

# **Modes of Analyzing Ethnic Identity: A Critical Evaluation of Constructivism**

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**DECLARATION**

I declare that the dissertation entitled "**MODES OF ANALYZING ETHNIC IDENTITY: A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF CONSTRUCTIVISM**" submitted by me in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of **Master of Philosophy** is my original work. It has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this University or any other university.


  
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*For Abbu, Ammi and Diddu*

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## *Introduction*

*In the social jungle of human existence, there is no feeling of being alive without a sense of identity.*

- Erik Erikson

Identity has become an important part of our daily lives. An individual is confronted with questions regarding his identity across multiple spaces and forums, sometimes even daily. An individual is made aware of his/her identity as a JNUite, Muslim, male or a Kashmiri in different situations by different people. Identity has also become an important marker of how we interact with different individuals and groups. Identity is used to group people and communities into pre-conceived columns and categories, to make sense of their position, their ideas and their existence. Identity has, thus, emerged as an important tool to bracket an individual or a group and, consequently, informs the response that an individual or a group receives.

In addition of informing decisions and responses in our daily life, identity also has a central, perhaps more important, presence in the political arena. Identity has become an important tool that is used in the political space to garner traction, build consensus, create antagonisms and, most importantly, build political movements.

Politically, identity politics strongly emerged after the fall of Soviet Russia (USSR) and Yugoslavia, which was aided by the civilizational different existing with them.<sup>1</sup> These breakdown of the USSR and Yugoslavia and the end of Cold War, lent significant momentum to identity-based assertions around the world, with other people “mobilizing behind these symbols of their new cultural identities.”<sup>2</sup> The attention, thus, shifted to an identity-based world order where conflict would emerge from deep rooted cultural and

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), p. 28.

<sup>2</sup> Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, p. 19.

civilizational animosities, an idea termed as “the clash of civilizations.”<sup>3</sup> Couple it with the discursive plank of “end of history”<sup>4</sup> which argued an end of class-based hostilities and a victory of economic liberalism, identity politics became a favourite staple of both academic and political discourses. It leads to the emergence of many other concepts and ideas that have, since, become influential. For example, the idea of ‘politics of presence’<sup>5</sup>, which argued for identity based representative model, has led to a powerful debate in the arena of political representation.

The identity discourse has also achieved centrality in the arena of political movements around the world. Movements, in the contemporary world, have a significant component of identity involved. In the present world, one usually hears about different feminist movements, Dalit movements, Kashmiri movement and LGBTQ movement. Each of these movements is affixed with a certain conception of identity which specifies its nature and membership. Thus, movements have an implicit attraction to identity.

This research was conceived as an attempt to make sense of this immense popularity and, in a sense, permeation of identity into our daily lives. Identity is everywhere and affects not only our personal lives but our conception of people, politics and movements across the globe. Identity has invaded each and every sphere of our lives and conditions our actions and interaction with people present in our immediate surroundings as well as those with whom we hardly have any physical or geographical connection. Identity can lead to a stable sense of self – perception and understanding but, on the other hand, also possesses a propensity of categorizing and classifying individual, groups and communities into pre-determined compartments, constraining their action and interactions. These inherent capabilities, present in the term identity, allows it to be used to develop and strengthen movements and alliances while, at the same time, can also be used to oppress, repress and suppress communities. These facets of identity invigorated my interest in the field. The concern that initiated this research was to understand the manner in which these identities,

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<sup>3</sup> Huntington, *The Clash of Civilization*, p. 28.

<sup>4</sup> Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?" *The National Interest*, no. 16 (1989): p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Anne Phillipe, *The Politics of Presence*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

which have profound political significance, are formed and are tagged to specific groups or communities. Basically, how do these identities emerge?

### **Objectives and Research Questions**

The objective of the research, hence, is to raise crucial and critical questions about the nature and formation of identity. What constitutes an identity, particularly ethnic identity? Whether such identities can be looked as ‘naturalized - ascriptive’ categories, hence fixed and solidified? Or do identities spring up in particular historical and political contexts?

Focussing on ethnic identity, reasons for which would be subsequently discussed in the dissertation, the research tries to understand various ways and means in which ethnic identity has been conceptualized by different scholars and academicians belonging to the field of social sciences. The emphasis is to understand the way each conceptualization of ethnic identity explains different phenomena that emerge out of ethnic identity, particularly that of ethnic conflict. The research will reflect upon the different attributes of ethnic identity and conflict, that are emphasised by each framework, while at the same time excavating factors that each framework neglects and subjugates.

In the myriad of frameworks and conceptualization of ethnic identity, this research engages with two frameworks – primordialism and constructivism. These two frameworks have been chosen for different reasons. The framework of primordialism was chosen because of its intimate connection with the term ethnic identity itself. The initial forays into the field of ethnic identity were guided by primordialist assumptions and principles, which would be subsequently explained. The framework of constructivism, on the other hand, has emerged as a “growing body of opinion”<sup>6</sup>, over the last few decades.

Primordialists suggest that ethnic identities “bind the individual to a larger to a larger collectivity based on a common outlook that differentiates members of the group from

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<sup>6</sup> D. Gupta, *The Context of Ethnicity: Sikh Identity in a Comparative Perspective*. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 1.

nonmembers.”<sup>7</sup> These identities are derived from a particular social structure and are, in this sense given and natural. The norms and principles of these groups are passed down from generation to generation in a systemic and solidified manner. The constructivists, on the other hand, respond to the problematic of identity in a different way. Identity, for them, is *context* specific. This leads to the conclusion that identities are not fixed but fluid and changing. Identities accommodate, as Fredrick Barth argues, to different “ecological factors”<sup>8</sup> around it, producing difference within an identity. Constructivism, thus, argues that individuals or groups have multiple and not just one identity. It also conceives identity to be dependent on a “causal variable,”<sup>9</sup> which if changed, produces a change in the identity as well.

Since identities have become increasingly important in studying conflicts, choosing one kind of theoretical formulation over other influences the study in a major way. A particular construction of an identity, not only impacts the understanding of the current situation of a conflict, but also recasts the past, history, origin, in some cases the very definition of the conflict. For example, if, one accepts the notions of primordialism, one may unknowingly accept the ‘naturalization’<sup>10</sup> of identities which can legitimize a certain degree of violence, which the framework pegs on the nature of ethnic identity itself. Such perception of naturalized identities can be used to mould the conception of a movement and a community, both at the discursive as well as popular levels.

Such ‘naturalization of categories’ has immense effect on the discourse of an ethnic identity and ethnic conflict. Naturalizations result in narrowing of the scope of understanding of a problem. In addition, it also perpetuates the dominant discourse, not only within the society, but also on the larger spectrum outside it. This has not only led to a particular

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<sup>7</sup> John F. Stack, “Ethnic Mobilization in World Politics: The Primordial Perspective,” in *The Primordial Challenge: Ethnicity in the Contemporary World*, ed. John F. Stack, (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1986), p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> Fredrik Barth, “Introduction” in, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, ed. Fredrik Barth (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1969), p. 11.

<sup>9</sup> Bayar, Murat. "Reconsidering Primordialism: An Alternative Approach to the Study of Ethnicity." *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 32, no. 9 (2009): p. 1642.

<sup>10</sup> Gupta, *The Context of Ethnicity*, p. 2.

discourse flowing from the field (even though intentions mentioned are otherwise) but also hegemonizing the said discourse, leading to a skewed understanding. The primordialist understanding of ethnic identity, thus, essentializes the concept of ethnic identity invisibilising different facets and factors that play a role in the development of ethnic identity as well as ethnic conflict.

