

Structural Basis of Ethnicity

- Ethnicity refers to a complex combination of **racial, cultural and historical** characteristics by which societies are divided into different groups and sects. Geertz has called “the **cultural givens**, assumed blood ties, race, language, region, religion, custom - as the heart of the ethnic matters”.
- Joseph Rothschild said, “**Competition** and **interaction** stress the situational and circumstantial nature of ethnic solidarity”. He considers ethnicity as a weapon in the pursuit of collective advantage. He further says, “Ethnicity is a plastic, variegated and originally ascriptive trait that in certain historical and socio-economic circumstances is readily politicized”.

- now we discuss the theoretical and structural basis of ethnicity, its meaning and evolution as political concept, that how does the problem of ethnicity arise in a heterogeneous society? Through which stages it passes, gets transformed from social to political phenomenon and becomes a threat to national integrity? How is it related to nationalism? This will also enlighten the concept of ethno-nationalism with reference to historical and analytical perspectives.

While explaining the nature of ethnicity Nelson Kasfir considers:

- As both **fluid** and **intermittent** and one of the many possible identities that could become the motivation for political action. His concept of ethnicity involves certain conditions, particular **objective indicators** associated with common ancestry, become the focus of **subjective perceptions**.

- Ethnic groups are in fact, modern **interest groups**, which invoke ethnicity as a matter of political efficacy in order to make claim on governmental sources. Denial Bell writes, “ Ethnicity has become more salient than class because it can combine **interest** with an **effective ties**”
- . Melson and Wolpe argued that “in culturally plural societies, citizens tend to perceive their competitive world through a **communal prism** and to be responsive to communal appeal”. Myron Weiner observed
- In fact it is not inequalities between ethnic groups that generate conflict but competition for wealth, political power etc.

He specifies a number of situations where ethnic conflict may generate, when there is

- competition between the dominant and subordinate ethnic groups
- the local population seeks access to occupations that they previously did not seek or from which they were once excluded,
- change in the power structure stimulates competition specially when the geographic core and the political core are held by different ethnic groups.

Ethnic conflict is also generated when the **educated middle class of indigenous ethnic groups** finds itself blocked by another ethnic group in its social mobility. It is the educated middle class of indigenous ethnic group, which takes up the banner of ethnicity in the name of collective interest of the group.

The above definitions encompass that whenever and wherever in a communal society inter-group competition starts, that creates ethnic consciousness among the people and they perceive whether they are deprived or victimized.

Why the phenomenon of **ethno-nationalism** has continued to be so powerful? A.D Smith gives the following reasons:

- The failure of the **modern state** to contain and minimize the ethnic revival,
- The counter productive pressure of the world state-system on state elite to homogenize and integrate,
- Continuing effects of nationalist ideals and movements.

In fact we can say that the differences between ethnic and nationalist movement is that the goal of an **ethnic movement** is to gain some advantage within an existing state whereas the **nationalist movement** seeks to maintain or gain a separate state.

As far as the **reasons for the emergence of ethnicity** are concerned, it is not only a fall out of state-centric policies but it embodies the intricacies of cultural traditions, political economy, modernization, urbanization and uneven development. There are certain particular human behaviors, which accentuate ethnic feelings. These can be classified in a following manner.

Instinctive Behavior

Selfishness, altruism, kinship, nepotism, genocide.

