

UNIT 4 POLITICAL TRADITIONS AND POLITICAL CULTURE

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4.1 INTRODUCTION

One of the leading Latin Americanists of the 1950s had once described Latin America as a ‘living museum’. It is said that the more Latin America changes, the more it remains the same. Old ideas and institutions do not disappear, while new ones are grafted on to the old ones to give Latin American politics a complexity and a flavour of its own. No wonder, political scientists find Latin America ‘a graveyard of theories’. Theories of modernisation and various Marxian perspectives all have provided some insightful understanding of the political structures and processes of Latin America but with the admission that the reality is too complex to be summed up from any one single theoretical perspective.

4.2 POLITICAL TRADITIONS

One needs, therefore, to approach the question of Latin American political traditions with a certain amount of dispassion.

4.2.1 Centralism and *Personalismo*

Values of personal trust, friendship (*amistad*), blood-relationship, god-parenthood (*compadrazgo*) are distinct characteristics of Latin American societies. These and other related values have had a deep imprint on the political processes of these countries. These are cultural values based on social structures that deeply influence and shape the political culture and commercial transactions in these countries.

Brazil has the unique social institution of *panelinhas*, which are actually informal groups composed of varieties of persons who are all linked together by personal ties of family, kinship, and friendship. Each *panelinhas* may have persons with diverse professional background such as law, engineering,

medicine, etc. Members of each group prefer to do business with each other rather than with outsiders, knowing they have the advantage of personal confidence and trust. In Mexico, personal relationships play an important role in getting employment, working out business deals, or when pursuing a political career. There is the unique political structure of *camarilla*, a hierarchical interlocking unit of personal relationship headed by a politician. When the leader of the *camarilla* goes up the ladder of political power, so does everyone in the *camarilla*. The political dynamics lead to the formation of new *camarillas*, and over years and generations, interpersonal bonds of *confianza*, *compadrazgo*, childhood friendships and blood relationship continue to provide a remarkable consistency, a kind of confidentiality to the political system. For 75 years, between 1924 and 2000, every Mexican president has chosen his successor for reasons that in the final analysis were of personal bonds and trust, childhood friendship, or attending the same school.

4.2.2 *Patrimonialismo*

In the Iberian philosophical and political traditions, society is viewed as a hierarchical, living organism whose ultimate goal is the pursuit of 'common good'. Such a view can be contrasted with the Anglo-Saxon view of a contractual society where individuals and groups are engaged in pursuing their own rational interests. A social and political legacy of the Iberian rule has come in the form of *patrimonialismo*. Patrimonialism involves a relationship between the unequal and hierarchically placed patron and clients. The two differ in status, resources and power, with the patron enjoying all of them and the client bereft of them. The patron bestows upon his client various favours, ranging from getting him/her a job to patronising the client's family functions. In return, the client expressed his gratitude through personal loyalty and obedience. A kind of a charisma or hallow surrounds the patron, and his clientelistic followers would have nearly blind faith in the patron's ability to protect them and reward and punish them. Patrimonial traditions had facilitated the rise of *caudillos* in the 19th Century. The often charismatic and certainly the machoistic 'man on the horseback' had risen to political prominence on the basis of a dense networking of personal and blood ties, and trade-offs with other powerful landowners, other regional *caudillos*, and other interests to provide political stability. *Caudillismo* militated against the institutionalisation of the political system especially the peaceful and orderly political succession. *Caudillos* were both the cause and consequence of the endemic instability and violence characteristic of the political instability in the 19th Century.

Nineteenth Century *caudillos* were embryonic of the 20th Century military men. Leading large personal armed followings, *caudillos* were independent political actors; however, some time, they were closely allied with or themselves were members of the dominant landed oligarchy.

Clientelism continues to be a firmly entrenched pattern of social relations that deeply influences the political process. The exchange of dissimilar things in the patron-client relationship reinforces the hierarchical social relationship; besides it endows the politics, its unchanging character of elitism, fealty, and domination-subordination. Clientelistic relationships were the bases of *caudillista* rule in the 19th Century; in the 20th Century, they infused the party systems, labour unions and all other sundry political institutions and movements. Since clientelism reinforces vertical ties, it has also checked the horizontal bonds of class and ethnicity. All political parties, liberal, social-democratic, even communist parties and unions have not been immune to the working of clientelism. Far from declining with industrialisation and urbanisation, clientelism has only flourished. It is also practiced in the industry and business. Clientelism is a strategy used by

the capitalists and the workers, politicians and labour leaders alike to adapt to a situation where resources are limited and mal-distributed. Clientelism ensures limited mobility for most, limited popular mobilisation and participation, and little popular pressures on those wielding the state power; and thus endows the political system with stability and a constancy to the ways of 'doing politics'.

