ETHNIC DIVERSITY IN INDIA: A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

DR. FAROOQ AHMAD RATHER

Abstract: Ethnic diversity in India is a multifaceted issue to be dealt with. Though there are over a hundred nationalities living in the country but the stratification of the society in India has always been bipolar – Muslim and Hindus. Yet the economic status, level of education, language, and the related issues are sometimes adding to the diversity / stratification of the peoples of India. Nevertheless the Muslims of the country has complained what has been put forward by the much famous Sachar Committee Report and the like disabilities. Therefore the management of the affairs of the national minorities in the state has been tackled in such a way so as to maintain the inter-ethnic harmony among its various nationalities. In this paper an attempt has been made to throw light on the theoretical framework of the ethnicity and ethnic diversity in India.

Keywords: Ethnicity, Diversity, Migration, India, Minority.

Introduction: It is not the great race that makes the civilization, it is the great civilization that makes the people; circumstances, geographical and economic, create a culture, and the culture creates a type. Therefore ethnicity to ethnic category is what class consciousness is to a class. Ethnicity and its related issues have become so visible in many modern societies that it has become very much impossible to ignore them. After the independence of India, the foremost question to be dealt with was the question of ethnicity and ethnic diversity in the post-independent states of India.

Since the entire the Indian subcontinent including Pakistan and Bangladesh are in the grip of hectic nation-building amidst rising ethnic assertions, an attempt has been made here to examine the role of ethnicity in India in theoretical prospective.

Ethnicity derived from the Greek word *ethnos,* meaning "people" or "nation", (writing in the 1970's Glazer and Moynihan argued that "ethnicity seems to be a new term", pointing to the fact that the word's earlies dictionary appearance is in the Oxford English Dictionary in 1972. Its first usage is attributed to the US sociologist, David Riesman in 1953) has been defined differently. By dictionary meaning it is an identity with a particular racial, national or cultural group and the observance of that group's customs, beliefs and language, refers to a combination of both biological (inheritance added superior opportunity to superior possessions, and stratified ones homogeneous societies into a maze of classes and castes) and cultural attributes. It has been defined variously by different academicians but the commonly accepted meaning of the term is given by Sponley as "the positive feelings of belonging to a cultural group". Social scientists, Shibulani Warner and Kwan consider ethnic characteristics as derived from common descent and have denied role of culture in it while as Glucknam, Mitchel and Epstein put emphasis on culture as the basis of ethnicity. Despress has defined ethnicity as a mechanism for social organization of competition over resources in the context of plural societies. According to Parsons, "ethnicity is a primary focus of group identity, that is, the organization of plural persons into distinctive groups and of solidarity and the loyalties of individual members to such groups. The members of the ethnic group have a distinctive identity of their own which is rooted in a distinctive sense of its history- this identity is basic to the idea of ethnicity". Morris defined that ethnic group may be based on the criteria of race of cultures or nationality. Max Weber called ethnic groups as "those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or of both or because of memories of colonization or migration". Nayak says the term ethnicity refers to a combination of both biological and cultural attributes while Schermerhorn calls the term *ethnie* (or ethnic community), "a named human population with myths of common ancestry, shared historical past/memories, one or more elements of common culture, a link with a homeland and a sense of solidarity among at least some of its elite members". The term ethnicity was for the first time explained in 1953 in the Oxford English Dictionary as quality of belonging to an ethnic or cultural community or group. It has following six main features:

a) A proper name, to identify and express the essence of the community.

b) A myth of common ancestry, a myth rather than a fact, a myth that includes the idea of a common origin in time and place and that gives an ethnie a sense of fictive kinship; Horowitz termed it as a "super family".

c) Shared historical memories, or better, shared memories of a common past or pasts, including hero's, events, and their commemoration.

d) One or more elements of common culture, which needs to be specified but normally includes religion, custom, or language.

e) A link with a homeland, not necessarily its physical occupation by the ethnie, only its symbolic attachment to the ancestral land, as with diaspora peoples.

f) A sense of solidarity on the part of at least some sections of the ethnies population.

Ethnicity, according to Devos, is a sense of ethnic identity which is consisting of the subjective, symbolic or emblematic use of culture by a group of people to differentiate themselves from other groups in the society. This feeling of group solidarity and togetherness, sharing common symbols and a structure of discourse are supposed to provide the intimate cohesion that is essential for a distinct ethnic identity. In recent years, the concept of ethnicity has been advanced as a generic term conversing conflict and tension arising out of the cultural diversity in a territorial state.

