

# Primordialism

Lecture Delivered

By

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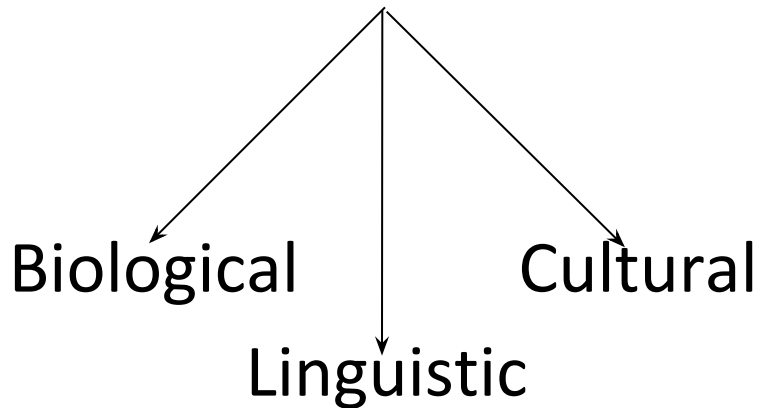
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## Primordialism: -

- It refers to ancient beginnings, evolution of human relations and blood ties.
- If we divide the study of ethnic conflicts and nationalism into two camps “old” and “new” then primordialism would be the older one.
- According to the proponents ethnicity is historically rooted.
- It is fixed and can not be changed.
- Primordialism is also associated with natural boundaries because ethnic groups are restricted by mountains, rivers and forests.
- Physical features define the homelands of specific ethnic group i.e. Indus river and Indus valley civilization are symbolic to indigenous Sindhis.

- The post cold war era depicts multiple ethnic conflicts.
- These conflicts were on the basis of peculiar characteristics of ethnic groups i.e. language, religion and region.
- Even various states fought and waged wars against each other for the purpose of ethnic cleansing. i.e. Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia etc. after the disintegration of Soviet empire.
- Although majority of the scholars reject the phenomenon of primordial ties but still it is considered as the basic “pull factor” regarding ethnicity in modern times.
- The proponents of this theory perceive that the concept of nationalism and ethnicity are not new, these are as old as human history.

- They believe that primordial ethnic ties are persistent and can never be ended. i.e. cold war generated more ethnic groups viz a viz more ethnic conflicts.
- The disintegration of empires or states further accentuated rather revived ethnic conflicts.
- Ethnic identities are determined at the time of birth. These are ascriptive traits.
- Dimensions of Primordialism



- Biological dimension of primordialism refers to the ethnic identification inherent in biology of human beings.
- It is natural to have propensity to support the same ethnic group member or kinship.
- There is a general predisposition to favor the same ethnic group even across the state boundaries.
- The proponents of this paradigm also stresses on the purity of the particular species.
- Infact they promote ethno-centrism (superiority of one's ethnic group).
- There is also an important aspect of biological primordialism i.e. in-group and out-group.
- In group tends to favor the same community having biases against the “others” or out group. For example the ongoing wave of extremism in India.

- The proponents claim that ethnocentrism is fundamental to the survivability of in-group.
- It shows the rigidity of the primordial ties which promotes the power of ethno-centrism.
- Another important dimension of Primordialism is cultural one. In this perspective Clifford Geertz and Edward Shils emphasize the cultural markers (language, religion, customs) as foundational identity.
- Common culture strengthens bonding among people. It sometimes becomes more important for the ethnic group than the state loyalties.
- Infect ethnic ties supersede the state and in the present age of globalization trans-national cultural ties have become quite significant.

- Modern means of communication and technology, educational institutions, religious associations are the powerful transmitters of cultural identities.
- The third important dimension of primordialism is linguistic. Language is a universal cultural identity.
- According to famous anthropologist Laponce, linguistic competition leads towards ethnic conflict. i.e. Urdu vs Bengali in Pakistan.
- Language is critical for setting political agendas and constructing identities.
- Distinct languages define the borders of ethnicity.