This does not mean that constructivism gets everything right and primordialism does not have any dominant role in the discourse of identity today. There might be a theoretical attraction in the framework of constructivism but it does have some limitations while encountering ethnic identity and conflict in the practical or empirical world. The world politics is still characterized by sharply defined identities and intractable conflicts around the world. Hence, the tenets of primordialism are still pertinent. There are places where divisions between people seem to exacerbate on ethnic lines.<sup>11</sup> In such a scenario, the question beckons that should we take the constructivist idea very seriously? The research tries to centrally address such a question, trying to look into whether the constructivist theory of identity formation helps us in making sense of various developments and assertion of identity and ethnic politics around the world. Alternatively, whether such conceptualization itself constructs the problem and conflict in a different light than is normally understood and, thus, sheds some new light on it? Also, if there are some important deviations, whether a recasting of constructivism is needed? The research plans to attempt to engage with the above questions, not only on the level of Kashmir conflict, which has been used as a case to illustrate the explanatory potential of the frameworks, but, more importantly, on the level of theoretical formulations of the framework of constructivism. The research will try to understand whether constructivism is able to help us understand the nuances of an identity formation and does primordialism play any role within the framework of constructivism?

Thus, the focus of this research is to engage with the framework of constructivism, to bring to fore its limitations and shortcomings, while dealing with ethnic identity and conflict on an empirical level. The dissertation will try to focus on facets and factors present in the study of ethnic identity and conflict that are usually neglected or glossed over by the

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<sup>11</sup> Places such as Kashmir, Palestine and Myanmar among others.

framework of constructivism. It would attempt a detailed analysis of different assumptions of constructivism to put forth a substantial critique of the prevalent tenets of constructivism. In presenting such a critique, the aim would be to equip the framework of constructivism with better tools so that our understanding of ethnic identity and conflict is further enriched.

## **Chapters**

The chapters of the dissertation have been divided and formulated keeping in mind the vastness of the field of identity studies as well as the objectives and the aims of the research. The dissertation has been divided into four chapters, excluding an introduction and conclusion, to give ample space and attention to different issues that emerge while undertaking a research in the field of identity studies.

The first chapter situates the concepts and variables used in the research in the broad domain of identity studies. The area of identity studies is vast and encompasses various fields and disciplines of study. Such varied application of the term identity, imparts the term with diverse meanings which makes it imperative for any research to outline the specific area that a research is based on. The chapter would briefly touch upon different usages of identity in different disciplines of study, focussing on the field of social sciences which is the field of this study. It would provide a short analysis of different facets of social identity. Further, the chapter would delineate the reasons for choosing ethnic identity, over different forms of social identities such as national identity, caste and religious identity, as the focus of this research. The chapter lists different factors that make ethnic identity a preferred choice for this study. Moreover, the chapter reflects upon crucial junctures of the literary canon of ethnic identity, classifying them according to their conception of ethnic identity. Finally, the chapter briefly interrogates the two frameworks of primordialism and constructivism, tracing their genesis within the literary canon of ethnic identity.

The second chapter is a detailed exposition of the framework of primordialism. It would deal with different principles and assumptions of the framework of constructivism. The definitions and the conception of ethnic identity that emerges out of the framework would



be specified. The chapter will, further, look into the aspects of culture and conflict and their position within the primordialist framework. It would be argued that an essentialist notion of culture is at the heart of primordialism. So is the relation between conflict and ethnic identity. These assumption lead to a very problematic understanding of world issues and gives rise to a very violent and antagonistic conception of world politics. Furthermore, the chapter would also engage with different methodological and theoretical constraints that engulf the framework of primordialism, curtailing its analytical and explanatory potential. The effect of such constraint and assumptions on limiting the scope of the framework of primordialism in a modern, globalized world would also be studied.

The third chapter is an exercise to deeply understand and explain the different contours of the framework of constructivism. The chapter is an exposition of various facets and principles of the framework of constructivism. It would locate the broad principles of constructivism in the different theoretical and philosophical discourses on social meanings and concepts. The chapter would also attempt to compare and contrast the framework of constructivism and the framework of primordialism, highlighting the positive aspects of constructivism over primordialism. The main focus of this chapter, however, would be to engage with the conceptualization of ethnic identity arising from the framework of primordialism. The different ways in which, constructivism believes that an ethnic identity is formed and the different factors and facets involved, would be deeply looked into. Attention would also be paid to different factors that influence the formation of an identity, including institutional or structural control. Additionally, the manner in which the framework of constructivism makes sense of different sociological concepts, mainly power and domination, and their effect on the construction of an identity, would also be dealt with. Finally, the chapter would sketch the merits of constructivism which has led scholars to term the emergence of constructivism as a ‘principle theoretical revolution in the field of ethnic identity.’<sup>12</sup>

The fourth chapter will deal with the practical application of the frameworks of primordialism and constructivism. Employing the frameworks of primordialism and

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<sup>12</sup> Kanchan Chandra, “Introduction” in *Constructivist Theories of Ethnic Politics*, ed. Kanchan Chandra, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 2.

constructivism on the example of Kashmir, the chapter will attempt to ascertain different ideas and ways in which these frameworks conceptualize the Kashmir conflict. The emphasis would be to look out for different ways in which each framework looks at the Kashmir conflict and the identity discourse that exists within the conflict. The differences in the interpretation of the conflict as well as different resources that each framework provides for understanding the conflict would be dwelled into. Furthermore, the reasons for emphasis on different facets and factors of the Kashmir conflict will be investigated. Additionally, the chapter would also enumerate the difficulties and problems that emerge from the understanding of each conflict. The special focus will be on the framework of constructivism and the chapter would try to provide an in-depth critique of the framework of constructivism.

Before moving forward, there are some clarifications that are required to be specified. After the situating the field of the research in the first chapter, the terms identity, ethnic identity and ethnicity are used interchangeably. All these terms are used as a substitute for the term ethnic identity and do not contain any other meaning or definition. Secondly, the dissertation understands constructivism as a group of theories that believes in a constructed nature of social reality and concepts and, hence, is not interested in interrogating different philosophical differences present within such a broad framework, such as that of social constructivism and social constructionism. That part is, thus, outside the scope of this research. Finally, Kashmir is not used as a case study but as an example to understand the different ways in which each framework makes sense of a conflict area. Hence, it's not a descriptive account of the Kashmir conflict but an enumeration of different conceptions that emerge on it, through the frameworks of primordialism and constructivism respectively.

## **Situating the Research**

Identity, as a term, subsumes diverse ideas, meanings and concepts within its fold. As the term identity is used in different disciplines of study, there is a plethora of ways, in which, it is defined. This immense traction of the term provides a certain dynamism and multifariousness to the concept of identity. On the flip side, it also leaves the term generally vague in nature. The idea of identity can have different meanings in different spaces and, therefore, it is important to carve out the area on which this study is based.

This chapter undertakes just this task. It situates the research in the broad area and discipline of identity studies. The initial part deals with the different concepts and meaning of identity, reflecting briefly upon its usages in different areas of study. The emphasis would be on the field of social sciences which would be dealt with in a little more detail. The different facets of identity that are there in the field of social sciences would be looked into, stressing on the category of ethnic identity. The next section will attempt to sketch out the reasons for choosing ethnic identity as the focus of this study. This section will touch upon the salience of the term ethnic identity and its explanatory potential. The third section will outline the prominent literature that reflects upon the concept of ethnic identity, focussing on important points that have defined the study of ethnic identity. The fourth section would briefly evaluate the two frameworks that emerge from the field of ethnic identity.

