

Factors of Ethnicity

Lecture Delivered

By

Dr. Aisha Shahzad

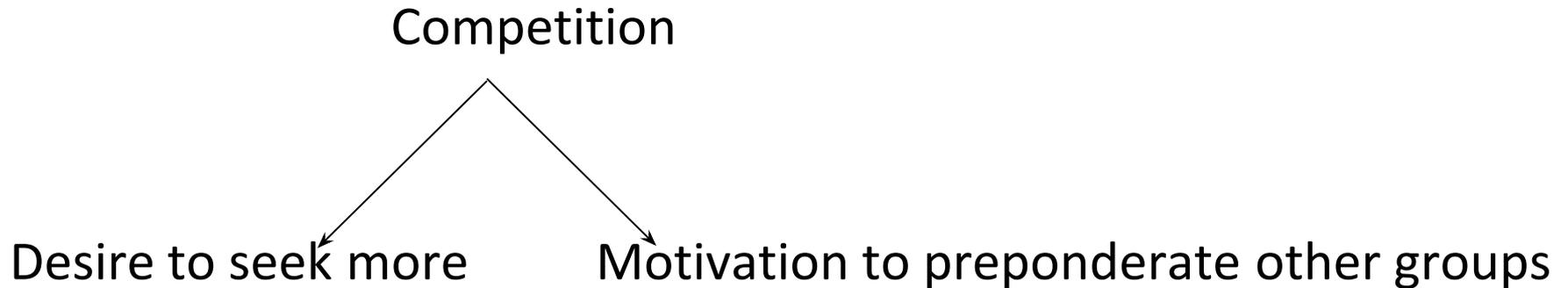
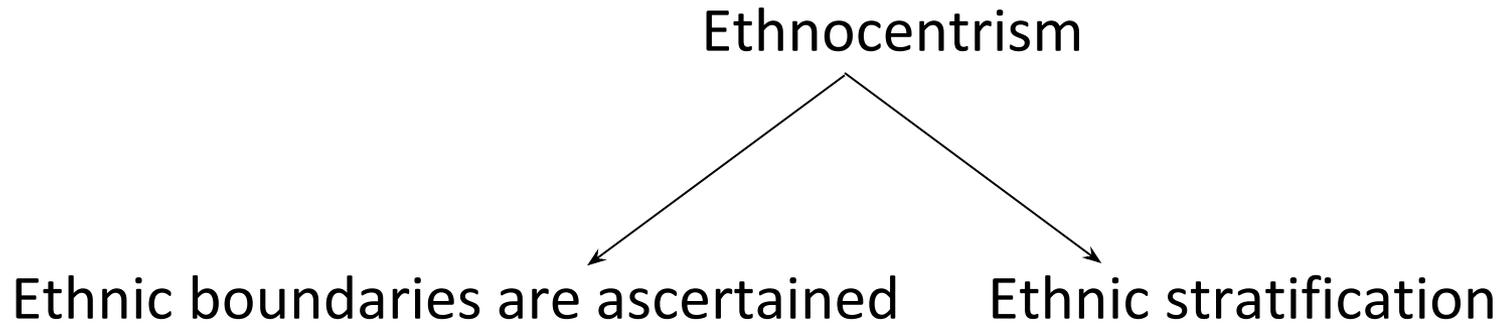
Lahore College for Women University, Lahore

Ethnocentrism: -

- Ethnocentrism is another related concept of ethnicity. It denotes the tendency to evaluate other societies and ethnic groups by the standards of one's own cultural traits. Ethnocentrism promotes the phenomenon of group closure which maintains the boundaries of ethnic groups while separating them from others.
- In this connection the competition among various groups in a multi-ethnic society becomes more pronounced. This competition may be for more share in resources or in the power structure of the state or educational and business opportunities. In this competition the winner becomes the dominant group while the loser becomes the minority or subordinate ethnic group. In this regard the power potential (size, quality of leadership, motivation to pursue their objectives, organizational structure) of an ethnic group is also very significant (Healey, 1995).