No discussion of personalism and patrimonialism can be complete without an understanding of the important ritual of pseudo-kinship called *compadrazgo*. To imbue personal relationships with permanence and an obligatory character, 'godparenthood' (*compadrazgo*) plays a significant role in the social and political relationships. Church has sanctified *compadrazgo*; on at least four ritual occasions of baptism, confirmation, first communion, and marriage, parents have the opportunity to have someone else act, and be forever, the 'godfather' (*compadre*) or 'godmother' (*compadre*) of a child. Often the *compadre* is the local 'influential'; he could be the landowner, merchant, labour union 'boss', political leader or someone else who is a prominent person. *Compadrazgo* spans large social networks. At the village level, this pattern provides stability and cohesion; in urban setting, it has encouraged 'bossism' in the labour unions and paternalism in political parties. In politics, it plays an important role in the political career and offers patrons extensive manipulative opportunities and bases of power and influence.

Populist, especially charismatic leaders like Juan Domingo Peron of Argentina and Lazaro Cardenas of Mexico were modern-day patrons. Cuba's Fidel Castro may also be viewed in the mould of a traditional patron rather than the premier of a socialist revolutionary Cuba. These are the traditions of patrimonialism that have historically endowed Latin American presidencies with excessive and arbitrary powers. Constitutions have recognised the arbitrary powers and traditions have legitimated them. Even contemporary democracies are president-centred; and one of the challenges facing these democracies is how to balance the powers of the presidents with those of the legislatures.

4.2.3 *Presidencialismo*

In *presidencialismo*, all goods and services, rewards and punishment, rules and regulations emanate from the presidency. More so in the 20th Century, as the role of the state expanded in areas of economic development and distribution, and political participation and control, the office of the president became more closely identified, even synonymous with the state. In the period of the state-centric model of development, state emerged as the chief patron dispensing goods and services to the general populace. No wonder, the preponderant role of a centralised state where powers are concentrated in the presidency has been the hallmark of Latin American politics since the times of Independence.

Related to the concentration of powers in the office of the president is the tradition of centralism. Iberian rule in Latin America was highly centralised with viceroys governing on behalf of the crown. This had given birth to a system of bureaucracy that was deeply hierarchical and bound by laws. Since then, the political systems have been highly centralised and legalistic. Political and economic developments in the post-Independence period such as the rise of *caudillos* in the 19th Century and the state-led strategy of economic development had further encouraged the process of centralisation. It is only now under democracies that constitutional and political efforts are being made towards decentralisation; and many Latin American countries, for the first time,

are experiencing the true meaning of federalism.

4.3 ELEMENTS OF POLITICAL CULTURE

Latin American societies are racially and culturally mixed societies; and the delineation of boundaries on the basis of race or ethnicity is very difficult. These are mixed, but not homogenous societies. Social structures are rigid along the lines of class, ethnicity and colour, with all three of them intersecting in some complex ways. The population has originated from three racial stocks—the indigenous people, the Europeans who are the descendants of the *conquistadores* (the conquerors of the continent) and the immigrants, and the African Negroes who were brought as slaves to work on the plantations.

Latin America, however, should not be approached in terms of its racial categories. It is more useful to talk in terms of ethnicity since it refers to both culture and race. The numbers of the Indian population in Mexico are, for example, assessed on the basis of language. If someone speaks only an indigenous language, he/she is regarded as an Indian. However, if the same person also speaks Spanish, wears shoes instead of going bare-foot, and eats bread instead of tortillas, he is no more an Indian. Miscegenation has taken to an extent that it is impossible to talk of distinct racial groups on biological basis. This is not to deny the important role ethnicity, expressed in racial terms, plays in social and political life.

The role of ethnicity varies according to the geographical regions. One can identify three distinct cultural regions. Scholars have sometimes used the expressions Indo-America, Afro-America and Ibero-America to very broadly identify these cultural areas and they can be subdivided according to the social and economic characteristics and institutions. Ibero-America consists of Argentina, Chile, Uruguay and Costa Rica, where European culture predominates almost to the exclusion of others. One may perhaps also include southern Brazil in this category. The Indian population in the southern cone countries is very small; it was exterminated not very long ago. On the southern tip of Chile, there is a small population of *Mapuche* Indians who, under the impact of modernisation, are leaving their communities to become domestic servants and casual labour in the urban and the rural areas. The influx of European immigrants since the latter decades of the 19th Century also drove away the descendants of African slaves long ago. The massive influx of European immigrants has given these countries a predominantly European culture.