### **Different Articulations of Identity**

Identity, as a concept, can be initially traced to the field of mathematics.<sup>1</sup> It is a relation of equality wherein even if you choose to change all the variables, the equality will stand.<sup>2</sup> In the field of philosophy, the term identity has had a chequered history. Its genesis can be

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<sup>1</sup> S. Malesevic, *The Sociology of Ethnicity*, London: Sage, 2004, p. 196.

<sup>2</sup> The relation in the equation  $(a+b)^2 = a^2 + b^2 + 2(a+b)$  signified by the symbol “=” “is an example of a mathematical identity.

stretched back to the classical Greek antiquity. The earliest philosophical conceptualization of identity is traced to Parmenides and his famous quote: "thought and being are the same."<sup>3</sup>In the philosophical field, the studies on identity usually deal with the nature of the self, and the different ways it can be conceptualized, its unity and its ontology. It is the question of *I*, its attributes and composition that have evoked interest in the field of philosophy. The concept of identity in philosophy encompasses different terminologies within it, such as the subject, consciousness, ego among others. The concept of identity has been reflected upon by philosophers from different philosophical traditions. From Ibn Rushd, to Descartes, to Hume, to Hegel, identity has raised evocative questions and interesting answers. For Locke "identity . . . consists in nothing but a participation of the same continued Life, by constantly fleeting Particles of Matter, in succession vitally united to the same organized Body"<sup>4</sup> while for Heidegger it is "belonging together."<sup>5</sup>

In social sciences, however, the term is of recent origin and became a "popular social science term only in the 1950s."<sup>6</sup> Psychologist E. Erickson is credited with "putting the word into circulation"<sup>7</sup> and coining the famous term *identity crisis*. In his work "*Identity: Youth and Crisis*," focusing on psychosocial development, Erikson recognized the psychological, as well as social and personal, dimensions of identity, thereby planting the seeds for a comprehensive, multidimensional theory of identity formation."<sup>8</sup> Erikson thought of identity as "a process 'located' *in the core of the individual* and yet also *in the core of his communal culture*, a process which establishes, in fact, the identity of those two identities (emphasis in original)."<sup>9</sup> One, the identity that develops within an individual and

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<sup>3</sup> Parmenides' conception of identity taken from Joan Stambaugh, "Introduction" in M. Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, trans Joan Stambaugh, (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Locke taken from P. Gleason, "Identifying Identity: A Semantic History," *The Journal of American History*, 69(4), (1983), p. 911.

<sup>5</sup> Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, p. 27 – 33.

<sup>6</sup> Gleason, "Identifying Identity", p. 910.

<sup>7</sup> Gleason, "Identifying Identity", p. 914.

<sup>8</sup> J. E. Cote, and C. G. Levine, *Identity, Formation, Agency, and Culture: A Social Psychological Synthesis*, (Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 2002), p. 14.

<sup>9</sup> E. H Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, (New York: WW Norton & Company, 1968), p. 22.

the other, the identity “and the growth of a sense of selfhood that arises from participating in society, internalizing its cultural norms, acquiring different statuses, and playing different roles.”<sup>10</sup>

This research is concerned with the second conception of identity – the social aspect of identity. The social aspect of identity deals with the relation between members of a group and its relation with non – members. Identity in the social realm reflects a certain relation that one ascribes to other individuals one normally interacts with, personally or otherwise. Such interaction may take place in a given space and time, although it is not dependent on it. Social associations may transcend any spatial or temporal constraints and can be based on a belief of relation or resemblance, even though one may not interact or share any immediate spatial relation with them. The relation could be that of sameness or difference and can involve adhering to a certain code which affects the lives of its members, including their actions.

The propensity of social identity to bracket individual behaviour is an interesting aspect of group relations. The actions of an individual are constrained by the group one is a part of. Conversely, the actions of an individual are understood on the basis of the group one is a part of, by the world outside of the group. The behaviour of an individual is reduced to the foundations and codes of a group and is judged on the basis of that. It is, in this sense, a gross negation of individual agency.

In addition to constraining individual behaviour, social identities also influence the self – perception of a group. Social identities are used to form coalitions and build movements. The conception of history, morality, norms and principles are derived from a specific sense of social identity. Consequently, it also influences politics of a group. The political action and political aims of a community are intrinsically linked to its ascribed social identity. Thus, social identity also has an ideological connotation to it. The usage of it has serious political and social implications. This dissertation, through subsequent chapters, would uncover these aspects of social identity, both the politics emanating from a certain usage as well as effects of such usage on individual action and movements.

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<sup>10</sup> Gleason, “Identifying Identity”, p. 914.

## **The Efficacy of Ethnic Identity**

There are many social identities that have proved efficient to understand different phenomenon and issues around the world. National identity has proved beneficial to understand the concept of nations and nationalism, caste studies has laid bare the methods of oppression based on birth, while religious identities are used to understand fundamentalism and communalism. This dissertation, however, seeks to employ the category of ethnic identity to understand and explore the aforementioned aspects of social identities.

The term ‘ethnic’ is derived from the Greek word *ethnos* which was used to “refer to other peoples who like, animals belong to some other group unlike one’s own.”<sup>11</sup> The Greeks used this term for people who they considered inferior to them, not sharing the same characteristics. The term ethnic identity, or ethnicity, thus, inherently possesses a bias of inferiority. Its usage, therefore, cannot be neutral. Its usage for movements and conflicts, inevitably, colour them in certain inferior light. The uncovering of the basis and effects of such bias is, therefore, an interesting project – one of the objectives of the research.

Couple it with the overtly popular nature of the term ethnic identity. The popularity is evident in its frequent, somewhat generous, usage to communities and groups. As a category it has been employed to explain and describe issues and conflicts around the globe. Ethnic identity, is considered to be “at the center of politics in country after country, a potent source of challenges to the cohesion of the states and of international tension.”<sup>12</sup> The category of ethnic identity has been used to study the Hindu – Muslim divide in India, the secession movements in Kashmir and Punjab, the question of natives and immigrant population in the US and the conflict between the Croats and the Serbs in the former

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<sup>11</sup> John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, “Introduction” in *Ethnicity* ed. John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985, p. xi.

Yugoslavia. Basically, "identity" is a key term in the vernacular idiom of contemporary politics."<sup>13</sup>

Thus, the term ethnic identity is ubiquitous in the field of social science. This can also be because the term ethnic identity is applied mostly to conflicts that are very recent in nature or are still going on. The people in the successor states of former Yugoslavia are still facing the aftermath of the bloody civil war. The demands of secession are still alive in the areas of Kashmir and Punjab, and the Hindu - Muslim animosity has exacerbated over the past few years in India. This reflects a certain contemporary relevance of the term ethnic identity. This makes the concept of ethnic identity much more suitable to the study of group identities.

Before moving further, it is important to delineate a working definition of the term ethnic identity which is going to be applied in this dissertation, howsoever basic it may be. The definition that is going to be applied in this dissertation is derived from its etymology, which as discussed earlier, clearly informs and reflects in its use. Ethnic identity is defined as an identity which stems from a certain 'difference' of a community or a group of individuals from a larger population of an area, particularly within a nation state. The identity, thus, is a result of a certain *outsidedness* of a group or community from the rest of the society. This *outsidedness* is necessarily not a corollary of numerical strength of a group but instead depend on the value its socio – cultural and political principles hold, within its nation - state. The case of Africans in apartheid South Africa can corroborate this point. Even, though a numerical majority, the Africans as a community faced discrimination from a small white – minority. The principles, values and norms of the Africans, thus, experienced an *outsidedness* with respect to the dominant narrative which was controlled by the whites.