Figure: -

→ The Phenomenon of Ethnocentrism



→ Ethnicity and Nationalism

Nationalism is derived from the Latin word 'natio' meaning birth or race. In the primitive ages it was used to ascribe the nation (group of people having sense of belongingness and common heritage) living in a particular area, regardless of their ethnic composition. It got its strength from Lockean Liberalism as John Lock envisaged that it is the legitimate right of the people to have a representative government which is sovereign.

The phenomenon of nationalism had been passed through different arenas. In the early modern period (17th and 18th centuries) European powers including England, France, and Portugal etc. strengthened colonial nationalism all over the world. European nations promoted their cultures, language and traditions in their colonies. They endeavored to disseminate the European culture to less developed regions.

- Afterwards, **during nineteenth century** the nationalist feelings emerged among the European colonies due to cultural and racial differences. There were sharp discrepancies between the culture of the dominant and the dominated which exhilarated nationalist movements (anti colonialism and anti imperialism) in Asia, Africa, Australia and America.
- In this perspective **the phenomenon of imagined political community** gained significance. It refers to the perception of ethnic groups who feel themselves to be marginalized by the state authorities. They use the politics of sub-nationalism (demand for a separate statehood) as an instrument to gain political power in the pursuit of their political objectives. Various factors also lead towards the development of sub-nationalism i.e. discrepancy between the values of state authorities and those significant for the sub-national group, economic disparities between the indigenous people

- (sub-nationalists) and the settlers and under representation of the ethnic elite in the ranks of the national ruling elite. Sometimes all the factors cumulatively generate the sub-nationalism and promote centrifugal forces (Mitra, 1998).
- **Nationalism implied the amalgamation of the state and the sovereignty.** Nationalist sentiments grow out of common language, culture, common religion, traditions, and customs on a particular piece of land. Some thinkers like Anderson believe that nation is an imagined political community (Malik, 1997) while nationalism grows out of national consciousness which also consolidates the nation itself. Nationalism and ethnicity are also perceived as synonym concepts.
- However, they are two distinct concepts, though very close to each other. Nationalism is the formation of a state under the fundamental axiom of national self-determination. But in a multi-ethnic state a deprived community quest for autonomy.

- **If a state has a centralized and authoritarian political system** then politicized ethnic group can move towards a secessionist path. Therefore ethnicity is driving force behind nationalism. Although the basic factors of nationalism and ethnicity (common culture, religion, language, common interests) are indiscernible but the nationalism accentuates on sovereignty.
- **Nationalism and ethnicity** both revolve around the state. Nationalism emerges to form a separate state while ethnic aspirations appear to demand for autonomy. In diverse societies ethnic groups perceive the state as not their own and struggle for their due share in the state structure. Nationalism has various dimensions i.e. state nationalism particularly encapsulates the political sphere. It is generated through formal and adequate ideological axiom from start to finish.

- While **ethnic nationalism** is non-programmatic and belongs to sociological sphere. It keeps on struggling and most often comes in confrontation with the state nationalism. The ethnic nationalism keeps on striving to have an equitable share in the power structure. Moreover, John Breuilly encompasses the political aspect of nationalism that nationalists politicize the people by inculcating the specific objectives. Nationalist leaders also magnify their role in their quest for power (Smith, 1996).
- **In fact nationalism is both an ideology and a form of behavior.** Nationalism is politicized aspect of ethnicity. In other words it is an ethnic group with a political agenda. An ethnic group must be politically mobilized before it becomes a nation and that political mobilization occurs in the form of some sort of collective objective of recognition.

- **The basic difference between nationalism and ethnicity** is that nationalism is an umbrella term while ethnicity may be a component of nationalism. Nationalism refers to the belongingness to a particular group or a nation for the articulation of their political rights to the extent even of seceding from the union of State while ethnicity may reflect the demands of the ethnic group to get maximum autonomy within the state boundaries.
- **The phenomenon of nationalism** can be interpreted in terms of cultural and economic fields. Economic nationalism refers to the policies and strategies adopted by the states especially the less developed states like protectionism to promote their domestic industry. It is based on the belief that states should use their economic strength to achieve national interests.