Ethnic identity is usually contextual and situational because it derives from social negotiations where one declares an ethnic identity and then demonstrates acceptable and acknowledged ethnic group markers to others. One's ethnic declaration often is open to the scrutiny of others who may validate or invalidate the declaration. Ethnic declarations embody an ethnic consciousness that is closely aligned with the cultural elements of the ethnic group with which they affiliate. The ultimate form of one's ethnic consciousness is the genuine association of one's personal identification with a communal one. Thus it is logical to assume that a concordance would exist between personal identity and an outsider's sense of identity where the importance is placed on one's own categories and intention of self-identification. To promote the union between self and other, individuals often will use ethnological speech patterns and gestures to promote the authenticity of their claim. If outward physical appearances do not mesh with the standard physical criteria or there is the sense that others doubt the identity claim ethnic actors will tend to exaggerate and give emphasis to mannerisms and speech idiosyncrasies known to be particular and specific to the reference group. This ritual or stylistic emphasis frequently occurs, too, when ethnic group members meet or gather in geographic areas that differ from their homelands or communities of common origin. The distinctive ritual is a prime example of situational ethnicity and situated ethnic identity.

Race, as a social concept, is a group of people who share similar and distinct physical characteristics. First used to refer to speakers of a common language and then to denote national affiliations, by the 17th century race began to refer to physical (i.e. phenotypical) traits. Starting from the 19th century, the term was often used in a taxonomic sense to denote genetically differentiated human populations defined by phenotype.

Nation has various meanings, and the meaning has changed over time. The concept of "nation" is related to "ethnic community" or *ethnie*. An ethnic community often has a myth of origins and descent, a common history, elements of distinctive culture, a common territorial association, and sense of group solidarity. A nation is, by comparison, much more impersonal, abstract, and overtly political than an ethnic group. It is a cultural-political community that has become conscious of its coherence, unity, and particular interests.

The nation has been described by Benedict Anderson as an "imagined community" and by Paul James as an "abstract community". It is an imagined community in the sense that the material conditions exist for imagining extended and shared connections. It is an abstract community in the sense that it is objectively impersonal, even if each individual in the nation experiences him or herself as subjectively part of an embodied unity with others. For the most part, members of a nation remain strangers to each other and will never likely meet. Hence the phrase, "a nation of strangers" used by such writers as Vance Packard.

Though the concept of ethnicity or the identification of oneself with a particular group developed after the World War II but the sense of kinship, group solidarity and common culture, to which it means, is as old as history itself. Since then societal fragmentation based on ethnicity is a global phenomenon, it became a matter of priority areas among the academic circles. In the early 20th century, some social scientists held that ethnicity and ethnic diversity would decrease in importance and eventually vanish in the years to come as a result of modernization and industrialization. But this theory did not came true. In fact, after the World War II politics of ethnic identity gained more currency all around the globe. Presently the ethnic issues like ethnic identity, ethnic diversity, ethnic conflicts, etc are the burning issues among many societies in the contemporary world. The basic question in all these issues remains the inter-ethnic relationship between the groups of people of different places, cultures and religions living in common political boundaries of a state. This relationship varies from place to place depending upon certain factors such as historicity, political process and socio-economic setup of the place they live in. As Will Durant put it, "everywhere man is born in chains: the chains of heredity, of environment, of customs, and of law". However, this relationship ranges from a relatively harmonious to that of antagonistic and open hostility.

Though all the nationalities of India do not share all these things distinctively, however, the Hindus and

the Muslims are the two main groups of the country, Hindus, the titular nationality and the Muslims the largest ethnic minority. Since ethnicity delimits the social circles in a heterogeneous population, yet Hindi still spoken by majority of population in India binds them together as a homogeneous group.

Thus the ethnic group that "uses cultural symbols in this way is a subjectively self-conscious community that establishes criteria for inclusion in to and exclusion from the group-ethnicity in addition to status and recognition either as a superior group or as a group equal to other groups".

Main Ethnic Groups in India: India is a fascinating country where people of many different communities and religions live together in unity. Indian Population is polygenetic and is an amazing amalgamation of various races and cultures.

It is impossible to find out the exact origin of Indian People. The species known as Ramapithecus was found in the Siwalik foothills of north western Himalayas. The species believed to be the first in the line of hominids (Human Family) lived some 14 million years ago. Researchers have found that a species resembling the Austrapithecus lived in India some 2 million years ago. Even this discovery leaves an evolutionary gap of as much as 12 million years since Ramapithecus.

There are many diverse ethnic groups among the people of India. The 6 main ethnic groups are as follows.