Even after defining ethnic identity, however, the scope of the term remains immense. This is because of a certain multiplicity of application that emanates from the definition of the term ethnic identity. It has been used to define “minority groups within a larger society of the nation-state, the European tradition regularly opted to use ethnicity as a synonym for

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<sup>13</sup> R. Brubaker, and F. Cooper, “Beyond “Identity”,” *Theory and Society*, 29, no.1 (2000): p. 1.

nationhood defined historically by descent or territory.”<sup>14</sup> It has lately also achieved a ‘quasi – legislative’ meaning with the influx of economic migrants and asylum seekers into the developed world. These people exhibit different physical, cultural and sometimes, religious traits than their hosts.<sup>15</sup> This dynamism inherent in the definition of ethnic identity makes it possible to incorporate issues and conflicts of other social and group identities within its fold. The conflict between two communities in India, the Hindus and the Muslims, is looked as an ethnic divide,<sup>16</sup> the issues of immigrants and different cultural and nationalities is looked as ethnic, so are the secessionists movements based on different cultural or national identities, such as those in Kashmir and Yugoslavia. Thus, by applying the category of ethnic identity, one is able to reflect on a broader range of conflicts and issues which is difficult with any other social identity. Analytically, the concept ethnic identity has been used by different perspectives and paradigms about society and movements ranging from the development and modernization perspective, the nativist perspective and, the communal perspective.<sup>17</sup>

### **Analytical Frameworks of Ethnic Identity**

The diverse usage of ethnic identity has resulted in an enormous body of work on the concept. Ethnic identity has been employed in different fields and disciplines such as history, politics, sociology, cultural studies and peace and conflict studies. Such diversity in the literary canon of ethnic identity provide different perspectives and ideas in which ethnic identities can be employed or engaged with. This diversity, however, is not unbridled. The literature also throws up different frames that emerge out of the study of ethnic identity, which denote specific ways in which ethnic identity has been conceptualized and used. The following literature review would enumerate the important

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<sup>14</sup> Malesevic, *The Sociology of Ethnicity*, p. 1.

<sup>15</sup> Malesevic, *The Sociology of Ethnicity*, p. 2.

<sup>16</sup> A. Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic life: Hindus and Muslims in India*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 4.

<sup>17</sup> See S. S. Jodhka, “Introduction,” in *Community and Identities: Contemporary Discourses on Culture and Politics in India*, ed. S. S. Jodhka, (New Delhi: Sage), p. 21 – 26.



junctures in the theoretical literature on ethnic identity. It will also attempt to bring out the dominant frameworks that are used to study the concept of ethnic identity.

Ethnic identity was initially used to understand and explain the continued emphasis and loyalty of the immigrant population, in the United States, to their group ties and affiliations.<sup>18</sup> The strength and reticence of these affiliations, which were supposed to give way to modern, individual affiliations such as citizenship, was taken up by scholars and academicians as a point of study. Subsequently, the category of ethnic identity escaped such narrow base and expanded to many other elements and social relations than mere immigrant populations. So, did the way and manner ethnic identity was conceptualized.

A certain section of scholars and academicians look at ethnic identity as a socially determined phenomenon. Scholars argue that ethnic identity is made of “primordial affinities and attachments”<sup>19</sup> which is “what a person is born with or acquires at birth.”<sup>20</sup> Ethnic identity is considered as an ascriptive category, which is defined for an individual on account of his birth in a particular social set up. Ethnic identity "is based on a myth of collective ancestry, which usually carries with it traits believed to be innate. Some notion of ascription, however diluted, and affinity deriving from it are inseparable from the concept of ethnicity."<sup>21</sup> These affinities are stable and hardly undergo any significant change for a long period of time. Ethnic identities and groups, according to this branch of scholars, are defined broadly in terms of ascriptive differences that “include color, appearance, language, religion, or some other indicator of common origin”<sup>22</sup> Thus, the “basic group identity consists of the readymade set of endowments and identifications

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<sup>18</sup> Ronald H. Bayor, "Italians, Jews and Ethnic Conflict." *The International Migration Review* 6, no. 4 (1972): p. 377.

<sup>19</sup> H. R. Isaacs, “Basic Group Identity: Idols of the Tribe,” in *Ethnicity: Theory and Experience*, ed. Nathan Glazer and David P. Moynihan (MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), p. 30.

<sup>20</sup> Isaacs, “Basic Group Identity”, p. 30.

<sup>21</sup> Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, p. 52.

<sup>22</sup> Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, p. 17 – 18.

which every individual shares with others from the moment of birth by the chance of family into which he is born at that given time in that given place.”<sup>23</sup>

The idea of kinship is given an interesting turn by sociobiologists. Ethnicity, for them, is some sort of kin selection to preserve and reproduce genes. The traits of “co – operation, individual sacrifice and group solidarity” that are definitive of an ethnic identity “are only possible because of genetic selfishness.”<sup>24</sup> Since genetic selfishness is not a specifically human trait, ethnic identity is understood as “primordial groups dating back to even before the origin of *Homo Sapiens*”<sup>25</sup>(emphasis in original). Functionalism, understood in a very reductionist sense,<sup>26</sup> also provides a very interesting take on the concept of ethnic identity. Ethnicity functions as a way of socialization and also provides “a sense of security, serenity and stability.”<sup>27</sup> Ethnic identity is defined as “an aggregate of kinship units, the members of which either trace their origin in terms of descent from a common ancestor or in terms of descent from ancestors who all belonged to the same categorised ethnic group,”<sup>28</sup> a form of association with a “distinctive sense of its history.”<sup>29</sup> Although, functionalism does give space to voluntary action but “transgenerational cultural tradition”<sup>30</sup>which include language, culture and traditions, remain paramount for promoting and safeguarding cohesiveness of an ethnic group. Thus, ethnicity is “perceived primordial qualities that accrue to a group by virtue of shared race, religion, or national origin, including in the latter

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<sup>23</sup> Isaacs, “Basic Group Identity: Idols of the Tribe, p. 31.

<sup>24</sup> Malesevic, *The Sociology of Ethnicity*, p. 83.

<sup>25</sup> Malesevic, *The Sociology of Ethnicity*, p. 83.

<sup>26</sup> Social phenomena are to be understood by the functions they serve.

<sup>27</sup> Malesevic, *The Sociology of Ethnicity*, p. 49.

<sup>28</sup> T. Parsons, *Social System*, New York: The Free Press, 1951, p. 172.

<sup>29</sup> T. Parsons, “Some Theoretical Considerations on the Nature and Trends of Change of Ethnicity”, in N. Glazer and D. P. Moynihan (eds), *Ethnicity: Theory and Experience*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), p. 56.

<sup>30</sup> Parsons, “Some Theoretical Considerations”, p. 56.

category linguistic and other cultural attributes associated with a common territorial ancestry.”<sup>31</sup>

Alternatively, ethnic identity, for a different branch of scholars, is a result of different processes in the common life of a community or a group of individuals. Ethnic identity is not static but can change depending on the change in situations and circumstances. An ethnic group is not merely, or even primarily, a community that shares a common culture and identity. Its identity “is constituted by dividing lines, by contrast with others.”<sup>32</sup> Ethnic group, then, is not a function of the content it confines within itself. The cultural core does not define ethnic identity. It is the process of exclusion and inclusion which defines the category of ethnic identity. It is “the ethnic *boundary* that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses.”<sup>33</sup>

It emanates from a political arena where action and interaction take place. Ethnic identity emanates from social process where definitions about different situations are formulated, and regularly changed. These definitions and situations affect intra - group or inter - group relations. Ethnic identity is formed through a dynamic process of interpretation and reinterpretation.