- Similarly the process of acculturation in the age of globalization has stigmatized cultural nationalism which also accentuates centrifugal forces like regionalism, ethnicity, etc. Another scenario is that nationalism, nations and nation states come together in various patterns. Sometimes nations precede nation-states like Germans existed as a nation due to cultural commonalities long before they established Germany in 1860s and 1970s. It is called 'unification nationalism'.
- On the other hand sometimes states are created first and then it seeks to promote a sense of common identity among people. For example the European imperial powers included people of different tribal and ethnic backgrounds within the borders of their colonies in Asia and Africa. When these colonies later became independent states, they lacked national integration.

- Numerous problems of ethnicity emerged and persisted due to the lack of cohesive national policies, political instability, military intervention, fragile democratic structure, corruption, lack of political efficacy and backwardness.
- In addition to it nationalism is a positive force as nationalism is based on the notion of popular sovereignty, so it promotes democracy. While on the other hand it also has a black side when it creates feelings of separateness, prejudice like fascism and Nazism. Negative nationalism leads towards violence and external aggression.

Factors Contributing to Ethnicity: -

Number of factors can be identified as the causes of growing ethnic conflicts all over the world.

1. *Economic Disparities*

- In a heterogeneous society, the economic disparities strengthen the ethnic identities. The minority groups feel themselves threatened by the dominant groups in terms of culture and ethnicity. These feelings are intensified in the absence of socio economic justice. Socio–economic injustice (denial of fundamental rights or neglect of economic rights such as access to adequate food and housing) fosters ethnic conflicts. Brown (1996) analyzes the economic factors of intra state conflicts.
- When state fails to protect individual's rights and liberties and to maintain equitable opportunities among the various groups, the marginal identities tend to perceive the state institutions and laws as unjust or oppressors.

- **This situation is further aggravated** when some ethnic groups are not drawn in the mainstream politics by the state. It increases their isolation from the state structure and erupts ethnic conflicts. The ethnic groups also tend to violence, if the situation persists as the marginalized groups take violence as the only way to vent their grievances.
- **Therefore socio-economic injustice** develops the feelings of alienation and deprivation among the marginalized ethnic groups. This sense of alienation generates the conflicts and issues in the society and leads to the demand for political autonomy. In short ethnic conflicts are closely related to divergent and uneven levels of economic development. In this situation ethnic groups complain of or make demands for a change in the distributive system. If a group of people or some minority in a state is deprived of its due share and suppressed economically then this difference leads towards ethnic tension.

- Economic disparities result into the social bifurcation and fragmentation of society. They exacerbate ethnic differences. In this connection Yiftachel (1997) explains that in heterogeneous societies, unfair distribution of state resources hatch ethnic conflicts. Then the marginalized ethnic groups protest for the protection of their regional economic interests. They claim that they are entitled to maximize their economic benefits from national resources.
- They also demand autonomy to achieve their group interests. On the other hand the dominant groups develop a feeling of satisfaction and perceive the state structure to be congruent. Here the role of the state becomes more pronounced. When the state cannot meet the aspirations of the diverse groups due to meager resources then the ethnic conflicts easily develop.

2. Problems of Modernization and Competition for Scarce Resources:

- There is another aspect that needs to be taken into account while analyzing the causes of ethnic conflict. Today modernization is taking place in every nook and corner of the world. As a result of modernization an uneven level of development has spread. The discrimination in terms of development and sharing of benefits among ethnic groups creates disequilibrium in a society. In this situation under privileged ethnic groups may develop a perception of relative deprivation.
- This relative deprivation (dissatisfaction among people due to economic disparities when they feel that they have less than their peers) becomes an important variable upon which the ethnic groups get momentum and start agitation.

