global warming, green house gases, ozone hole are today matters of concern of all governments – democratic and authoritarian. The indiscriminate deforestation and increasing noise and air pollution has brought the basic questions of relation between man and nature, the limits to industrialization and economic growth to the fore. Political theory cannot avoid addressing itself adequately to all these questions. No state, today, can ignore or underplay the question of gender justice, the demands for empowerment of women, the rights of the child and the unborn and the issues of positive discrimination.

Political theory in the era of globalization will have to address itself to the question: how political institutions and structures condition and get conditioned by social power?

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### 29.12 ETHNIC CLEAVAGES

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In recent years, particularly after the disintegration of the world socialist bloc, the world has witnessed a series of ethnic and religious conflicts. There has been an upsurge in social strife, fundamentalism and intolerance. In the era of globalization, political theory will have to address itself to this phenomenon. The class conflict which Marx had so ably highlighted is on the back burner. It has given way to ethnic conflicts bordering on genocide in the developing world and racial hatred and hate speech in the developed world. In the unipolar world, there is an attempt by the United States which is the sole super power today to impose western culture and values on the rest of the world. Within nations, the minorities are getting marginalized. In this scenario, new empirical images of democracy highlighting diversities are likely to emerge in political theory. In several societies secularism as a value and as an ideal is being discounted. There is spurt in communalization, criminalization and lumpenization of democratic processes and practices. The moral residue in politics is receding to a diminishing point. Even the image of the individual which was characterized by Aristotle as political and social animal is giving way to the individual as a consumer, as an economic animal. In the midst of this perspective of possessive individualism, political theory cannot afford to overlook the expanded notion of freedom where freedom is taken to imply absence of all forms of domination and simultaneous increase in opportunities for self-realization. In other words, the focus in political theory will be on maximizing individual's counter-extractive and developmental powers.

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### 29.13 NEW DIMENSIONS IN THE THEORY OF FEDERALISM

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The prevailing theories of cooperative and competitive federalism are likely to see new dimensions which will lead to newer models of federalism. Federalism is an institutional arrangement as a constitutionally established power balance between *self-rule* and *shared rule*. The crucial question is how will globalization affect the theory of federalism? Will globalization strengthen or weaken federalism? What will be the new dimensions in the theory of federalism? How will the globalization of markets affect the federal states? In multi-cultural and multi-national polities, there are demands for the recognition and legitimization of internal diversities. Regional and sub-regional identities are getting sharply reflected in the theory of federalism. It has already given rise to *ethnic federalism*. In other words, the nation-state federalism has to cope today with multi-ethnic challenges. With the pluralist societies being viewed as polities of identities, there will be a concomitant decline of the nation-state. The *ethno-centric concept* of nation in political theory is gaining currency at the expense of the political concept of nation.

The nineteenth century constitutionalism has to cope with the challenge of globalization. Globalization will affect the conventional notion of federalism in the light of newer relations between federal states and their federating units with the WTO and other global institutions like the World Bank. Lidija Basta Fleiner, a renowned Swiss scholar of federalism, has aptly termed it as "*democratic control of federalized power and the federalized control of democracy*". As a consequence of globalization political culture will reflect greater *decentralized loyalty* on one hand, and greater *supra-state loyalty* on the other; thus, the crucial issue before the theory of federalism will be to build a federal contractual equilibrium within a majoritarian democratic setting and to bring different groups together by transcending particularistic loyalties. The structural tensions which globalization

will generate will impinge on majoritarian democracy and anti-majoritarian federalism. Libertarian democracy (of Robert Nozickian type) will not itself be able to cope with the politics of group differences in the process of nation-building. It will, therefore, be structurally incapable of meeting the challenge of multi-culturalism on the centrality of diversities and collective rights.

In the established liberal democracies, there will be growth of judicial power in the wake of globalization and this, in turn, will trigger greater concern about judicial independence. The judiciary will get more directly inter-meshed with democratic politics. This judicial transformation will have two major dimensions: strengthening the power of judicial review and adoption of political pluralism in the appointment process of judges. There is another implication of globalization for the theory of federal democratic states. Liberal welfare state is wedded to the notion of equal representation of all individuals, which is a procedural commitment to ineliminable differences. Multi-culturalism based on diversities and collective rights of different communities is likely to be anti-thetical to globalization which will invariably intensify inequalities among and within states. Hence, the mere constitutional guarantee of equal rights alone will not be enough to ensure equality, unless it is accompanied by right to be equal irrespective of differences. This question will become increasingly crucial.

In fact, it may boil down to reconciling *equality, liberty and fraternity* as cardinal principles of the modern state with an alternative emerging paradigm which emphasizes *security, diversity and solidarity*. In short, the 19th century liberalism will have to model itself to be in tune with multi-culturalism. As Will Kymlicka argues, the fundamental challenges which the theory of liberal state will face in the wake of globalization is to identify some new sources of unity in a democratic multi-cultural state.

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## 29.14 SUMMARY

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In the foregoing part of this unit, we have highlighted five main points in an attempt to spell out the contours of political theory in the era of globalization.

First, that both Liberalism and Marxism have lost their pre-eminence as explanatory ideologies. The interface of state, society and market is evolving in a way where there is hegemony of the market. The challenge of post-modernism has questioned some of the basic tenets of modern political theory like "the meta narrative" and broad categories like "class". Given this scenario, it seems that political theory in the era of globalization is going to be some sort of a synthesis of Liberalism, Marxism and Post-Modernism.

Secondly, in the wake of globalization, the whole notion of state sovereignty is getting compromised. The external aspect of state sovereignty is being hampered due to the increasing role of IMF, World Bank and the multi-nationals. The internal aspect of state sovereignty is also under threat due to the increasing role of non-governmental organizations, rising protest movements and increasing consciousness of masses, demands for greater transparency in government functioning and the right of information.

Thirdly, the emergence of identity politics is attracting greater and greater attention of political theorists. The phenomenon of globalization and the rise of identity politics will lead to individual's decentralized loyalty. On the one hand, identity politics will lead sub-state loyalty and on the other hand, globalization will lead to individuals' greater supra-state loyalty. As a consequence of this twin phenomenon, the loyalty to the nation state will get compromised.



Fourthly, in the era of globalization, political theory will have to address itself to the phenomenon of growing ethnic conflicts, rising fundamentalism, increasing intolerance and dominance of majorities leading to the marginalisation of minorities.

Finally, the traditional notion of federalism as a mix of *self-rule and shared-rule* will have to be seen in a new light in the wake of globalization. The notion of 'ethnic federalism' will become central in political theory due to the challenge of multi-culturalism. In fact, due to these emerging challenges of multi-culturalism to the liberal state, it will have to look for some new sources of unity and new bases for buying legitimacy. Political Theory has today to address itself to these developments.

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### **29.15 EXERCISES**

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- 1) What is Identity Politics?
- 2) What will be the impact of globalization on state sovereignty?
- 3) How will globalization affect the prevalent conceptions of federalism?
- 4) Identify the major contours of Political Theory in the era of globalization.