1. Negrito
2. Proto - Australoids or Austrics
3. Mongoloids
4. Mediterranean or Dravidian
5. Western Brachycephals
6. Nordic Aryans

Negroids: The Negritos or the Brachycephalic (broad headed) from Africa were the earliest people to have come to India. They have survived in their original habitat in Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The Jarawas, Onges, Sentinelese and the Great Andamanese are some of the examples. Some hill tribes like Irulas, Kodars, Paniyans and Kurumbas are found in some patches in Southern part of mainland India.

Pro-Australoids or Austrics: These groups were the next to come to India after the Negritos. They are people with wavy hair lavishly distributed all over their brown bodies, long headed with low foreheads and prominent eye ridges, noses with low and broad roots, thick jaws, large palates and teeth and small chins. The Austrics of India represent a race of medium height, dark complexion with long heads and rather flat noses but otherwise of regular features. Miscegenation with the earlier Negroids may be the reason for the dark or black pigmentation of the skin and flat noses.

The Austrics laid the foundation of Indian civilization. They cultivated rice and vegetables and made sugar from sugarcane. Now these people are found in some parts of India, Myanmar and the islands of South East Asia. Their languages have survived in the Central and Eastern India.

Mongoloids: These people are found in the North eastern part of India in the states of Assam, Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, and Tripura. They are also found in Northern parts of West Bengal, Sikkim, and Ladakh. Generally they are people with yellow complexion, oblique eyes, high cheekbones, sparse hair and medium height.

Dravidians: These are the people of South India. They have been believed to come before the Aryans. They have different sub-groups like the Paleo-Mediterranean, the true Mediterranean, and the Oriental Mediterranean. They appear to be people of the same stock as the peoples of Asia Minor and Crete and pre- Hellenic Aegean's of Greece. They are reputed to have built up the city civilization of the Indus valley, whose remains have been found at Mohenjo- daro and Harappa and other Indus cities.

Western Bracycephals: These include the Alpinoids, Dinarics and Armenoids. The Parsis and Kodavas also fall in this category. They are the broad headed people living mainly on the western side of the country such as the Ganga Valley and the delta, parts of Kashmir, Kathiawar, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.

Nordics or the Indo-Aryans: This group were the last one to immigrate to India. They came to India somewhere between 2000 and 1500 B.C. They are now mainly found in the northern and central part of India.

Nevertheless Indian was divided by the Britishers on the basis of Religion into India and Pakistan.

The diverse ethnic stock in the independent states necessarily were required to forget ethnic conflicts for the sake of nation-buildings, even when the regimes used and misused their established positions for the extension of their own powers. The ethnic diversity in India offers a challenging task for nation building if the dominant ethnos of Hindu and Muslim are not regarded as cultural collective identity.

There are two prominent views regarding the rise and growth of ethnic diversity; constructivist and primordial. According to the constructivist view, the ethnic diversity is primarily a product of recent state formation processes during modernity; and according to the primordial view, it has deep roots in history and culture and as such should be analyzed in an evolutionary framework. Constructivists held ethnic identification or ethnic diversity as a socially constructive phenomena appearing during modern times for the purpose of uniting desperate nations into states, while as the primordialists argue that

ethnic identification is a natural and indeed rational behavior that has existed throughout history. Thus according to the modern primordial view, the origin of ethnic diversity is as old as the civilization. With the passage of time it developed into nation-states with distinct historical legacy, geography, culture, religions, languages, customs and traditions, etc.

Earlier the scholars like Shirokogorov, Hev Gumilev, Yulian Bromley and others gave "Soviet theory of ethnos" which remained a dominant theoretical paradigm for the study of ethnicity in former Soviet Union. According to Shirokogorov, "the ethnos are a group of people, speaking the same language, who recognize their shared heritage and have a shared complex of social mores, mode of life, retained and sanctified traditions which differentiate them from other groups". According to the constructivist view, the rise of sedentary agriculture and a more stratified society was soon followed by the emergence of states. An ethnic group, thus, has two basic features; shared/common history or ancestry (homeland, migration or settlement of new territory), and cultural commonality, which is manifested in common religion, language, and customs and traditions. Perhaps there must be some unity of some basic beliefs, some faith, supernatural or utopian, that lifts morality from calculation to devotion, and gives life nobility and significance despite our moral brevity. And finally there must be education-some technique, however primitive, for the transmission of culture. Whether through imitation, initiation or instruction, whether through father or mother, teacher or priest, the lore and heritage of tribe-its language and knowledge, its morals and manners, its technology and arts-must be handed down to the young, as the very instrument through which they are turned from animals into men.