- **Ted Gurr defined relative deprivation** as “a gap between the expectations and perceived capabilities of a group vis-a-vis their economic situation, political power and social status in relation to others.” (as cited in Ahmed, 1996, pp. 68-72).
- The idea of relative deprivation also helps to explain the phenomenon of political mobilization of economically and politically under privileged groups. Uneven development generates psychological frustration among the people of the peripheries.
- Moreover the process of modernization has increased communication throughout the world. It also put pressure of population on resources and sense of economic insecurity among the indigenous groups. Scholars like Newman (1991) quoted Connor that modernization integrated diverse ethnic groups which resulted in escalating the ethnic conflicts.

→ Then Kunovich & Hodson (2002) quote the scholars of ‘ethnic competition theory’ and ‘ethnic segregation theory’. These scholars assert that modernization does not reduce ethnic conflicts rather it promotes inequalities and competition among ethnic groups. They criticize the concept of ‘melting pot’ which explains that modernization is a process which diminishes the ethnic differences. Infact the modernization increases rather than decreases the ethnic conflicts in developing societies. Ethnicity re-emerges as a vital principle of identity. It cannot be suppressed in the name of a supposed modernization.

3. Historical and Cultural Factors: -

→ The historical and cultural factors are also very significant regarding ethnic conflicts especially in the context of third world states which are heterogeneous in nature.

- Ethnicity is also commonly tied to territory. Sometimes changes in territorial boundaries can lead to significant changes in ethnic identities. Ethnic groups can fuse or split apart, such processes may combine primordial sentiments. The colonial powers exploited the caste, racial, linguistic and religious differences of the indigenous people of Afro Asian countries to perpetuate their rule. Imperial policies of colonial powers politicized ethnic groups in many colonies. It has been a divisive factor in third world countries.
- Religious and linguistic diversities are a common feature in these countries i.e. majority – minority language issues, the question of national – official language, religious cleavages are a common phenomenon. The smaller cultural entities feel threatened by the domination of larger ethnic groups. The submergence and marginalization of smaller groups create ethnic tensions in a society.

→ Several ethnic conflicts have raged around the world due to religious differences. Religious identities are commonly transformed over time into ethnic identities. Varshney (2003) discusses the cultural factors of ethnicity that traditions, customs and religion are not merely responsible for conflicts but actually it is the relationship between the dominant culture and the subordinate culture, which generates ethnic conflicts in developing heterogeneous societies. Those ethnic groups who claim to be the 'sons of soil' deserve more political and economic opportunities. But when their rights are subverted by other groups then the ethnic conflicts occur.

4. *Demographic Factor:* -

→ Ethnic problems emerge not only due to the socio-economic processes but also due to the demographic changes (migration, assimilations etc.).

→ The large scale migrations within the state contribute to ethnic conflicts. Inter-state migrations also create the problems of assimilation. In this way the ethnic conflict starts between the local people and outsiders gradually. As Eriksen (1993) describes that when the migrants come into contact with the people of distinct culture, traditions and identities both the groups (migrants and locals) endeavor to retain their hold in the power structure of the state. This situation leads towards ethnic discrepancies in most of the developing heterogeneous societies.

5. Political Factor: -

→ Political factors are also responsible for ethnic conflicts. Political turbulence starts when all the ethnic groups do not get due representation in the power structure and decision making process of the state.

- In this situation ethnic groups tend to identify themselves as a part of their respective region. Elite also mobilizes ethnic groups for political purposes, reshape their identities and even form new ethnic groups and nations. Although the concept of modern nation state is a material force but its legitimacy depends on its claim to represent a nation. The modern nation state has diverse ethnic communities especially in the post-colonial era that's why it has to face the challenges of ethno-nationalist movements when the political aspirations of nations are not accommodated by the state.
- States adopting strong assimilationist policies may become a cause for the resistance from those ethnic groups who are not willing to surrender their ethnic identities. Ethnic groups may also endeavor to seek more political power to protect their political and economic interests.