Hence, the process of forming an ethnic identity is not the result of a social order but emanates from the political sphere.<sup>34</sup> Ethnic group, thus, “is primarily a political community, no matter how artificially organized, that inspires belief in common ethnicity.”<sup>35</sup> Ethnic group is primarily based on political action. Ethnic group, is “actually an array of ‘socially constructed macro aggregated ethnicities’, where aggregation stands

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<sup>31</sup> J. Alexander, “Core Solidarity, Ethnic Outgroup, and Social Differentiation: A Multidimensional Model of Inclusion in Modern Societies”, in *National and Ethnic Movements*, ed. J. Dofney and A. Akiwowo, (London: Sage, 1980), p. 10 -11.

<sup>32</sup> Malesevic, *The Sociology of Ethnicity*, p. 132.

<sup>33</sup> Fredrik Barth, “Introduction” in, Fredrik Barth (ed.) *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1969, p. 15.

<sup>34</sup> Political is, used in this research, as a space where action, interaction and intervention take place. It is constantly evolving and deeply conflictual arena, as opposed to stable, solidified ‘social.’

<sup>35</sup> M. Weber *Economy and Society*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), p. 389.

for group markers such as language, religion, ‘race’ and so on, around which groups can be mobilized.”<sup>36</sup> These characteristics are not given and monolithic but change according to different social and political needs. These identities become important in specific times and moments, where their existence and use can result in certain political advantages.

Additionally, scholars point out to different other motives that are responsible for individuals organizing themselves into ethnic groups, primarily economical. Such scholars conceptualize human beings as “*homo economicus* – whose actions are almost universally seen and explained as utility-oriented.”<sup>37</sup> Since any individual action is directed at self – interest, organization of individuals into ethnicities is also in order to safeguard and promote that interest. Subscribing to an ethnic identity is a means to maximizing individual gains and advantages – to indulge in group action to advance specific individual interests of the member community.

These two branches of scholars point out to two important, divergent frameworks or modes that are employed to study the concept of ethnic identity. The difference is mainly on account of conceptualization and source of the category of ethnic identity. The former branch of scholars looks at ethnic identity as given, a socially passed on trait, which is based on the cultural characteristics of a group. The latter branch of scholars challenges such innateness of an ethnic identity. For them, ethnic identity, is a dynamic, constantly evolving political category, which is formed due to certain political processes, rather than a culturally determined category. While the earlier branch of framework can be termed as *primordialism*,<sup>38</sup> the latter scholars and theories can be grouped under the rubric of *constructivism*.

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<sup>36</sup> Malesevic, *The Sociology of Ethnicity*, p. 135.

<sup>37</sup> Malesevic, *The Sociology of Ethnicity*, p. 95.

<sup>38</sup> Primordialism term, itself, needs to be justified. Although there is certain debate going on whether this term is applicable, I use this term as it signifies two things. One, it signifies the unchanging nature of the ethnic identity, as primordialism signifies an old and historical nature of ethnic identity. Secondly, primordialism, also signifies the pre – modern characterization of ethnic identity, an important tenet of primordialism. For further justification of the term see D. Horowitz, “The Primordialists,” in

### **Primordialism and Constructivism**

It also important to point out, that methodologically speaking, constructivism as a framework does seem more interesting and it gives more space to engage with the ground situations. Since constructivism entails a certain intervention, producing construction, the political assumes primacy over the social, providing resources to analyse the formation and genesis of an ethnic identity in more depth. It helps to engage and bring forth the role of ‘politics in ethnic identity’ which is the central concern of this research endeavour, as opposed to ‘ethnic identity in politics’ which is the primary concern for primordialists. Constructivism also makes it possible to engage with different political concepts such as power, state, domination among others, making it more preferable in the specific field of political science, in which this research is attempted. This gives the framework of constructivism more leverage in the study of ethnic identity.

This, however, does not signify that primordialism as a framework has lost its relevance or has been rejected. It also does not signify that constructivism does not have any issue or constraints and is perfectly able to explain the concept of ethnic identity. The predominant position of constructivism makes it imperative to engage with it more deeply to bring out the shortcomings present in it. Primordialism, on the other hand, still holds considerable significant position on the field of ethnic identity and ethnic studies. Its tenets still inform many studies and guide investigations in many issues related to ethnic conflict.

Being paradigms with certain principles and assumptions, both primordialism and constructivism posit a certain structural edifice on studies undertaken on different identities, especially ethnic identities. Each framework provides a certain blueprint for studies that employ each of the framework. Such a structural core, emanating from a constructivist or primordialist paradigm, push the study of group identities in a particular direction, which may be helpful and rewarding in some cases, but at the same time can be extremely limiting in other scenarios. The effects of these constraints do not limit

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*Ethnonationalism in the Contemporary World: Walker Connor and the Study of Nationalism*, ed. D. Conversi, (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 72 – 83.

themselves to the concept of ethnic identity only but has wide ranging ramifications, for understanding the nature of the communities and the perception of the politics that emerge from these communities.

To conclude, this chapter laid out the theoretical outline of the dissertation, situating the research in the broad canon of identity studies. It laid out the specific scholarly and intellectual tradition that this study is located in, differentiating itself from other traditions that deal with the concept of identity. The canon of the term identity is large. The term originated from the field of mathematics and has received considerable attention in the area of philosophy. The question of identity has been one of the pressing questions of the area of philosophy since the time of Greek antiquity. In the field of social sciences, however, it is a recent addition but has achieved considerable prominence in the field of social science, in a very short span of time. The area of social science is what this research is situated in, specifically dealing with ethnic identity, which is quite popular as a category of analysis in the world of social sciences. Enumerating further reason for choosing ethnic identity, the chapter ends with a brief literature review, bring forth the frameworks of primordialism and constructivism.

The following chapters would deal in detail with the aforementioned frameworks. The dissertation would further look up at each of these modes of understanding ethnic identity separately, to understand the basic tenets and assumptions of each of the paradigm more clearly. The basis and motivations for these assumptions and tenets would be investigated. The chapters would further enlist, illustratively, certain inferences that flow from each of the frameworks, which exert considerable influence on a study undertaken in such a framework on analysis. These inferences would also be deeply analysed, and its effects on the concept and study of ethnic identity would be looked into. The effect of different social realities on the studies, in turn, would also be studied. The chapters would try to study each of these frameworks separately, to provide a critical analysis of each of these modes of understanding ethnic identity.

## *The Framework of Primordialism*

‘Primordialism’ is as old as the term ethnic identity itself. The very application and usage of the term ethnic identity, provided roots to the framework of primordialism. Primordialism developed, as a framework, from the studies that were conducted to understand the nature of relations between immigrant communities in the United States, on the one hand, and the study of colonial subjects and communities, on the other. Primordialism, thus, emanated from a curiosity to understand these ‘different’ communities but at the same time exhibits a patronizing attitude toward these groups and communities.