Social & Political Behavior

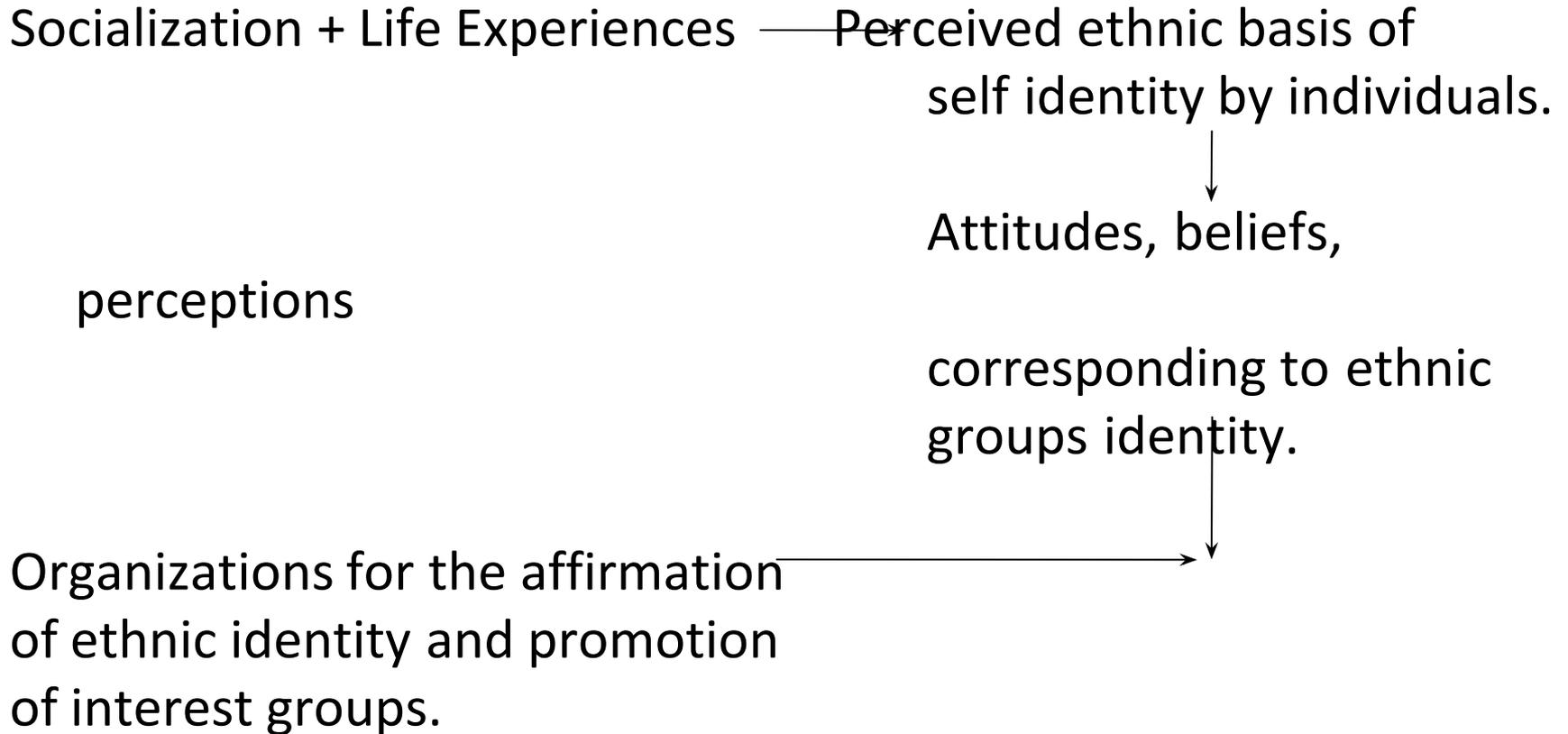
Realistic group conflicts, differences of caste, creed language and race.

Deliberate Behavior

Nationalism as ideology, Nazism, fascism etc

The presence and strength of these conditions vary from society to society however socialization and life experiences of the individuals propel them to their association and identification as a member of a particular group in a society. So the phenomenon of ethnicity requires a multi-cyclic structure for its representation.

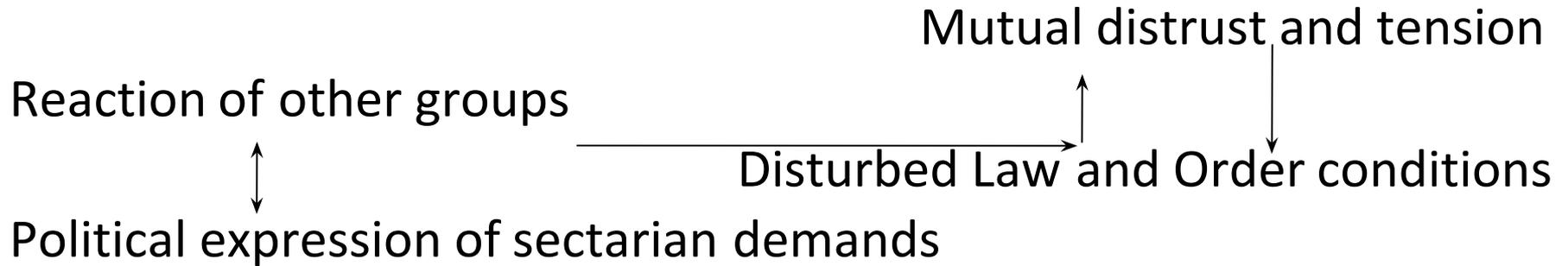
Reinforcement of Ethnicity



The above model endeavors to identify the underlying factors and the nature and pattern of their interaction that lead to the emergence, growth and persistence of ethnic antagonism in societies.

- The demands and protests of one ethnic group affect the reaction of the other groups.
- Contradictions among various groups cause mutual distrust and tension.
- Distrust and tension reinforce the perceived deprivation and grievances of ethnic group members. This situation may become a cause to disturbed law and order conditions in a society and increased ethnic violence and riots.

