

The Concept of Ethnicity: A Theoretical Analysis

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ABSTRACT : My research is on the ethnicity which consists of Cultural characteristics such as (Language, history, values and customs) that are shared of a distinctive of a group of people. Ethnicity contrast with the concept of race, which concerned shared physical characteristics. Like as the Sindh which was forms an integral part of Pakistan, received its name from Sindh i.e. Indus which flows through it.

KEY WORDS: Ethnicity, Sindh, Pakistan, Boundaries, Community, India, Pakistan, Nationhood, Country, Culture, Groups, languages, Politics.

I. INTRODUCTION

The province of Sindh which was forms an integral part of Pakistan, received its name from Sindh i.e. Indus which flows through it. Sindhu literally means an ocean or a vast collection of water. The name was given to it by the Aryans due to the great sheet of water which the Indus carries after meeting with Kabul river. In medieval times the whole valley of Indus up to the confines of Kashmir was known as Sind or Sindh as against Hindu or India which was separated from it by the desert barrier of Thar region. Sindh proper now lies between 23rd and 28th parallel of the north latitude and between 66th and 71st meridian of east longitude. It is about 360 miles from north to south, with an average breadth of 170 miles from east to west covering an area of 59166 square miles. The linguistic boundaries of Sindh extended beyond the political demarcation of Cutch and Kathiawad in the south, Jaisalmer and Jodhpur in the east, Bahawalpur and Multan in the north and to Las-Bela and Mokran regions in the west Sindhi speaking people may be met with in almost every corner of the Indian sub-continent and smaller communities flourish in Burma, Malaya, Indonesia, Hong Kong, Oman, Hijar and East Africa.

The present boundaries of Sindh were fixed by the British after the conquest of the unhappy valley in 1843, which was first added to the Bombay presidency for administrative reasons, but later it was separated under the Government of India Act 1935, and constituted a separate Governor's province. At present Sindh is divided into two separate divisions Khairpur, Hyderabad. The Khairpur division includes the districts of Khairpur, Sukkur, Jacobabad and Larkana and the districts of Hyderabad, Nawabshah, Sanghar, Dadu and Thatta form part of Hyderabad division.

Population of Sindh: Sindh has a variety of population, people of many races and nationalities live in Sindh. The Aryans, Semites, and the Mongols, the Turks, the Tartars, the Kols and Bhils, the pre-historic people of Indus Valley who held kinship with the Sumerians of al-Iraq and even the negroes of Africa are presented by their descendants who speak Sindhi and have absorbed and assimilated the Sindhi culture for several generations. There can be very little distinction between the original Sindhi and the Migrant, for the whole seed has been mixed up now. The exception however, lies in the new migrants after the partition of India in 1977, when two independent states of Bharat and Pakistan came into being. The new comers who are known by the common appellation "Muhajirs" have come to Sindh, in a huge wave and in a complete distinct and divergent language and culture. They have not yet reconciled with the general culture and as soon as they are absorbed, they will lose their original character and due course of time they will become part and parcel of the Sindh inhabitants. Very few Hindu now live in Sindh and they are mostly confined to Tharparkar district and the upper Sindh towns of Sukkur and Shikarpur.

Ethnic Politics in South Asia: A Conceptual Frame Work: The International Encyclopedia of social Sciences defines an ethnic group as a distinct category of the population in a larger society whose culture is usually different from its own. The members of such a group are, or feel themselves, or are thought to be, bound together by common ties of race or nationality or culture. The encyclopedia definition does not include territory as a criterion and mentions Culture generally without emphasizing a special position of language. Encyclopedia Britannica defines an ethnic group as follows: a social group or category of the population that in a larger society is a set apart and bound together by common ties of race, language, nationality or culture.

As a general case, at the core of ethnic identification are primordial affinities and attachments, derived from place of birth, kinship relationships, religion, language and social practices that come natural to an individual to attach himself to other individuals from the same background. These attachments remain in the unconscious and can be rekindled by appropriate stimuli. On the other hand, individuals may have no emotional attachment to their language culture, or even identity. Students of ethnic formation and change have noted that individuals in any society not only have multiple identities some being considered primary and others secondary, depending on the context, but group identities change, new cultural or ethnic identities are created, and old ones disappears.