## Soft Primordialism and Neo- Primordialism : -

- Soft primordialism refers to common origin and a myth of common homeland i.e. Americans have developed a sense of common identity while living in a single state. Although they belong to different ethnic groups. They have ancestral background. But they share a common belief of Americanism.
- Common homeland disappears the distinct ethnic identities and merge them into a single melting pot.
- Infact according to soft primordialists like Walker Connor, the myth of common homeland diffuses the ethnic differences. This is a process of assimilation.
- Apart from all these diverse aspects of Primordialism, there is another dimension “Neo Primordialism”.



→ It is based on the notion of clash of civilization presented by Samuel Huntington.

→ The post cold war era reflects the fault lines among nations on the basis of religion.

Islam vs West (The stunt of terrorism is used to defame Islam). Religious sentiments prop up ethnic diversities.

Instrumentalism : -

→ This school of thought views that ethnicity means to achieve some specific political ends. It depends upon the political goals of an ethnic group rather than blood ties.

→ Instrumental ethnic identities are malleable or changeable.

→ Ethnic groups keep on changing different classes and groups in the pursuit of their political motives. For example during the election campaign of Clinton during 1992, (U.S presidential elections) the image was built up that

belonging to a working class family grew or flourished without any privileges. It contributed to strengthen his vote bank even in the working class.

- Indeed the political representative or elite (power wielders) try to manipulate the circumstances to maximize the advantage.
- In this connection the leaders also use certain symbols i.e. language, culture, common political agenda etc. to mobilize the people. i.e. during Pakistan movement the symbols of Urdu language, Islam religion.
- Similarly during 1930s the presence of flag (the swastika) and the presence of a large of German people at Nazi party events were all instances of using symbols to unify the people.

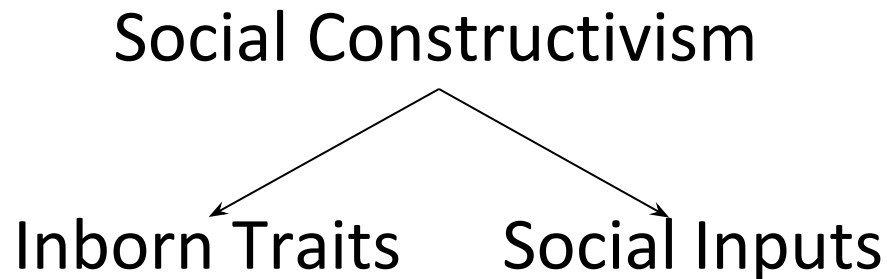
- Then example of Hindu - Muslim unity during 1915-16. Lukhnow pact. Historical antecedent in the context of instrumental ethnic identities.
- Some instrumentalists assert that sometimes individuals keep affiliation with distinct groups, professional organizations, interest groups or NGOs to achieve their particular goals i.e. (power, wealth or fame).
- Sometimes the pursuance of political motives leads towards the establishment of certain organizations i.e. the establishment of All India Muslim League in 1906.
- Here the role of leadership becomes more pronounced regarding the mobilization of ethnic movements.
- Moreover Paul Brass has made research on Indian society which is quite complex in terms of ethnic and linguistic identities.

He concludes that elite can both create ethnic groups and transform them.

- Paul Brass also believes that the conflicts between the ethnic elites generate ethnic conflicts within a state.
- Competing interests of religious elites also escalate conflicts i.e. Shia-Sunni conflicts.
- Sometimes elites have their own vested interests i.e. self aggrandizement or lust for power for which they manipulate the people to win the power struggle.
- For example Nazi German's goals was to blame Jews for the economic devastation after WW-1. They promoted Aryan ethnic group as the best one and expelled the Jews.
- Different tools are used to resonate instrumental ethnic identities i.e. media, protest demonstrations, interest group etc.