Perceived Grievances And Deprivation of Ethnic Group Members:



Analyzing the phenomenon further one finds that the frightening experiences of individuals however become a lasting reason of ethnic basis. These frightening experiences might be due to grim economic pressures of population growth, inflation and unemployment and if they persist during a given period, they aggravate the perceived grievances and deprivations of ethnic group members.

Now we see that modernization also mobilizes social and ethnic stratification and divides a society into politico-cultural collectivities.

- **Social and political changes** in a society sometimes create a sense of alienation and loss of identity among the people. Consequently they try to revive their social status by strengthening their particular community. In this way modernization leads to ethnic uprisings and the deprived groups demand the promotion of their religious and cultural values.

- Lack of good governance, political instability and economic upheavals further aggravate the deprivation of ethnic groups.
- Opprobrious relations among ethnic groups become a cause for the problems of national integration. The serious implications of its non-resolution weaken the integrity of the pluralistic society such groups identify themselves as a part of their respective region, religion or language.

- Ethnic consciousness of the people does not remain confined to cultural traditions, sentiments and interests but it gradually penetrates towards ethnic chauvinism and genocide.
- It also creates the problems of social divisiveness and tensions at the national level which impedes the way to national reconciliation.
- On the other hand governments policies are oriented towards the politics of vote - banks and to foster inter - communal riots then the process of national integration and political development losses its credibility.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ETHNICITY AND NATIONALISM:

- Nationalism is an awareness of membership in a nation (potential or actual) together with a desire to achieve, maintain and perpetuate the identity, integrity, prosperity and power of that nation.
- Nationalism as an ideology refers to a “state mind” a psychological condition in which one’s supreme loyalty is to a nation. It involves a belief in the intrinsic superiority of one nation over all other nations. The important point is the psychological condition of beliefs.

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 to such an extent even to secede from the union of the state.

- While ethnicity may reflect the demands of the ethnic group to get maximum autonomy within the state. There are different aspects of nationalism.

- If the glorification of nation entails annexation of other people or conquest of other countries, then we shall call it **expansive nationalism i.e** the nationalism of Nazi Germany was expansive, entailing attempts to conquer and dominate other peoples.

It is of course quite possible for one type of nationalism to be transformed into another. For example German nationalism of the twentieth century was a transformation of the nineteenth century formative nationalism. There are three important factors, which influence the phenomenon of nationalism in any state:

Politics, economy and culture. In **politics** the focus is on power, those who achieve power command political structures. But those who are not in power become challengers to those in power.

If politics is about power in relation to the state, the **economy** concerns material interests of individuals, firms, trade unions, classes, regions, nations and so on. If economic power in a state is seen to be based on “internal colonialism”, in such a state the economic opportunities of ethnic and national groups are deliberately stratified, with one group on the top and others arranged hierarchically below it. This takes the form of “relatively deprivation.”

It depends upon how **cultural developments** have contributed to the rise of the ethnic and social nationalism.

- So an ethnic group goes through different stages and after reaching a particular stage it does not remain fixed in it permanently. It moves up and down these stages showing different degrees of intensity of ethno nationalism.
- It shows that Ethnicity is not a static phenomenon. It develops and declines. Both its development and decline occur in a particular set of conditions and in response to internal and external changes in a society.

STAGES OF ETHNICITY:

ETHNIC SELF-AWARENESS

Ethnic self-awareness, ethnic identity, ethnic solidarity or the sense of belonging to a specific ethnic group (the concepts are to be used interchangeably) are subjective feelings and different from other groups. Ethnic consciousness is a variable and not evenly distributed among all its members. It becomes stronger as the group becomes politicized but sometimes it starts weakening when it does not succeed to put forward its demands.

- As the ethnic group moves from lower stages to a higher stage, the quality of consciousness also changes. If it is already negative, ethnocentric and close, these attributes become further accentuated. If it is open, tolerant and outward directed, it loses some of these characteristics and undergoes a qualitative change.
- Ethnic awareness changes due to internal and external factors to the ethnic group. The internal factors relate to what is unique about the group i.e language ,religion etc. The external factors are located in the society in which the group is situated.

- As far as the external factors are concerned the ethnic self-awareness is also activated by the inflow of immigrants of other ethnic groups in an area occupied by an ethnic group leading to competition for the resources with the members of the pre-existing ethnic group e.g. the rise of MQM in Pakistan during early 80's representing the demands of Mohajir immigrants.
- Ethnic self-awareness is also promoted by the transnational linkages of an ethnic group.

SELF EVALUATION

- The stage of self-evaluation and self-awareness are dependent on each other. Both stages can occur simultaneously. Self-evaluation can be with reference to a group's past position relative to the past or current positions of significant ethnic groups in the power and social structure. This may lead a group either to conclude that it was losing its past privileged position or not.
- An ethnic group can evaluate its situation by using a new set of norms for distribution of power and privileges. The above discussion indicates, self-evaluation of an ethnic group which can lead it to a different set of conclusions leading to the adoption of different strategies for dealing with the situation.