Indo-America refers to Mexico, the Central American countries of Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua, the Andean countries of Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru, and from the South American mainland Paraguay, Panama, and most of Colombia and Venezuela. Central and southern Mexico were the seat of the Aztec and Maya civilisations while the Inca civilisation had flourished at Cuzco in Peru. Much of the social and technological achievements of these civilisations were destroyed by the conquest; and Indians exterminated through wars, diseases and overwork. Still many survived by withdrawing to the peripheral areas such as the slopes of the Andes or in the interiors of Mexico and Guatemala. Here, they had reconstituted their communities with their traditional customs and institutions interacting with the Spaniards only when necessary like paying taxes to the colonial authorities or tithes to the church. These communities had faced in the 19th Century new threats of racial extermination and destruction of their collective farms under the guise of Liberalism and capitalist modernisation. It was in the 20th Century, with the outbreak of nationalism, that a pride in the Indian past was felt and attempts were made to revive and preserve

the Indian heritage.

In the Afro-America, all three racial stocks are present. The indigenous population in this region, which refers to most of Brazil, and lowland parts of Venezuela and Colombia as well as Cuba, Haiti and Dominican Republic were very few in number and had a much simpler social and economic structure than the Aztecs or the Incas. In this category, one should also include the English-speaking countries of Guyana, Jamaica and Trinidad & Tobago and other islands where slaves were brought to work on the sugar plantations.

The destruction of the Indians had necessitated the import of slaves from West Africa when plantations emerged. Slaves were the backbone of plantation economy and after the abolition of slavery, the slave or the African culture has become a blend of traditional African customs with those emanating from the slavery to become an integral part of the Brazilian culture. The Iberian culture is predominant but one can see the contribution of the Negroes in sports, music especially the samba, the carnival, spirit-procession cults such as the *mucumba* and the *umbanda*, and in food.

Let us see each one of the three cultural zones in some details.

4.3.1 Indigenous Identity and Rights

Indians in Mexico and Guatemala and Peru had resisted the Spanish conquest and continued to do so for the next three hundred years. Despite their greatly diminished numbers, they were able to organise themselves in villages along the lines imposed by the Spanish administration. Indians were the subjects of the crown. Through the *encomienda* system, each village was granted a legal charter and communal lands, which was the pre-Columbian system of landholding among the Indians. The mixing of the Indian and the Spanish blood gave birth to the *mestizo* population. Throughout the colonial rule, there developed in Mexico, Central America and the Andean region a situation of isolated, exclusively Indian communities, *mestizo* population, and small white aristocratic groups.

In the 19th Century, attempts were made to forcibly integrate the Indians. Under the guise of ideological liberalism, private property in land was introduced in place of the communal farms with a view to create a class of yeomen capitalist farmers. Indian uprisings took place but were brutally put down. More Indian lands gravitated towards the large landholdings called *haciendas*; and more Indians ended up in becoming peons for the *hacendados*. In Mexico, there prevailed the system of indebted hereditary peonage. Rodolfo Stavenhagen has described this process, as one of 'internal colonialism'. Many Indians had lost their lands and became bonded peons on *haciendas*; others were compelled to work in the new monetary economy and faced new political domination; still others were forced to work for strangers who, being *mestizos*, were ethnically different; many just withdrew further from the society. The *hacienda*, which came to dominate the lives of so many Indians, was not just an economic unit but also a social system and a political institution. It was a measure of social and cultural domination, economic inequality and political control. Stavenhagen has demonstrated how in contemporary times, as contact between Indians and *mestizos* grows, there is a shift from a situation of 'internal colonialism' to one of class relationships. 'Internal colonial' relationships are characterised by superordination-subordination in terms of power, race and culture. For a while, there is an overlap of colonial and class relationships, when Indians participate in the market place but demonstrate their vulnerability by

maintaining Indian language and custom. As they adopt Spanish language and culture, they may be less vulnerable in cultural terms but their exploitation through class relationships increases. It is well known that Indians are paid less than others; or Indian peasants end up selling their produce to middlemen at reduced rates.