Disputing Primordial assertions Constructionists stressed on social and political elements in constructing ethnicity and ethnic identity. For Max Webber, ethnic groups are human groups whose belief in a common ancestry is so strong that it leads to the creation of community. Ethnicity on the contrary should be viewed as the social and political creation of elites, who draw upon, distort and sometimes fabricate materials from the cultures of the groups they wish to represent in order to protect their wellbeing or to gain political and economic advantage for their groups and for themselves. For critics such as Jack Eller, Reed Caughlam and others, Primordial perspective is aprioristic and asociological, reducing social phenomena to inherent bonds and thereby producing the possibility of explaining collective passions. Primordial perspective was further criticized for its failure to explain ethnic change, dissolution, inter-ethnic marriage and immigration in the modern world. For

Constructionists ethnicity is a modern phenomena which has a tendency to emerge and re-emerge as a result of changing power structures. In its construct elite and ethnic entrepreneurs play an important role in manipulating cultural markers of language, religion, shared memories to rationalize the identity and organization of a particular ethnie. These elites produce subjective visions of social world. In its manipulations language turns out to be the most symbolic component of ethnic distinctiveness. Although the later versions of social constructionist perspective were such sophisticated as propounded by Abner Cohen, Micheal Heehter and Micheal Banton which altogether rejected normative structuralist explanations and emphasized malleability of ethnic ties, however, such models fail to account for mass passions evoked by ethnic ties and cultural symbols. Both approaches lack something with regard to ethnic change and ethnic durability.

The vicissitudes of ethnic group and identity along with ethnic diversity demands a broader, comprehensive theoretical framework. Theory as a set of statements explains relationship between phenomena, which helps in organizing data in to a meaningful whole while ethnicity as a social reality is as old as civilization even if the study of ethnicity is a recent phenomena in major aspects of social sciences. Being new its precise boundaries and definitions are yet to be agreed upon. In the globalised world ethnic differences have not only surged forth with violence but are continuously being asserted through typical social mechanisms. They have seriously undermined optimistic homogenizing tendencies of modernization and globalization. Even then social scientists still wonder what ethnies are or more pointedly what they are not.

The general observation of theoretical review shows that most of the theoretical perspective do not take into account the larger and comprehensive view, but rather concentrate on selected aspects of social reality. Whether it is dominant, structural functional, conflict interactionist or social exchange perspectives, none of them can apply exclusively to ethnicity or comprehend its dynamics in toto.

Their application is determined by unique socio-cultural and politico-economic models. Though very significant as these approaches have been, should however, be taken as points of departure only. Most often these have proved appropriate for western societies while as "contours of social existence are by and large similar across borders, however there is always a contextual variations... that makes each one of these unique in a number of respects. The unique cultural context has significant implications for determining psychology disposition for social action". Ethnic diversity of India though similar in many

respects to the other South Asian countries or many other countries across the globe, is unique, given its demographic composition, shared history of distinct ethnies, developmental plank, mutual stereotyping, dominant-dominated perceptions, majority-minority syndrome and above all the achievable nation building project. Therefore the need is for a generalized structural and social criteria, erecting an all embracing theory that could claim to be both comprehensive and universal, but unfortunately we lack such a design.

The problem with social science theorisation is that it (theory) is more like an impressionistic painting than a well defined blueprint. Despite all efforts it lacks coherence and clarity in theoretical portrait. Instead social theory per-se is a loose clustering of implicit assumptions, where in concept and statements hardly qualify for a paradigm. In real sense it is a general perspective or orientation for looking at various aspects of a social reality. Although sociological theorizing has been periodically criticized and elaborated, however sometimes problem is compounded by the crude blending of two or more approaches. Therefore there is a need for an alternative comprehensive theoretical framework wherein different perspectives are taken as different tools of analysis. The theoretical formulations of Functionalism, Conflict Interventionist and Exchange can be applied to specific aspect of ethnicity and ethnic diversity of India, but none of them can encompass the whole phenomenon exclusively unless these diverse approaches as they are, converge into a workable broader framework which leads to definitional and methodological problems, therefore, demands flexibility in formulation and application of research tools.

Three important dimensions with regard to ethnicity in India pose both theoretical and methodological problems.

1) That since 1960s there has been a plethora of literature and discourse material on ethnicity and ethnic diversity in sociology, anthropology and political science, mostly of Area Studies tradition. But as according to Ronald Cohan (1978) fewer of these who use the terms bother to define them, which confuses the object of enquiry and appropriate theoretical frame work. The present study is based, however, on the premise that ethnicity per se has (something) to do with the classification of people and group relations based on collective cultural identities.

2) In literature and common usage ethnicity has been glued to minority issues, nationalism and race relations. Although there is always an aspect of minority, sub national or race element in ethnicity and identity, however these are neither prerequisites nor dominant elements. Majorities are no less ethnic than minorities. Race is altogether a different phenomena, contested not only on its fundamental axiom i.e. heredity but on cultural variations within a race as well.