The psycho cultural school defines ethnicity almost entirely on the basis of subjective factors e.g. According to De Vos, “an ethnic group is a self- perceived inclusion of those who held in common a set of traditions not shared by others with whom they are in contact. Such traditions typically include folk ‘religious’ beliefs and practices, language, a sense of historical continuity and common ancestry and place of origin. Brass defines an ethnic group on the basis of both objective attributes and subjective self-definition and traces the stages in the ethnic community formation. Brass definition of an ethnic category begins with the objective cultural markers of language, religion or race, diet, dress or customs which are susceptible to change and variation, such a group must contain within its membership, “in principal or in practice the elements for a complete division of labour and for reproduction”, in order to distinguish itself from the categories of class, gender and age brackets. When a group uses these cultural symbols in order to create internal cohesion and differentiation from other groups, it becomes a subjectively self-conscious community. Ethnic identity also requires claiming to status and recognition either as a superior group or atleast a group equal to other groups. Brass terms ethnic communities of ‘political significance’ as nationalities. According to Brass, the ethnic identity formation of a group involves struggles within the group for control over material and symbolic resources, struggle for other groups for rights and resources and struggle with the state and the group dominating it.

From the definition cited above and review of the literature, one would note that the prevalent usage of the concept of ethnic group does not include territory as a necessary condition. Freedoms from such a binding condition make the concept more inclusive. Further, common culture of the group is more universally deemed to be a necessary condition for a group to be considered a distinct ethnic group. However, a possession of a distinct language is not always a precondition, although language has been recognized as a single most characteristic feature of ethnic identity. In applying the concept of ethnic group to the conditions of Pakistan, language would be the central definition feature of an ethnic group. Since all linguistic groups have more or less distinct cultures in addition to many overarching cultural characteristics that they share in common, the criterion of culture would also be satisfied. Religious basis of ethnic identification does not present a problem in Pakistan’s specific situation. Adherents of almost all religions belong to one or another of the linguistically based ethnic group. As with many other post-colonial societies, establishing “nationhood” in South Asia prior to independence had been difficult and the state had to spearhead a composite, super-ordinate nationalism with the thinning of early anti-colonial nationalists sentiments, ethno-nationals forces have been striking back demanding recognition of pluralism-separatism. The state’s attempts to integrate ethnic groups into a cohesive nationhood, on former’s terms, have transformed cultural nationalism into full-fledged ethnic nationalism. The four major types of ethnic movements in contemporary South Asia can be characterized as follows:

Autonomous: The movement led by the Sikhs and Tamils are the best examples, where the major goal is to have maximum cultural, political and economic autonomy just short of total independence making ethnicity a case of majority minority relationship.

Situational: Politicized ethnicity aims at ensuring proper economic, cultural and political rights in a given national setup. Such a need may arise due to an influx of population from outside causing slogans like “sons-of-soil” emphasizing nativism. The best example could be Assam where the main focus is on nativism.

Parallelist: Sind could be a case where indigenous Sindhis find themselves squeezed by the influx of ‘outsiders’. Simultaneously, the former immigrants from India, find themselves losing their cultural and politico-economic power to other rivals including Sindhis, Punjabis and Pushtuns. Here the reluctance on the part of various ethnic groups to accept pluralism turns out to be the main issue.

Separatist: The movement in Kashmir is a case in point. Here all the major determinants enumerated above are operative in consolidating ethno-nationalism, with the main valley becoming the focus of the movement led by Muslim activists.

Ethnic Politics in Pakistan: While discussing ethnic polities in Pakistan, Tariq Ali, Selig Harrison, Inayatullah Baloch and Lawrence Ziring prophesied an eventual disintegration of the country. Hamza Alavi believes Pakistan's dilemma is typical of many post-colonial countries where the usual process of maturing into nationhood before becoming a country has been reversed. To Anwar Syed and Akbar Ahmed ethnicity is basically inherent within the society, while to Tahir Amin and Mumtaz Ahmad, it must be studied simply in reference to Pakistani state structure, religion and foreign intervention. The colonial state laid the foundation of provincial identities on the debris of dismembered pre-colonial polities. The settlement policies, the rearrangement of revenue system, irrigation schemes, the clear bias of administration through local intermediaries, and the rearrangement of politics in favor of provinces all served to consolidate regional elites spearheading regional/provincial identities while supporting the raj.

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