DEMANDS FOR EQUALITY

At the third stage of ethno nationalism the central demand of a dissatisfied ethnic group is equality, which can take two forms:

- Ethnic groups also demand to be accepted as separate identities when they feel the encroachment of their culture, then they start agitation for their cultural survival against the dominant group.
- Demand for political equality, equal share in 'national' power, equal right to participate in national political institutions vis-à-vis other ethnic groups. This demand can itself be an end in some cases but political equality is strived for by a subordinate ethnic group as a means for achieving other goals and values such as protection of its cultural heritage, language, right to use economic resources lying in its 'territory' and seek educational, job and other opportunities denied to it.

The ethnic groups also try to strengthen themselves because the success of struggle for ethnic equality by an ethnic group depends on different factors like

- Degree of solidarity of the group.
- Nature of the political system and its response to such demand.
- Quality of ethnic consciousness.

Along with it the type of elite also plays an important role in promoting ethnicity or national integrity. As long as ethnicity is not politicized, the national and the ethnic elite in power as well as those in opposition manage to create a certain degree of unity among them. However, once ethnicity assumes political salience and ethno-national movements develop, a sharp bifurcation develops between the elite in power and the elite in opposition.

DEMAND FOR POLITICAL AUTONOMY

If an ethnic group fails in its attempt to achieve equality, it may demand political autonomy. Like political equality the demand for autonomy may consist of several sub-demands, which may include the following:

- Changing a unitary political system into a federal one.
- Redistribution of central and local powers through changes in constitution, conferring more political power or autonomy to political sub-units (besides gaining ethnic political equality, such a demand is made when the over centralization of power in central government occurs and poor performances of the bureaucratic apparatus and its corrupt practices create administrative difficulties and personal inconveniences for an ethnic group.

- To create a new political sub-unit in which the ethnic group has a numerical majority.
- Breaking up an existing political sub-unit into two or more units to ensure numerical majority for the dissatisfied ethnic group.

The response of a state to an ethnic demand depends on whether it is democratic pluralist or authoritarian - Unitarian. The first generally accommodates and the second generally rejects ethnic demands. If the state decides to reject the demand for political autonomy or creation of a new sub-unit, it may confront an explosive ethnic problem.

BLUFF SECESSION

- If the demand for a separate political sub-unit or the demand for greater autonomy for the existing sub-unit is not accepted, the group may adopt the strategy for a 'bluff' secession.
- The bluff secession is a threat used to extract concessions or acceptance of demands. If bluff secession is correctly understood by the rulers they may decide to negotiate and bargain with the elite of the ethnic group. This is more likely to happen in a democratic system than an authoritarian one. If these negotiations succeed, the ethnic group may give up some of its demands in exchange for concessions on other demands.

SECESSION

If the strategy of 'bluff' secession fails then the ethnic group has two options:

- a. To revert to its demand for autonomy.
- b. To move to the stage of actual secession if prospects of its success seem reasonable.

Actual secession is an indication that the seceding ethnic group has ceased to recognize the legitimacy of the larger political community. All democratic and authoritarian states respond to attempted secession by using force to prevent it. If the state succeeds in controlling secessions, it may get a temporary reprieve from ethnic problems. Otherwise the ethnic conflict will reemerge overtime and in case of success of the ethnic group a new nation state comes into being.

- While concluding we can say that ethnic consciousness once formed persists over time and exercises an independent effect on the development of ethnicity and its movement through various stages. it is shaped by the characteristics of a society. The policies of forcing assimilation on subordinate ethnic groups are likely to produce opposite results, i.e. stimulation of ethno nationalism.

THEORIES OF ETHNICITY

a. INTERACTIONIST THEORY

Spicer is the main exponent of this theory. According to this theory ethnicity emerges only when there is absence of interaction among the group. If these ethnic groups are given equal participation then there will be harmony in a society, there will be lesser chance of conflict and there will be more national integration. Otherwise lack of interaction gives momentum to ethnic conflicts and consequently it hampers the way of national integration.

b. ISOLATIONIST THEORY

Some political scientists believe that ethnicity emerges only in the absence of communication and interface.

They reasoned that ethnic groups who were able would adopt the ways of dominant society and cease to be ethnics, other did not assimilate and did not actively resist the dominant society would persist in their own cultural ways and thus isolate themselves artificially from the rest of the society. The isolationists assume that those resisted would either cease to exist in the struggle or would be forcibly isolated from society.

c. SOCIOBIOLOGICAL THEORY

According to this research human infants and animals both are afraid of strangers. It suggests that there is biological and evolutionary basis of ethnic behavior. They are of the view that humans are genetically predisposed to ethnocentrism. Van Den Bergh advocated this theory.