Primordialists argue that the ‘outsidedness’ of an ethnic group, which has been defined as the defining principle of an ethnic identity in the previous chapter, results from different familial and kinship ties of individuals. It represents a relation to a certain group of people emanating from a shared conception of blood or familial connections, essentially, persisting old, *primordial* bonds. Primordialists argue that ethnic identity is a form of association that puts onus on primordial affinities, stemming from kinship and family ties. The traits, tenets and principles of ethnic identity are, therefore, inherited. The contours of ethnic identity are given and static. Ethnic identity is a social association which is based on relations of descent. Furthermore, these principles and values are transferred along these lines of descent. Therefore, primordialists conceptualize ethnic identity “as something that is for the most part *a priori* given, objective and overpowering.”<sup>1</sup>

This chapter will scrutinize the assumptions of the framework of primordialism to understand the basis and principles of its views of ethnic identity. It will attempt to provide an illustrative enumeration of different inferences and effects that emerge from the framework of primordialism. The first section of the chapter would deal with the roots and ideas of primordialism. Having set out the theoretical contours of primordialism, the next section would mention different generalizations and inferences that flow from the framework, which in turn affects the understanding of the concept of ethnic identity,

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<sup>1</sup> S. Malesevic, *The Sociology of Ethnicity*, (London: Sage, 2004), p. 176.

leading to very problematic outcomes. It would be followed by a section on the theoretical and methodological constraints that emerge from primordialism, affecting its ability to properly explain issues pertaining to ethnic relations in the contemporary world.

### **Primordialist Conception of Ethnic Identity**

In primordialism, ethnic identity “in general terms” can be “defined as one’s relation to an ancestral cultural group.”<sup>2</sup> It is a function of kinship and is “defined as a level of socialisation in one particular ethnic group, or through the perception of the existence of ancestors, the real or symbolic members of the (particular) ethnic group.”<sup>3</sup> The identity is transferred from one generation to another through a specific value set, which may include solidified and recurrent practices or rituals. All these factors impart a certain intensity to the concept of ethnic identity. Thus, primordialists understand social identities to be “pervasive and persistent,”<sup>4</sup> deep – rooted, solidified, over – powering and inimical to change.

The continued existence of these primordial associations, across generations, is realized through a process of continuous dissemination or propagation of values, associated with the identity, primarily through the institution of the family. The family ensures the continued adherence to norms, practices and rituals of a particular community within the younger generation. Thus, ethnic identity is passed from one generation to other and “internalized through the process of primary socialization in early childhood.”<sup>5</sup> Later on, these values are also internalized through the individual’s interaction with the larger society, of which he/she is a part of. The internalization through family ensures that the values have inter – generational translatability and could evoke a certain sense of belonging

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<sup>2</sup> W. W. Isajiw, “Ethnic Identity Retention in Four Ethnic Groups: Does it Matter?”, *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 21, no.3, (Fall 1990), p. 289.

<sup>3</sup> W. W. Isajiw, “Ethnic Identity Retention”, in *Ethnic Identity and Equality: Varieties of Experience in a Canadian City*, ed. R. Breton, et al. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), p. 35.

<sup>4</sup> A. Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 230.

<sup>5</sup> Malesevic, *The Sociology of Ethnicity*, p. 176.



among people ascribing to such a group.<sup>6</sup> Through these mechanisms, ethnic identity turns out to be a powerful source of solidarity and group affiliation among its members.

Primordialism, hence, imparts primacy to the idea of the ‘social’ in determining the affinities of an individual. The choice of individual does not matter nor does the *context* or *situation*. The identity of an individual is derived from his/her place in the social setup, the cultural characteristics one is born with and the values that the society attaches to it. Identities, such as ethnic affinities are primordial attachments that stem from the assumed “givens – of social existence.”<sup>7</sup> The ‘givens’ would constitute of “kinship, religion, language and social practices.”<sup>8</sup> These attachments have a “sense of natural – some would say spiritual – affinity than from social interaction,”<sup>9</sup> because of which “these congruities of blood, speech, customs, and so on are seen to have an ineffable, and at times overpowering coerciveness in and of themselves.”<sup>10</sup>

The genealogy of these definitions, if one looks closely, emerges out of the interest to understand immigrant communities, which was the early community tagged with the ethnic tag (as discussed earlier). These definitions were used to highlight the descent – specific attributes of immigrant population. On one hand, such definitions bring to fore the outsidership of these communities from the dominant group of the society. Since these associations put an onus on blood ties and relationships, preferring community over individualistic associations, primordialists also consider these identities as pre – modern. As these communities maintained their loyalty to the communities based on blood relations, they were termed as ‘pre – modern’ as opposed to the modern – rational form of sensibilities and associations, which are primarily based on individualism. These ethnic communities are, consequently, considered different from the modern citizenry.<sup>11</sup> It was

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<sup>6</sup> H. R. Isaacs, “Basic Group Identity: Idols of the Tribe,” in *Ethnicity: Theory and Experience*, ed. Nathan Glazer and David P. Moynihan (MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), p. 30.

<sup>7</sup> Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, p. 259.

<sup>8</sup> Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, p. 259.

<sup>9</sup> Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, p. 260.

<sup>10</sup> Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, p. 259.

<sup>11</sup> Many articles such as Leonard Bloom, "Concerning Ethnic Research," *American Sociological Review* 13, no. 2 (1948): 171-82; E. K. Francis, "The Nature of the Ethnic Group," *American Journal of Sociology* 52,

argued that with passage of time these identities would be replaced by the modern forms of association as modernization would “obliterate the existence of ethnicity.”<sup>12</sup> These predictions have not come true and ethnic identity as a concept has continued to grow both in scope and scale.

Although proponents argue that ethnic solidarity is a function of (perceived) descent, rather than particular cultural or religious content,<sup>13</sup> the continuous transfer of ethnic norms and values from one generation to another would be impossible without an ‘ethnic culture,’ which encapsulates these values and norms for further propagation. Even if, culture is considered “a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life,”<sup>14</sup> it is still a coded and structured system of values and norms. It is an inherited blueprint of meaning and associations, developed for further generations to emulate. The success of an ethnic identity association is, therefore, dependent on the entrenchment of the culture that specifies its contours and values. Ethnic identity is, thus, defined by the culture it encapsulates.

Thus, it is safe to argue that conception of identity, emerging out of primordialism, revolves around “an imperative status, as a more or less immutable aspect of the social person.”<sup>15</sup> It conceptualizes ethnic identity as a social relation revolving around a sense of kinship, blood ties, ancestral connection or territorial coexistence. Thus, ethnic identity is reduced to a social structure, kinship, ‘a culture,’ which conditions the actions and affiliations of the population under it. Identity is socially derived and is transferred generationally through

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no. 5 (1947): 393-400; Paul Hatt, "Class and Ethnic Attitudes." *American Sociological Review* 13, no. 1 (1948): 36-43; Nathan Keyfitz, "Ethnic Groups and Their Behavior," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 253, (1947): 158-63 and Simon Marcson, "The Control of Ethnic Conflict," *Social Forces* 24, no. 2 (1945): 161-65. doi:10.2307/2572531 understand ethnic people as different from modern citizens.

<sup>12</sup> Malesevic, *The Sociology of Ethnicity*, p. 45.

<sup>13</sup> Definition given by W. Connor taken from Joseph Ruane and Jennifer Todd, “Ethnicity and Religion,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Ethnic Conflict*, ed. K. Cordell, and S. Wolff, (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 69.

<sup>14</sup> C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, (New York: Basic books), 1973, p. 89.

<sup>15</sup> T. H. Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Anthropological Perspectives*, (London: Pluto, 1993), p. 55.

rituals, customs and different social practices. It is these transferred values that spring up differences between different groups and communities as “social groups possess different cultural characteristics which make them unique and distinct.”<sup>16</sup> Identity is, hence, invariably linked to culture which determines the *content* and characteristics of an ethnic identity.

Primordialism, thus, promotes an essentialist understanding of ethnic identity. It makes ethnic identity contingent on culture – where a pre –given, natural and unchanging culture emboldened a primeval, innate, inherent and hereditary ethnic identity. The essence of an ethnic identity is reduced to a culture, encompassing unique and distinct cultural markers. If one puts forth a claim to a different cultural identity and lineage, it entails a different ethnic identity.