## Social Constructivism: -

- Social constructivism focuses on the fluid nature of ethnic identities.
- Social and economic factors mold ethnic identities.
- The proponents of this school of thought not only addresses the objectives of ethnic groups but also their origin.
- They view all factors i.e. language, religion, physical characteristics are important to create ethnic identities.
- People choose their ethnic identities based on social, political, economic and biological conditions.



- The social constructivists believe that due to the rapid social change and the process of globalization the nature of ethnic identity has subsequently changed.
- Sometimes people have multiple ethnic identities like we are Pakistani, Punjabi, Kashmiri or something else.
- Moreover the ethnic choices and preferences depend upon the circumstances.

### Group Formation and Disappearance: -

- Social constructivists also view that ethnic groups sometimes merge into a larger ethnic group.
- i.e. In New York city once the German immigrants were quite influential but now their separate identity has vanished. They have merged. They choose the alternative identity as Americans. Now they are no more politically or socially distinct from others.

	Primordialist	Instrumentalist	Social Constructivist
Origin of Identity	Innate and ancient.	Manipulated and varied in time.	A combination of innate characteristics and socially generated myths.
Goals of ethnic groups	Undefined	Political and economic gain.	Various
Role of Leaders	Undefined	Critical in defining goals.	-
Ethnicity attribute of	Group	Individual	Group
Ethnicity viewed as conflictual or neutral	Conflictual	Conflictual	Neutral
Expiration of identities	-	Can disappear when no longer politically expedient.	Can disappear for variety of reasons.

## Rational Choice Theory: -

- This theory of ethnicity refers to the prediction of people's behavior. It has two assumptions:
  - i) It is possible to identify the people's preferences and choices.
  - ii) People always try to maximize self interest.
- Rational choice theory magnifies the role of an individual while choosing his or her ethnic identity.

## Group Theory: -

- This theory of ethnicity refers to the dynamics and social construction of an ethnic group.
- There are two dimensions of ethnic groups in-group and out-group.



- In-group shows the shared psychological attachments. While out-group shows distinct ethnic identities. i.e. Americans promote American products, Cultural superiority.
- Similarly the Romans considered themselves as superior to others. In the territories under Roman Control, the ethnic Romans were the most privileged ones than the other ethnic groups.
- Out-groups are also recognized as oppositional groups because if the powerful groups dominate them then they get merged in them otherwise they confront the in-groups. In this way disagreement or dissidence occur between in-group and out-group which leads towards ethnic conflict between indigenous groups and immigrants.

## Competition Theory: -

- The contextual analysis of ethnicity shows that in-group and out-group phenomenon creates a competitive environment.
- This competition might be due to power struggle, resources, representation etc.

## Ethnicity in a Globalized World – Impacts of Modernization: -

- The proglobalist proponents assert that modernization has neutralized ethnic identities. The global interests and market forces have diffused ethno-nationalistic tendencies.
- On the other hand various scholars contended that Globalization has evoked regionalism and ethnic consciousness.

→ Therefore ethnicity still exists due to the internal dynamics of ethnic groups.

Development Perspective	Active Ethnicity Perspective
-Strong market forces.	-Prominent ethnic distinctions.
-Fragile ethnic identities.	

→ The developmental perspective encompasses that global culture configuration has diluted the polities of local cultures.

→ The proponents perceive the global culture as the “unitary high culture” or “western culture” which fade away the local cultural identities.

→ Similarly the globalists envisage the emergence of “universal homogenous culture”.

- While the nationalists or Marxists assert that class struggle has reduced the significance of ethnicity since the working class has unified against the repercussions of capitalism which endeavors to assimilate all diversities.
- Infact ethnicity has taken the shape of class conflict.  
Proletariat vs Bourgeoisies.
- The development of capitalism specially in the modern age of globalization has accentuated ethnic aspirations.

→ The process of Modernization Embodies

Historical Dimension

Normative Dimension

British Revolution Industrialization  
1760-1830

Third world getting  
modernized through

+

French Revolution (1789-1794)

western values and  
culture.