One may even describe this as a process of acculturation of the Indians. But Stavenhagen would argue that acculturation is a process of becoming marginalised and proletarianised in very poor conditions. Others have looked at it as the termination of Indian ethnicity. Once an Indian learns Spanish, migrates to the city and becomes a wage labour, this may integrate him into the class structure but at the lowest level, with the added risk of his losing his ethnic identity. One simply needs to look into the official census figures to see the declining percentage of the Indians in the national population. A measure of the superordination of the *mestizo* culture is the fact that certain Indian communities are simply not recognised as Indians. In Mexico, many *indigenistas* (pro-indigenous) felt the Indian ethnicity to be an impediment in the process of modernisation. They considered integration in the form of a move from Indian to *mestizo* as benevolent, constituting as the upward social mobility of the indigenous population. Acculturation, however, does not mean the end of racial categorisation or prejudices against the Indians. Often the word 'Indian' is used to denote certain isolated communities or is used as a pejorative expression.

Indian communities survive mostly on subsistence economy producing traditional Indian crops of maize, squash and beans in Mexico and Central America and potatoes and quinoa in the Andes. Twentieth Century states were nation states who proclaimed the goals of nation-building which meant national integration. For Indians, it meant some state paternalism in the form of museums and programmes to preserve the indigenous cultures, occasional fetes and celebrations of Indian culture, some promotion of Indian languages through schools and radio broadcasts, some state patronage in the form of land grants, agricultural subsidies and other support mechanism for the economic well-being of the Indians. These policies were more symbolic and less substantive. Anyway, in the end, they all intended to facilitate the gradual integration of the indigenous with the dominant *mestizo* national culture. Whenever—and these were quite often—state's paternalistic policies would fail, the blame would be attributed to the Indian culture and habits of laziness, lack of enterprise, etc. In the past the Indian question was often equated with the system of landholding; and it was argued that land distribution and creation of *ejidos* (communal farms) will solve the problem of both their integration and preservation of their culture. This was the predominant view in the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution, wherein the Indians had played an active revolutionary role demanding the return of their seized lands. Extensive land reform took especially in the 1930s, education was extended and steps taken to preserve the Indian languages, and Indian was idolised. Many of the world famous murals painted by revolutionary artists such as Diego Rivera depicted Indians in a revered pose. Such attempts, however, had limitations, and often led to the proletarianisation of the Indian and deprivation of his ethnic identity. The process of economic liberalisation has brought new hardships for the indigenous in the form of the withdrawal of state patronage, extension of market principles to the Indian communities, and alienation of Indian lands.

The contradictions of changing the indigenous economic system and maintaining the indigenous culture have never been resolved. As against the paternalistic attitude of the state and solutions from above, Indians have often taken independent initiative of their own. There is a growing Indian consciousness of their collective rights and mobilisation against policies of economic

liberalisation and globalisation. Indians rose up in revolt in 1994 against the introduction of NAFTA in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas demanding recognition of their collective rights and that they also need to shape and direct the process of economic liberalisation. It has been documented that if properly managed, Indians can become efficient producers and compete well in the market economy. In Mexico, many Indian *ejidos*, producing cash crops have survived the withdrawal of state support in the wake of economic liberalisation process. In Bolivia, Indians have sustained mass mobilisation against selling national patrimony to the multinational corporations in the name of globalisation. Besides, powerful Indian federations in Bolivia and Ecuador have both defended the political rights of the Indians for decades. In Brazil, the movement of the 'landless' comprising of the indigenous and other indigenous movements that are linked to the preservation of environmental assets have created new debates about the so-called Indian question. Several constitutions today recognise the rights of the Indians and ensure the Indian representation in the national legislatures. The post-modernist thoughts give a new eminence to the Indian culture and rights. World-wide consciousness and mobilisation by and on behalf of the indigenous populations is leading to new efforts to appreciate and recognise the diverse cultures and traditions of the indigenous in Latin America.

4.3.2 Mestizo Mobility

Much of the history since Independence is the history of *mestizo* political and social mobility. Philosophers such as Octavio Paz and Samuel Ramos have tried to analyse the phenomenon of *mestizaje* in countries like Mexico. In his masterly work, "Profile of Man and Culture", Ramos has tried to explain the *mestizo* view of society as a continuous combat and his own deep sense of inferiority. The conquest and the gradual emergence of the *mestizo* had created the cultural middle of the Mexican population. During colonial rule, *mestizo* was the disinherited, the wretched of the earth, who was despised alike by the defeated and subordinated Indians as well as by the victorious and dominant Spanish. He neither worked on the lands like the Indians nor owned lands like the white creoles. Lacking values of his own and suffering from a fundamental sense of personal worthlessness, Indians were social 'hangers on'—cattle hustlers, cowboys, peddlers and petty merchants, and all the time highly mobile—both physically and culturally. Stranded culturally in a 'no man's land', he despised the Indians and had often tried to imitate the Spanish, the French and even the North Americans.