3) Thirdly the political referent, although not a necessary component in ethnie, was appended to Hindu group in 2014-15, when it virtually took physical possession of their historical territory and then got elevated in the BJP ruled states. Simultaneously Muslims and other ethnies began to stripped off the same. The newly elevated exhibit a macho type of activism in ethno-social and ethno-political endeavors.

As a matter of fact despite variations in theoretical approach concepts of cultural differences, majority-minority, conflict of interest, mutual stereotyping, power structure and social distance from the building blocks of most of the theoretical perspectives in present study of ethnic diversity, interaction and resultant social relations among culturally diverse ethnic groups forms the basis of social reality. All ethnic groups not withstanding their numerical strength qualification and relation to power structure belong to the same family of phenomena i,e collective cultural identities.

Ethnic diversity in essence is a social interaction, although cultural differences make it an ideal synopsis for conflict theorists who could see diverse groups contesting for scarce goods and services in the same space. In fact even if ethnic diversity is prone to conflicts, wherein two or more ethnies aspire to an outcome that the other is unwilling to provide, but in most of the social situations not only contending, but mutual yielding and 'problem solving' are other crucial aspects of ethnic strategy. Ethnicity in poly-ethnic societies presents a combination and often a sequence of these components and rarely is one strategy used to the exclusion of others. That is why despite contestation the rival groups often find a solution to settle disputes, dissolve conflict situations and give continuity to the established structure and system.

Ethnicity emerges and is made relevant through social interaction in social situations through a group's way of coping with the demands of day to day routine. Contrary to much popular notion, ethnic relations may and have been just as balanced and peaceful as they may be violent and volatile. Ethnic groups in India with differentiated cultures, customs and languages frequently interact in competitive labour markets and in politics on the basis of mutually approved norms of behavior.

Dichotomisation and complementerisation are complementary aspects of ethnic durability and ethnic interaction. While as the former stress on relative distinctiveness of ethnic groups, when different ethnies in a poly-ethnic social system

remain apart in many respects, the later focus upon aspects of relationships, mutual contacts and integration. Despite differences mutual interaction and interdependence develop through trade, exchange, specialization and services. Complementerisation first acknowledges ethnic differences and identity but simultaneously open up for interaction and inter-ethnic relationship.

Where dichotomisation essentially expresses an "Us-Them" type of relationship, complimenterisation can be described as "We-You" kind of process. In most of social situations from daily encounters to power politics both processes go hand in hand, substantiating the fact that inter ethnic relations are not necessarily conflictual despite frequent discrepancies of power and differentiation in distribution of desired goods and services. Contemporary India manifests the phenomena inspite of "US-Them" contrasts, there has been a shared field of interaction or inter-ethnic frequency. On the one hand different ethnic entities with different cleavages contest in the same space, projecting conflicting interests with regard to power, dominance, exploitation and cohesion, but constantly engage in social interaction, establishing relationship for consensus, institutional safeguards, equilibrium and continuity of established dispensation. It makes an ideal synopsis for Interactionist theorisation.

Ethnomethodology has emerged as an aspect of interactionist field of enquiry and forms the significant component of present theoretical framework. The approach rests on the principle of methods of common sensical reasoning that ordinary social actors use to recognize feature of social world and to respond to different social situations. To Garfinkle social order is located in the first place, in shared understanding among ordinary social actors (an actor being anyone individual or ethnic group performing an action), knowledge held in common is a primordial basis for an ordinarily social world. In daily chores ethnies in India essentially use ethnomethods to cope with various social situations involving actions from contesting ethnic groups. In politics and labour markets ethnic interaction and resultant relationships get patterned on commonsensical recognisiblity of objects and a tacit but shared knowledge of the situation. The relationship and the response thus emerging are mutually agreed upon by all groups. It gives a procedural character to social action. On the basis of shared sets of practices an ethnic not only construct ones lives of conduct but interpret actions of contesting others as well. Furthermore the investigator is of firm conviction that basic premise of all theoretical approaches whether Structural-Functional, Conflictual or Social Exchange, is interaction. Not to elaborate upon Functionalism or Social Exchange even conflicts and outright wars need at least a dyad to interact while as ethnicity has been taken as quality of a group, having significant bearing for social relationships, it is in essence an interaction. The interactionist approach along with its limitations is deemed appropriate to study ethnic diversity in independent India.

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Dr. Farooq Ahmad Rather, Ph.D (History)
Centre of Central Asian Studies, University of Kashmir, Srinagar, India