→



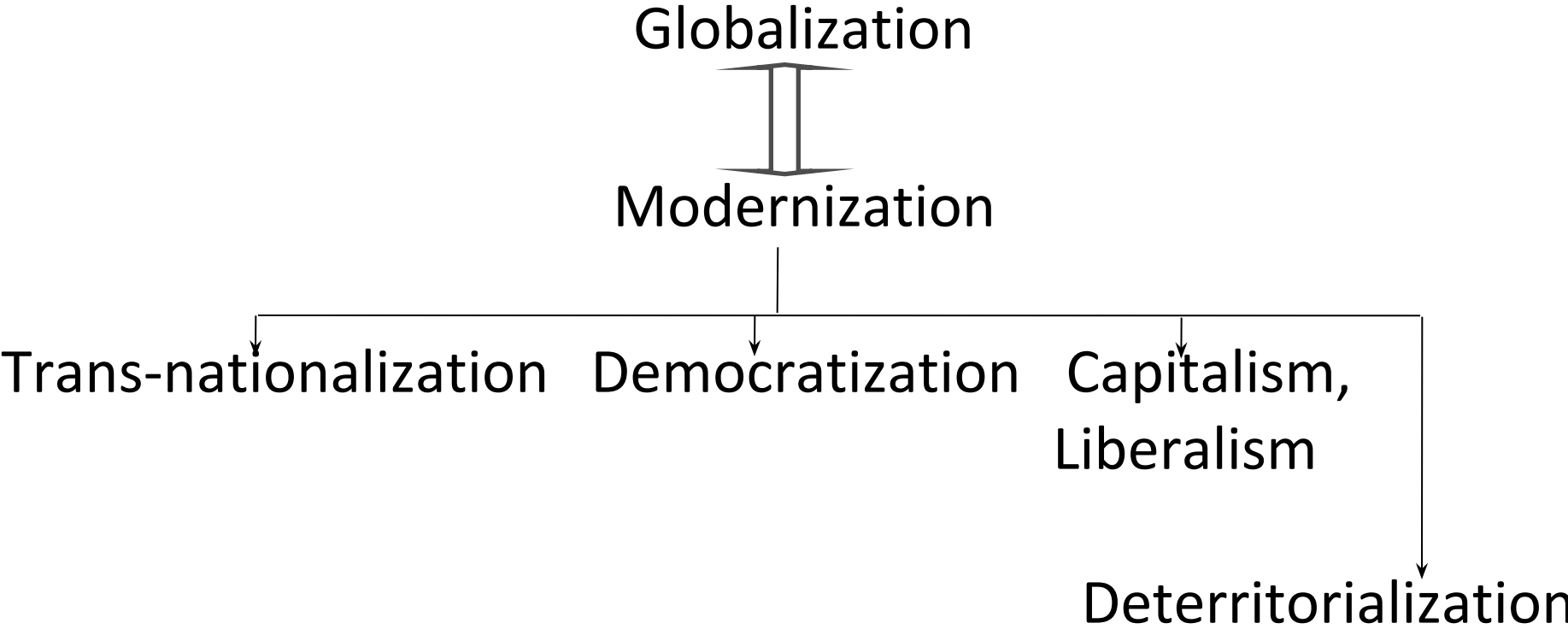
Modernization

Scientific logical  
Democratization  
Reasoning

Capitalism

Technological  
advancement

→ According to sociologists like Max Weber and Conor, all the elements of modernization are pervasive and holistic in nature. They have revolutionized the entire anatomy of the world.



- Infect all the indicators of modernization or globalization correspond each other and reflect the process of rationalization.
- Indeed, all the states are acquiring these values to be a part of globalized world i.e. the socialist state like China adopted the policies like “open door” in trade to promote liberalism and achieve the target of technological advancement.

Modern organizations, modern phenomena, universalism, cosmopolitanism are permeating all over the world while merging regional identities.