The outbreak of movements for independence had brought the *mestizo* into his own. Once under arms, *mestizo* never looked back and made his own imprint in the form of militarism and *caudillaje*. Taking advantage of the weaknesses and struggles within the *creole* aristocracy, *mestizos* successfully set themselves as the local strongmen, and had begun entering the national politics as generals who were commanding their own personal armed followings, governors, and alongside the *creole* landowners as the new *hacendados*. *Mestizos* did not look forward to the goals of democracy and development or backward in the form of reviving the Indian culture but always upward. They understood the values of personal power and wealth, and became the dominant conservative political force by appropriating and manipulating the levers of state power in Mexico and other countries.

It was the overwhelming number of *mestizos* who were left outside and behind the system who took up the cause of revolution and social change in the 20th Century. They expressed the ideas of national identity in terms of the 'mixed' national culture, nationalism, and revolution. They

formulated new cultural and political ideas to redeem their nations and founded new political parties and unions to realise the goals of national greatness. In short, *mestizaje* became the dominant discourse in the 20th Century infusing ideas of nationalism and the need to liberate the continent from the yoke of foreign domination and dependency. It also revived the ideas of continental unity and a common continental identity as distinct from North America and the Europe. In a cultural sense, the Mexican revolution of 1910 was a *mestizo* revolution that helped *mestizaje* finally emerge as the national identity of Mexico. Jose Vasconcelos even described the *mestizo* as the 'cosmic race' destined to attain the greatness for the Latin American continent. In countries with large Indian population, it ignited a pride in the Indian heritage of the continent and a new valuation of being Indian. This was the beginning of the *indigenismo* (nativism).

4.3.3 Slavery and the Plantation Economy

Brazil has seen extensive mixing of three distinct racial stocks and therefore, racial boundaries cannot be defined there. Nevertheless, there is a clear correlation between skin colour and racial features on the one hand, and class structure on the other. This ethnic composition derives from the social organisation of the plantation system and the social changes that followed the abolition of slavery. Plantation economy—sugar in the north and coffee in the south—had played a decisive role in the early economic development of Brazil. The *fazenda*, as the plantation was called, was not just an economic system. It was a massive social and political structure run by the *fazendero*, who was literally the master of all that he surveyed. Gilberto Freyre, the noted Brazilian sociologist, has said that the *fazenda* was a total way of life and at its focus was the patriarchal family which lived in the big house at the heart of the *fazenda*. *Fazenda* was at one and the same time a system of production; a system of labour (slavery); a system of transport (the ox-cart, the horse), a system of religion (family Catholicism with a chaplain subordinate to the master of the house); a system of sexual and family life (patriarchal); a system of bodily and household hygiene; and a system of politics (nepotism and patronage). The white landowner was the master, the head of the system; and slaves on the *fazenda* were his absolute subjects.

The relation between the white and the coloured races in Brazil was shaped by two factors: the system of economic production, which was monoculture and *latifundia*; and the scarcity of white women among the conquerors and explorers. *Latifundia* was a system of very large landholdings producing generally a single crop. All over Latin America, large lands were held not simply for producing cash crops but to exercise social and political domination with land lying fallow. The counter part of *latifundia* was *minifundia* (small, subsistence plots) tilled by the Indian peasants, or those who worked on the *latifundia*. The *fazenda* economy, especially sugar raising, required a large labour force and therefore the great demand of slaves. The shortage of white women had led to the miscegenation of the white male and coloured female. An important aspect of the life on *fazenda* was that the coloured mistress of *fazendero* and their *mulatto* children also lived in the patriarch's house. The status of these women varied, some became domestics, others concubines and a very small number lawful wives. Many illegitimate *mulatto* sons inherited portions of the estate, a small number becoming legitimised first. Another notable aspect of the slavery was that it was a custom to baptise the slaves; and once a member of the Catholic community, they came under the guidance of the clergy who saw them all as members of God's family on earth; and some times defended them against harsh treatment.

In these above-mentioned respects, slavery in Brazil and the Spanish America in general had a

different twist from the slavery as practiced in the US. This has led some to even argue that slavery was a gentler institution in the southern hemisphere. The *mulatto* off springs of the patriarch had a different lifestyle than that of a slave. Besides, the extent and ease of manumission also had some salutary effect on slavery. Out of piety and kindness and on religious and family festivals, it was common to manumit some of the slaves; slaves could also purchase their freedom or someone else could buy them out of slavery. A slave was free to marry a non-slave; and by law their children were to be free. A slave, appointed guardian of a free man's children, became free. Syndicates of slaves were formed to help buy each other out; and by the 19th Century, manumission was widespread. The noted historian, Frank Tannenbaum has written that both law and custom had made possible various forms of obtaining manumission. In 1888, when slavery was abolished in Brazil, it is estimated that there were three times as many Negro freemen as Negro slaves; moreover, abolition was achieved without violence or civil war.