- Sometimes smaller ethnic groups feel themselves as their socio-cultural identities are being merged by the state-centric national identities because of the lesser opportunities in the state structure. This shapes their disposition towards the polity. They perceive themselves as alienated from the overall political process and the state institutions and become more indifferent towards the polity.
- Consequently the socio-cultural identities of these groups provide the basis for the political mobilization. It becomes a serious threat to national solidarity and creates the problem of social divisiveness. It also impedes the way to national integration and the resultant factor is ethnic conflict.

6. External Factors: -

- External influences also become a cause to generate ethnic conflicts.

→ Stavenhagen (1998) argues that sometimes the ethnic groups get ideological and financial support from external actors. History is full of examples of outside interests and interference in ethnic issues of other countries. In the post World War I period several treaties were signed between the states regarding the protection of each other's national minorities. The League of Nations guaranteed the protection of minorities but it could not be successful. A number of bilateral treaties were signed between states on the treatment of national, religious and linguistic minorities during the period between World War I and II. Subsequently the U.N and the international agencies have guaranteed against genocide and have given to protect human rights.

Stages of Ethnicity: -

There are different states through which an ethnic group gradually develops its ethnic identity, articulates its demands and postulates its efforts to achieve the final task of autonomy or secession.

1. Ethnic Self Consciousness: -

- Ethnic consciousness is a dynamic, social phenomenon. Socialization and life experiences of individuals propel them to their association and identification as a member of a particular group. Ethnic consciousness is a variable, not evenly distributed among all the members of the group. Ethnic consciousness depends upon the social and political conditions of the state.
- These are intensified due to grim economic pressure, political alienation, inflation and unemployment and if these conditions persist during a given period, they aggravate the deprivations of the members of the ethnic group. Ethnic consciousness also depends upon some internal and external factors. Internal factors relate to what is unique about the group.

→ The external factors are related to the society, i.e. racial distinctiveness, linguistic differences, separate religious identity etc. These differences in the society reinforce particular ethnic identifications of a group. In this situation the ethnic group either evaluates itself with reference to its past position or compares itself with other ethnic group in a state and concludes that either it is being deprived or not.

2. *Demand for Equality:* -

→ At this stage the ethnic group demands an equal status in a society, equal share in power structure and all political institutions. Here the role of the leadership becomes very important. The new ethnic elites aspire for its entry into the politics and a due role. It sometimes uses ethnic symbols to assert in the arena of politics. For this purpose it also starts to encourage the ethnic group for political mobilization.

→ The success of the struggle of ethnic group depends upon different factors i.e. solidarity of the ethnic group, the quality of ethnic consciousness and the nature of the political system.

3. *Demand for Political Autonomy:* -

→ If an ethnic group fails in its struggle to achieve equality, the demands for political autonomy emerge. Demand for autonomy may include changes in the constitution, redistribution of powers between centre and the provinces, decentralization in the political system to redraw the boundaries of the provinces etc.

→ Here again the achievement of the ethnic group depends upon, whether the political system is democratic pluralist or authoritarian. The democratic systems mostly accommodate the demands of the ethnic groups in the larger interest of the state.

→ While the authoritarian, dictatorial or autocratic system usually suppresses such demands, which ultimately leads towards political and ethnic violence. If the government negotiates with the ethnic group to make any compromise then the ethnic violence can be prevented, otherwise situation goes from bad to worse.

4. Secession: -

→ At this stage ethnic group has two options, either to withdraw from its demands or move towards secession. It is an indication that the particular ethnic group does not recognize the legitimacy of the government and is dissatisfied with the existing economic and political system of the state (Baluch, 2001).

→ Infact ethnicity is not a static phenomenon. It does not remain fixed at one stage. It keeps on varying due to the internal dynamics of an ethnic group and the response of the state.

Ethnicity and Politics: -

- The nature of state whether authoritarian or democratic, regional biases of political leadership and majoritarian rule are significant regarding the emergence of ethnic problems. For example 3rd world states are facing the **problems of assimilation especially in the post colonial era.**
- Many Asian and African states were not able to contain regional diversities within their politico – bureaucratic framework due to their heterogeneous political cultures. Mostly the Asian – African states have subject and non –participatory political culture. People are not oriented towards politics based on mass-participation and democratic values due to frequent military intervention. The public attachment to political institutions is fragile. Public opinion is ignored by the government and political issues are decided by force i.e. Paraguay and Congo.