To counter global forces the “active ethnicity perspective” becomes assertive. It carries two dimensions:



Cultural Construct

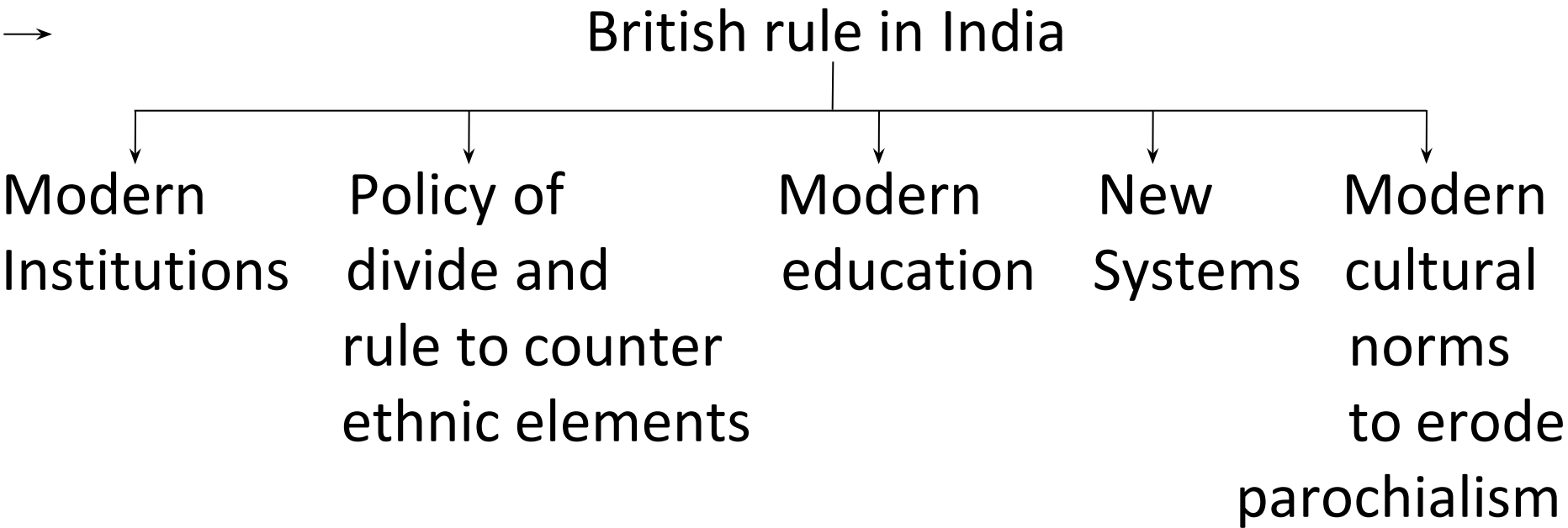
Situational Construct

- The proponents of regionalism are of the view that the process of globalization is curbing regional cultural markers i.e. language, religion.
- The modernization in the name of globalization is prevailing only single culture (western culture English language) and the secular values.
- While situational construct refers to the ethnic assertion in a multi ethnic competitive societies.
- Infect ethnicity pertains primordialism and utilitarianism (collective good)

Modernization	Ethnicity
i) Universalism	i) Particularism
ii) Overwhelming power erasing ethnic distinctions.	ii) Ascription
	iii) Collective interest of the group.



→ The case study of United India to explore the relationship between modernization and ethnicity.



- But British policies of unification of India could not last long. Centrifugal ethnic forces disrupted or revolted against the British imperial power.
- On the other hand the pro-globalist forces believe that modernization greatly impacted upon ethnic forces through modern institutions, urbanization (which led people to move from their native towns to big metropolitan cities for better opportunities).
- India after 1947, emerged as secular, plural state. Initially Indian leadership adopted the policies of ethnic accommodation to satisfy all ethnic groups.
- But the phenomenon of Hindu ethno-centerism remained strong which resulted in the emergence of ethnic movements in almost 20 provinces.

- Ethno-nationalism in India is a reaction to Indian Nationalism and the marginalization of ethnic communities.
- Khalistan Movement in Indian Punjab was a reaction to centralization.