This is not to suggest that slavery was any less repugnant or any less exploitative and dehumanising in Latin America. No gainsaying, slave life on *fazenda* was short and brutish. But it certainly was not lonely. Slave hostility and resistance to the *fazenda* system was universal. Runaway slaves would form their community in inaccessible areas. There were very serious and widespread insurrections, such as the slave revolts in Bahia in 1830s and in the coffee regions in the 1840s. Slavery was abolished not because of any philanthropic reason, but because modernisation of agriculture towards the end of the 19th Century had found the system of free labour more profitable.

Abolition brought in several waves a very large number of white immigrants who took advantage of a rapidly modernising economy. Negroes were unaccustomed to participation in the competitive market economy. Whites were better skilled and were also preferred in jobs that required skills and craftsmanship. Negroes were pushed to the social and economic periphery of the society. The successes in the industrialisation drives after the 1940s brought more opportunities for lower-end labouring jobs for the Negroes and the *mulattos*. Most of them are part of the industrial and agricultural work force in Brazil and elsewhere too. However better skilled and better paid jobs have remained with the whites—the descendants of the immigrants.

Post-abolition, a more notable development in the case of Brazil and other countries too is the extent of miscegenation and the growth of mixed populations, which makes any racial typing impossible. Besides, gradation and segregation on the basis of white or Negro blood does not work. This is not to suggest the absence of social distancing and discrimination; it exists, more so because skin colour and facial features denote other forms of differentiation. What has resulted is a 'colour class system', where colour has been integrated into the general social order, as one of the various criteria which identify people in a status system. To elaborate the point here, along with colour, other variables such as income, occupation, education, family background and finally physical appearance determine a person's social status. The majority of Negroes and *mulattos*, because of their experience of slavery and resulting integration in the labour force—formal and informal—has been unable to achieve any significant social mobility. Thus, socio-economic factors and discrimination combine to keep darker skinned people in the lower ranks of the society. Nevertheless, social mobility is possible for, as the Brazilians say, 'money whitens the skin'. The renowned footballers from Pele to Ronaldo, for instance, are accepted as part of the upper white crust of Brazilian society. Besides, the early entry into the labour sector has allowed many coloured to become over next generations part of the expanding middle class of Brazil. Such social and economic mobility, however, has not meant the end of discrimination against the

Negroes and the *mulattos*. This is notwithstanding the public ideology of racial equality that the constitution and the laws proclaim. Black consciousness movements have been outspoken against the unequal terms of Negro participation in the economy and the polity. Brazil's 'colour class' system, as stated above, includes not colour and facial features alone, but factors of education, income and occupation too. The system thus lends better social and economic mobility and is clearly less racial than say the racism and racial discrimination in the US. Probably, it is for this very reason, Brazil did not have the kind of Black Power movement that had emerged in the US and the Caribbean. It is because coloured have greater access to life chances detracts from any growing consciousness on the basis of race or colour. Most Negro protest groups that have appeared in Brazil have proved short lived; nor have political parties and electoral games raised the issue of race and colour in a sustained manner. The same thing can be stated for Cuba prior to the 1959 revolution. Cuba had the similar 'colour class' system. Notwithstanding nearly half a century of socialist ideology and practice, colour discrimination exists in Cuba too. The revolution has no doubt clearly abolished excesses in this area and eliminated its overt manifestation, but the Cuban government had been more concerned with the general redistribution of goods and services than singling out colour for particular attention. As a result, racial discriminatory attitude remained intact and is being discovered now by the socialist regime.