- **In centralized and authoritarian political systems**, diverse ethnic groups confront each other in a competitive framework. In this regard the interaction among a few large or privileged groups (in terms of number and skill) becomes more critical and accentuates sense of alienation among smaller and less privileged groups.
- More significantly all ethnic groups (larger and smaller) contend each other in respect of the better share in the resources and power structure of the state. Therefore the ethnic issues become so prominent that the ethnic movements defy the process of national integration.
- A society divided into distinct cultural groups, a policy that is supported by one ethnic group may arouse opposition in another. On the other hand democratic regimes through accommodative policies can mitigate the intensity of ethno-nationalism.

- Accommodative policies by the state to integrate all the ethnic groups while retaining their regional autonomy de-escalate the ethnic tensions. Infact the stability of the political system depends upon the appropriate strategies by the state to respond the demands of the ethnic groups.
- Sometimes the policies by the governments are perceived by ethnic minorities as a threat to their cultural identity which causes ethnic problems in the state i.e. in Sri Lanka discriminatory policies were followed in language, citizenship and standardization of education etc. which resulted in separatist movement by Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).
- **Structure of political parties** is another important factor. Afro – Asian states lack strong and pragmatic political party system at the national level. National parties diminish the fragmentation of society and bring new ideas.

→ They create national unity and overcome parochial and regional biases. Infact it depends upon the capacity of political system to balance and coordinate interests of various ethnic groups especially in heterogeneous society. Otherwise alienation becomes widespread so the heterogeneous society requires the broad based democratic political system based on the principles of pluralism and decentralization. Therefore the process of policy making should entail to subsume local, traditional and parochial identities into a larger national identity.

Strategies Adopted by the Government: -

→ Policy framework is also closely related to ethnic issues because in the present world, states have to accommodate various ethnic groups. In multicultural societies governments adopt various policies to counter regional ethnic forces such as assimilation, pluralism, multiculturalism and preferential ethnic policies.

1. *Assimilationist Policies:* -

- In heterogeneous societies, governments sometimes adopt Assimilationist policies to promote ethnically undifferentiated identity. Assimilation can be of two types: Cultural and structural. Cultural assimilation is the amalgamation of diverse languages, religions, traditions, customs, practices, values and beliefs. It is also explained in the metaphor of 'melting pot'. Whereas, structural assimilation takes place at two different levels: Primary and secondary.
- Primary structural assimilation refers to the inter marriages, family linkages, social circle etc. The secondary structural assimilation is fostered through the fair distribution of resources, socio-economic justice and equitable opportunities to all the ethnic groups.

→ If the process of assimilation reduces the cultural and linguistic differences to promote national integration then the ethnic groups do not make claims against the ruling elite. But if these policies impose official identity upon all the ethnic groups without realizing their regional diversities then the deprived ethnic groups articulate claims against the state authorities.

2. Pluralism: -

→ The policies of pluralism are designed by the government to promote group rights and to support ethnic diversities. In this connection pragmatic economic and political policies are formulated to bind all the ethnic groups. Power sharing arrangements and conflict resolution mechanism are also postulated by the government to accommodate all the ethnic groups. But if the state does not implement the consequent policies then it has to face resistance from centrifugal forces.

- Moreover, if the state adopts coercive policies to counter these forces in order to establish the writ of the state then the process of national integration cannot flourish. These assertive forces only pursue their own interests and they even victimize the solidarity of the state.
- Therefore in heterogeneous societies pluralist policies can bolster to overcome the ethnic discrepancies among diverse groups. Like assimilation, pluralism has also two dimensions: Cultural and structural. Cultural pluralism entails to preserve the diverse cultures and structural pluralism promotes the principles of equity to mitigate the cleavages among ethnic groups.
- Moreover, governments also adopt multiculturalists policies based on bilingual or multilingual frame works to preserve the integrity of the ethnic groups. Such viable policies assist to maintain the customs, traditions and cultural heritage of the ethnic groups and strengthen the process of cultural pluralism.