Cultural determinism is, therefore, an important aspect within the canon of primordialism. Culture determines the *content* of a group identity. Each ethnicity is identified through the stuff it encloses, its composition is contingent to the different cultural values it encompasses, to different genealogies and histories it claims for itself. The values, meanings and preferences of a group identity are determined by the specific markers of their culture. The identity of an Arab, a Kashmiri, a Sinhalese or a Tamil is deeply rooted in the way such cultures are understood. The category of culture, itself, “is viewed as more or less constant, persistent, static, almost unchangeable feature that clearly demarcates groups from one another.”<sup>17</sup> It is, such conception of culture, that exists at the core of an ethnic identity, determining its outline and structure. Rather than seeing culture as a dynamic ensemble of different social, economic, political factors that are shaped historically and contingently, the primordialist position seeks to paint an ahistorical, stagnant and reductive view of culture, thereby of identity.

This cultural determinism, coupled with narrow interpretation of culture, affects the discourse on identity in two ways. An individual can only have one particular identity which he/she must adhere to. This can result in the imposition of dominant societal norms

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<sup>16</sup> Malesevic, *The Sociology of Ethnicity*, p. 2.

<sup>17</sup> Malesevic, *The Sociology of Ethnicity*, p. 176.

on differing individuals, sometimes violently. Such tendency negates the existences of different value systems, which may correspond to different identities, that one may subscribe to. It invariably relegates the choice of an individual to a socially determined structure where the determination of an identity for an individual is more akin to “*processing* of information, rather than conscious choice.”<sup>18</sup>

Secondly, since actions and attributes of a particular society are linked to its cultural content, any deplorable action by any specific section of a particular society can result in denigration of the entire culture. Conversely, as the ideas and practices of a particular society are understood through values and meanings attached to their own social, cultural and organizational structures, it promotes a certain degree of cultural relativism, which can be used to justify violent and deplorable actions, such as honour killings, murder and war. It may, in some cases, argue that actions do not possess a meaning outside of a cultural space, while on the other hand, legitimize practices which may be undesirable to modern sensibilities, if not completely abhorrent. The impact of such a centrality of culture on different studies endorsing a primordialist view of identity would be discussed subsequently in the chapter.

### **Effects of Primordialism**

Looking at ethnic identity as ossified entity, based on a fossilized conception of culture, has limited the scope of understanding the concept of ethnic identity. Academically, it leads primordialists “to emphasize the conflict-proneness of ethnic groups and the destructive effects of intensely held identities.”<sup>19</sup> To understand these solidarities as consolidated, unitary and a remnant of the past, in other words, is to emphasize their direct ‘*conflict*’ with the changing present and a modern future. Their antiquity imbued these affiliations with a certain sense of spirituality and coerciveness and, hence, ethnic identities can stoke

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<sup>18</sup> D. Horowitz, “The Primordialists,” in *Ethnonationalism in the Contemporary World: Walker Connor and the Study of Nationalism*, ed. D. Conversi, (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 78.

<sup>19</sup> Horowitz “The Primordialists,” p. 76.

“intense passions”<sup>20</sup> within a society. These factors were deemed to be responsible for intrinsically violent nature of ethnic identity and conflicts arising out of it, characterizing ethnic identity “as a depressingly destructive force,”<sup>21</sup> a “bloody phenomena.”<sup>22</sup>

Therefore, in the framework of primordialism, ethnic identity is intertwined with *conflict*. Conflict became the ambient within or because of which ethnic identity was studied. Even historically, the category of ethnic identity evoked interest because of its intimate relation with conflict. It was initially considered, as mentioned earlier, when ethnic identity was considered intrinsic quality of minority groups that existed outside the rubric of the modern citizenry. Hence, it was thought to instigate a certain tension and conflict within the broader body – politic of the nation – state. Subsequently, studies after studies, emphasized the relation between conflict and ethnic identities, ethnic conflict, in itself, becoming a site of intense scholarly interventions. David Horowitz’s<sup>23</sup> seminal text, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, which is considered the foundational text of the field of ethnic identity and ethnic conflict,<sup>24</sup> neatly coalesced ethnic identity with conflict, thereby, embedding its study intimately with that of conflict. Horowitz collated ethnic identity and conflict by claiming “ethnic identity is often accompanied by hostility towards outgroups.”<sup>25</sup> For Horowitz ethnic identity is “a form of greatly extended kinship,”<sup>26</sup> and admits that the “cultural variations in family patterns may be felt in the arena of ethnic conflict.”<sup>27</sup> Thus, primordial

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<sup>20</sup> D. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 104.

<sup>21</sup> Horowitz “The Primordialists,” p. 74.

<sup>22</sup> Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, p. 140.

<sup>23</sup> Many would not accept Horowitz as a primordialist in the specific meaning of the term as he does accept, fleetingly, that ethnic identities can change. However, these are exceptions for him, rather than norm. He also acknowledges primacy of birth in ethnic identity as well as, for methodological purposes, accepts culture as constant. For these reasons, I label him as a primordialist.

<sup>24</sup> Horowitz’s work is considered “the foundational text of the field.” See A. Varshney, “Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflict”, in *Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*, ed. Carles Boix and Susan C. Stokes, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p.274-95.

<sup>25</sup> Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, p. 7.

<sup>26</sup> Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, p. 57.

<sup>27</sup> Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, p. 59.

understanding of ethnic identity lends a certain inevitability to the emergence of ethnic conflict between communities.

Primordialism, thus, simplified the understanding of the relationship between ethnic identity and ethnic conflict. According to primordialists, the intractable nature of a conflict was directly proportional to the intractable nature of the ethnic identities involved in such a conflict. Horowitz opined, that “ethnic conflict happens between groups with fairly firm boundaries”<sup>28</sup> enclosing solidified values and norms. Primordialism, hence, fits neatly with the existing and commonsensical understanding of conflict. The more emboldened and entrenched an ethnic identity is, the more violent and dangerous is the conflict that emanates from it. Also, conflict happens between different groups and, hence, most studies carried on ethnic studies, simultaneously, focusses on conflict motives and relations between different groups, rarely focusing on factors and influences that go on shape a particular identity. Such studies mostly focus on inter – group relations rather than intra - group processes. Primordialists, hence, “are concerned to make a causal point in the large, theirs is a macro-perspective.”<sup>29</sup>

However, by fixing a certain structural core around a study of ethnic identity, primordialism did steer the understanding and explanation of ethnic identity and conflicts in a particular direction. It emboldens the narrative of the intractable nature of conflicts, reducing cultural contents of different ethnic groups to their ancestral moorings and kinship connections. By reifying categories, primordialism boxes political action and spaces in compartmentalized categories, mostly disparate and antagonistic to each other. Primordialism, therefore, severely limited the understanding of conflicts. Such a reified understanding has led to a bleak, negative and highly problematic view of cultural issues and world scenario. It also allowed some studies, on account of strong cultural heirarchization, to imprint conflict with certain ideological connotations.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, p. 74.

<sup>29</sup> Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, p. 74.

<sup>30</sup> Samuel P. Huntington and his concept of *Clash of Civilisations* model can be cited as an example. See Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

In fact, the term ethnic identity and its usage is itself wrought with ideological connotations and agendas. The term, etymologically,<sup>31</sup> carries an inherent tendency to be used in a prescriptive manner, against communities that are deemed as ‘misfits’ in the modern world. As mentioned earlier, ethnic identities were attributed with traditionalism and pre – modern characteristics and, hence, were in conflict with the modern world. These inferences can be deduced from its initial usage for immigrant communities in the United States. Over the years, these connotations in more complex ways, bringing forth newer faultlines and sites of conflict.