In sum, ethnicity plays a crucial role in determining the life chances in Brazil and the Spanish America; and race does not operate in such a way as to demarcate distinct groups. Ethnic labelling is used to demarcate distinct boundaries, in some cases as a form of exclusion but in others in order to minimise the exploitation that certain type of socio-economic contacts bring about. Since group identity has been on the basis of culture, often linked to somewhat isolated Indian communities, it has not led to the emergence of a consciousness of race or ethnicity in any political form. Black protest movement has been minimal and Indian mobilisation has also generally been limited and localised, peaceful and limited to their demanding recognition of collective rights. Latin American societies are more 'colour class' society where colour is only one of the many variables that shape someone's life chances and status. Ethnic minority nationalism has not flourished in any political sense and only ambiguously in a cultural one because historical trends, and the lines of social and economic division, have not favoured its emergence. The grossly disproportionate distribution of wealth and power all over Latin America has meant that lines of conflict have not been drawn between racial, which would have been virtually impossible, or ethnic groups but that oppression has been suffered by one class at the hands of another. Where class and race have overlapped, such as in the Indian communities of Mexico and Peru, resistance has taken the form of affirming distinctive cultural traits rather than forming dissident or separatist racial or political movements. However, greater Indian consciousness and movements such as those of the landless in Brazil or the armed uprising in Chiapas, the recognition of their rights in some of the democratic constitutions for instance that of Colombia and Venezuela, and many Latin American countries declaring themselves as multicultural may mean that situation is changing; and the question of ethnicity, especially of Indian ethnicity, is becoming one of the central issues in the politics of Latin American countries.

Slavery had had a different meaning and impact on the English-speaking Caribbean. Its abolition around 1830s brought in waves of 'East Indian' indentured labour to work on the sugar plantations. The ex-slaves set up their own independent villages, and most of them drifted to the cities as mining and other urban activities began towards the end of the 19th Century. A dominant feature of the Caribbean societies became the hostility between the Africans and the 'East Indians' with

both of them claiming sufferings and deprivations at the hands of the planters' class and seeking to inherit the mantle of political power when these countries gained independence in the 1960s. Black consciousness, the Black Power Movements, race and ethnicity political parties and mobilisation have remained the features of the political process of countries such as Guyana, Jamaica and Trinidad & Tobago.

4.4 AN EVALUATION

Political culture is a term used to describe the basic values, ideas, and behavioural patterns that govern a society. The term may mean many things and is fraught with the danger of misuse. In the first place, one must avoid stereotyping societies as democratic and authoritarian, secular and fundamentalist, tolerant and intolerant, etc. One must also recognise that any society may have several cultural currents existing at the same time. One must also realise that political culture presents a generalised picture of a society and many groups or regions may not be part of the generalised description of a political culture. Also, with the political experiences and practices of a people as a whole, political culture undergoes change; it does not remain permanent and static. Outside processes and forces also do impact a political community, such as foreign invasions and occupations, aid programmes, foreign capital in the crucial sectors of a national economy and operations of multinational corporations. Yet it cannot be denied that the concept of political culture is useful in understanding the differing assumptions—philosophical, cultural, historical, and societal—on which different political societies are based. It is in this context that the political culture of Latin America is described as strongly elitist, hierarchical, authoritarian, corporatist, and patrimonialist. Elitism of the Latin American societies came from the Iberian philosophical traditions, which had suggested that society should be governed by its 'natural elites' and that masses are incapacitated to govern themselves. It had also emerged from the early experiences of conquistadors who set themselves as aristocrats lording over lands and the labour, both of which were found in abundance. The influence of Catholic religious ideas, especially of St. Thomas Aquinas, was very strong in the Iberian Peninsula shaping their laws, institutions, social mores and economic practices. Elitism, hierarchy and authoritarianism all had strong bases in the traditional Spanish Catholicism. The dominant belief was that political authority emanated from God or from the 'natural order' of the universe. Both power and society were organised hierarchically from the top down.

Although Latin American society was thus structured hierarchically by rank, in the aftermath of the Independence, it has also been structured vertically in terms of society's major corporate groups: army, church, nobility and landowners, bureaucracy, university and so on. This historical tendency to divide society vertically and functionally had been the basis of corporatism in the 20th Century. All these features of corporatism, authoritarianism, hierarchy and elitism reinforced each other and fostered a rigidly stratified system in which mobility was nearly impossible.

In the 19th Century, Liberal ideas of individuality, republicanism, egalitarianism, and secularism were superimposed over the earlier traditions of hierarchy, inequality, patrimonialism and centralism. Scholars have asked as to how much these new ideas and values took hold. One may argue in answer that Liberal and democratic ideas were incorporated in laws and constitutions but the underlying structures of landownership and authority often remained elitist. Two political cultures could exist side by side: one elitist, hierarchical and authoritarian; the other liberal and democratic—

sometime co-living, at other conflicting with each other. Democracies behave in an authoritarian fashion; and authoritarian regimes incorporate significant sectors of the society into the governing coalitions. Both anyway practice corporatism i.e. seek to control varied interest by linking them vertically to state apparatus. Corporatism however has never been complete so as to overwhelm the entire society, just like the way Nazism and Fascism sought to do in Germany and Italy. Corporatism has always been partial and limited to important social groups and interests such as labour.