3. *Preferential Ethnic Policies:* -

- These policies are aimed at to compensate those deprived ethnic groups on priority basis that have been marginalized in the past. These groups are facilitated through more opportunities in educational and economic sectors. More comprehensive reforms programs are introduced for their economic uplift. They are also encouraged to participate in the mainstream political structure of the state.
- In this connection federation as a structure of government is more viable to accommodate ethnic diversities. Federations are more prone to ensure conflict resolution mechanism. Federal structure consists of a written constitution which guarantees division of powers at each level of government. It encourages decentralization which is valid to abridge ethnic cleavages.

- Then a bicameral legislature in which the federating units have representation which is usually based on equal representation in the upper house and proportionate representation in the lower house. Moreover, the method of amending the constitution is not so flexible. Mostly two third majority needs to make an amendment, which also secures the rights of the provinces.
- The federal structure also requires independence of judiciary to adjudicate the disputes among federating units or between different levels of government. Infact these structural arrangements provide devices to promote ethnic harmony. Federations also coincide with other mechanism to manage diversities to reconcile ethnic conflicts in deeply divided societies. Federations based on the principles of consociationalism guarantee the group representation to secure the rights of minorities.

→ Although the inter-ethnic conflicts in heterogeneous societies don't disappear but if the rights of all the ethnic groups are preserved then the motivation to secession is diminished. Lijphert gives the consociational model of democracy for multiethnic societies. It refers that a sound democratic system lies in:

- A written constitution with decentralization.
- Separation of power with checks and balances among all the organs of the government.
- Bicameral legislative system with equal representation of all the units in the upper chamber in order to protect the rights of the minority groups.
- Promotion of grand alliances to give equitable representation to all the minority ethnic groups.
- The ethnic groups must have the veto right against any legislation subverting their larger interest.

- The method of amendment in the constitution must be rigid so that it may not be violated easily (as cited in Phadnis & Ganguly, 2001).
- Infact the consociational model of democracy explains all the imperatives of a stable polity in a heterogeneous state. In this connection, Nordlinger encompasses the conflict resolution mechanism in deeply divided societies on ethnic lines. According to Nordlinger the success of consociational democratic system can be ensured through stable coalitions with the spirit of reconciliation and sense of accommodation among elite (as cited in Phadnis & Ganguly, 2001).

Symbolic Ethnicity:-

- Symbolic ethnicity developed when a particular ethnic group feels that its fundamental ethnic symbols are being subverted i.e. in case of Pakistan merger of smaller ethnic identities into a greater one i.e. Seraiki.

- Ethnic identities may be linguistic, conventional, religious etc i.e. attachment of Irish people to their language as a communicative element.
- Bengali assertion for the official recognition of their language.
- Urdu vs English dilemma in Pakistan. This linguistic distinction has spoiled the social fabric of our society.
- Flaws in educational system Urdu medium vs English medium. This controversy has bifurcated our society into numerous classes which is hatching fragmentation.
- The regionalists have predisposition that globalization is subverting regional linguistic identities.
- Single culture configuration under globalization (English) is penetrating all over the world where there is no space for local dialects or regional languages.

- This shift of linguistic identity prop up ethno-nationalistic tendencies.
- Indeed the modern linguistic assimilations in a pluralistic context is undermining ethnic identities.
- Symbolic ethnicity specially exist in those ethnic group which concentrate in foreign countries i.e. Muslim communities in Europe and America.
- Such ethnic groups continue to pass on their respective customs, religious rituals and traditions from generation to generation.
- To some an extent conventions or customs may be diluted with the passage of time but the spirit of their religion remains intact. Other attributes may disappear.
- Straight – line theory which refers to abruption of minorities gradually.

→ But even after their merger they retain their religious identity
i.e. research on Bengali family in Canada. 3 generational study.