To the corporatist-authoritarian and Liberal-democratic traditions were added the socialist tradition in the 20th Century. Socialist governments in Cuba, Chile and Nicaragua, communist and socialist parties and movements, socialist influence on church, etc. have given new traditions and institutions to Latin America.

One can imagine how deeply divided and unstable the political culture of Latin America has become if we also take into account the ascendance of neo-liberalism. Market-based principles and ethics are shaping not only economic processes but also the shape and content of contemporary democratic regimes in Latin America. Periodic elections, peaceful transfer of power, legislative supremacy, judicial independence, coalitional parties and politics, citizenship rights and constitutional guarantees all indicate that major political churning is going on in the regional politics. As it always happens, old values are no longer universally held, yet the new ones are sometimes only incompletely established. Moreover, the distance between such wholly different societal conceptions—patrimonialism, liberalism, socialism, and neo-liberalism—are so vast as to be virtually un-compromisable. The overlaps among and fusions of distinct and opposite ideas and values of society tend to make Latin America even more complex and absorbing a continent, meriting scholarly attention. It should also be borne in mind that these distinct ideals of society are not uniformly present in Latin America; country variations of the strength and weakness in one or the other framework abound. No wonder, Latin America has been described as a ‘living museum’ of ideas and institutions.

Merle Kling has developed an interesting theory of political power and political instability in Latin America. With the lands historically in few hands and in the 20th Century too, economic resources owned by few leading to sharp social and economic inequalities, the only recourse left to capable individuals and groups has been political insurrection to grab state power and effect a redistribution in their favour. Political systems are top-down and not flexible enough to absorb new societal pressures and demands. This sometimes leads to insurrection, revolutions, and no-holds-barred mobilisation. Latin American systems are remarkably stable in that the power and resources remain the monopoly of the few; but at the same time they give the impression of being highly unstable and violent since new groups often take recourse to politics—electoral and peaceful or violent and revolutionary—in a bid to enter the system and effect some redistribution of economic and political resources. It is said that Latin American societies, being traditional, have very little politics. The contrary view is that Latin America suffers from too much of politics. Be that as it may, politics brings little change to the socio-economic and cultural structures and patterns; but this is the only instrument left in the hands of the masses to ameliorate their situation. No wonder, elites have to often discount all politics and would prefer to exclude it in the name of development, security, etc. In brief, the sets of challenges and ideals are quite huge in Latin America. When we talk of the challenges of nation-building, they are numerous. Not what is the nation but ‘who is the nation’, not what is development but for whom the development, not what is democracy

but how participatory and egalitarian it is are some of the questions that need to be examined when discussing the question of nation-building.

4.5 SUMMARY

Political traditions and political culture in Latin America, in spite of the process of change, cling on to their old ideas and institutions resulting in a reality too complex to be summed up by a single theoretical perspective. Traditionally, personal bonds of friendship and kinship, patrimonialism or a patron client relationship with blind faith of the client on the patron, *compadrazgo* or 'godparenthood' and *presidencialismo* or the concentration of powers in the office of the president, played a significant role in the social and political relationships. Another important aspect of Latin American society is its racial composition of the indigenous people, the Europeans, the immigrants and the African Negroes which is now being divided culturally into three broad areas of Indo-America, Afro-America and Ibero-America.

Added to this is the *mestizo* population, a mixture of Spanish and Indian blood suffering from a sense of worthlessness and the *mulattos*, a mix of white and Negro blood. The *mestizos* soon began to enter national politics, but those who were left out of the system took up the cause of revolution and social change in the 20th Century. Thus political culture based on political society in Latin America was elitist, hierarchical, authoritarian and patrimonialist. The new liberal ideas of egalitarianism and republicanism were superimposed on the earlier ones and thus the underlying structures of land ownership and authority remained elitist. It is said that Latin American societies being traditional have very little politics. The contrary view is that Latin America suffers from too much of politics. Be that as it may, politics brings little change to the socio-economic and cultural structures and patterns; but this is the only instrument left in the hands of the masses to ameliorate their situation and so the challenges faced by Latin America are immense.

4.6 EXERCISES

1. What are the main characteristics of the political traditions in Latin America? To what extent do you think they are still of relevance to contemporary Latin American political processes?
2. To what extent are indigenous societies in Latin America a part of the political culture?
3. What do you understand by the term *mestizo* in the context of Latin American political culture?
4. Discuss briefly the legacy of the institution of slavery in Latin America.