Initially, as discussed earlier, the conflict arose within the confines of the modern nation – state where certain ‘ethnicities’ posed a challenge to the homogenous category of citizenship and class solidarities. Studies were conducted<sup>32</sup> to understand the continuing reticence of ethnic solidarities and ways to integrate them into the modern society, reducing ethnic conflict.<sup>33</sup> Ethnicity, thus, represented a ‘lesser,’ pre – modern culture in need of emancipation from obsolete bonds. This led to demeaning of certain cultures, termed ethnic, and *ergo* the people associated with it. Certain life – worlds, appropriated to themselves, the beacon of enlightenment, the spectre of objectivity and science as well as weapon of modernizations, while other life - worlds were relegated to pre – modern, spiritual and irrational - in dire need of patronage from the former.

Escaping the boundaries of the nation – state, such generalizations about cultures and people also influenced studies about different conflicts around the world. Ethnic identity, since it represented a decaying form of association, was attributed to post – colonial societies as it had a “less urgent character in the west.”<sup>34</sup> These, non – western societies,

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<sup>31</sup> As explained in the first chapter, the word ethnicity is derived from the Greek word ‘ethnos,’ used by the Greeks to define non Greeks.

<sup>32</sup> Ronald H. Bayor, "Italians, Jews and Ethnic Conflict." *The International Migration Review* 6, no. 4 (1972): 377-91, Keyfitz, “Ethnic Groups and Their Behavior” and Marcson, “The Control of Ethnic Conflict.”

<sup>33</sup> Education was seen as one of the important mechanism ways to do it. See Marcson, “The Control of Ethnic Conflict,” p. 161. Interestingly, education also became an important part of the modernization scheme prescribed for post - colonial societies. See S.M. Lipset, *Political Man: The Social Basis of Politics*, (New York: Doubleday, 1960), p. 47.

<sup>34</sup> Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, p. 18.

had come out the oppressive colonial rule, mostly of western nations, gaining independence after a hard-fought struggle. These societies, which were till recently a political part of the western countries, were characterized as premodern, still heavily influenced by their earlier spiritual and pre – modern past and associations. These societies still had to undergo modernization, the template of which was also provided by authors born in the country of their former colonizers. One encounters a large body of work which suggests a certain pathway of modernization and democratization to the post – colonial countries, mostly written by western authors.<sup>35</sup> This further perpetuated the patronizing attitude of the latter over the former – a continuation of their colonial mentality. <sup>36</sup>

More importantly, primordialism results in a very reductive understanding of different societies and cultures. The primordialist conception of ethnic identity renders opaque other facets and factors that might have contributed to conflicts in different societies. The issue of Kashmir is a case in point. A dispute which has wide ranging reasons and rationale, has increasingly found academic and political discourse on it caught in the quagmire of ethnic and religious identity. The analysis may enter the debate from any angle, but any analysis is incomplete without emphasizing the Muslim character of the State and importance of its ethno – religious character to the both nation – states of India and Pakistan. Such an understanding, however, invisibilizes the economic and social angle, as well as the internal divisions and unresolved tensions within a particular ethnicity, such as the Kashmiri Muslims. It, hence, leads to a certain ‘naturalization of identities.’<sup>37</sup> Moreover, the understanding of movements, and identities that fuel them, as innate and unitary, glosses

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<sup>35</sup> Among different modernization theories, the most influential ones are that of Walt Whitman Rostow, SM Lipset, David Apter and Samuel P. Huntington. See W.W Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960); Lipset, *Political Man*; and S. P. Huntington, (1968). *Political Order in Changing Societies*. Yale University Press. For a concise exposition on modernization theories see Partha Chatterjee “Political Development and the Question of Political Stability” in *The State of Political Theory: Some Marxist Essays*, ed. Sudipta Kavirak et.al. (Calcutta: Research India Publications, 1978)

<sup>36</sup> E. Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Vintage, 1979), p. 199.

<sup>37</sup> D. Gupta, *The Context of Ethnicity: Sikh Identity in a Comparative Perspective*. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 2.



over the complex processes of formation and assertion of such identities. It also neglects the immense diversity, in some cases contradictions, that such identities and movements possess. Thus, it promotes a very simple and crude analysis of the dispute affecting its overall understanding and future course of action.

Additionally, by providing a certain ideological tenor to conflicts, primordialism also helps in justifying certain actions, some of which can be horrendous. The way in which ideological justification was used to support and warrant the American invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan as well as in its intervention in different Arab states such as Libya and Egypt, resulting in huge loss of life and property, is an apt example. The impact of reducing an entire civilization to an enemy, incompatible with the modern values of living and existence, is still evident in the world politics.<sup>38</sup> It has also given social acceptance to the concept of Islamophobia – the cultivated fear of Islam and its adherents, that has provided legitimacy to actions of states that invaded countries as well as curtailed civil liberties back home.<sup>39</sup> Such discourse, therefore, criminalizes an entire group of people while at the same time allows the State to aggrandize more power and authority over its populace.

It is also interesting to note, that such reduction does not only take place from the side that considers itself to be the modernizing force, but also from the other side. The *Ancien Regime* or the regime threatened by the modernizing force, also conceptualizes its identity through primordialist tropes. Thus, the framework of primordialism is beneficial to extreme conceptions of identities. The ‘fundamental or repressive’ regime also uses the category of culture and identity as the fulcrum around which the resistance is envisioned. In more cases than one, such resistance metamorphoses into counter – violence. The case of Al – Qaeda may be cited as an example. In its call for jihad against the western world, the Al – Qaeda refers to a denigration of Islamic culture and a need to preserve it. This is also the case of many revivalist movements across religions as well.<sup>40</sup> Primordialism, thus, serves as an

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<sup>38</sup> The consequences of War against fundamental Islam have been tremendous. It has led to the destruction of number of countries such as Libya, Yemen, Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria, resulting in enormous loss of both lives and property.

<sup>39</sup> US PATRIOT Act enacted after September 11 attacks is an apt example.

<sup>40</sup> Reformation in Europe and Arya Samaj movement in India can be cited as examples.

efficacious medium to promote conflict and violence, incompatibility and intolerance. The politics emanating from a primordialist discourse is more antagonistic, solidified and prone to violent results. The political values and ideals that emerge from a primordialist framework remain steadfastly static and unchanging.

Such tendency can be attributed to the fact that once culture becomes the central aspect of association and identity, “every civilization sees itself as the center of the world and writes its history as the central drama of human history.”<sup>41</sup> This centrality of civilizational values and an obdurate understanding of them, invariably leads to a conclusion akin to that of *Clash of Civilizations*, which envisages a world that will see conflict and violence emerging from the cultural differences of major civilizations around the world. It argues that “the dangerous clashes of the future are likely to arise from the interaction of Western arrogance, Islamic intolerance, and Sinic assertiveness.”<sup>42</sup> Consequently, it leads to emboldening civilizations around particular values, each antagonistic to other, negating any chance or efficacy of dialogue, discussion and compromise. The only way out suggested is that of confrontation and conflict which is intriguingly close to call of jihad given by Al – Qaeda. Thus, for Huntington, “the survival of the West depends on Americans reaffirming their Western identity and Westerners accepting their civilization as unique not universal and uniting to renew and preserve it against challenges from non-Western societies.”<sup>43</sup>

Primordialism, thus, solidifies extremes while making a middle path immensely difficult. It emboldens the state and its actions, that in more case than one, result in aggrandization of power by the state structures while at the same time allowing it to drastically curtail of civil liberties. It makes it possible for certain dominant players in the arena of world politics to justify their violence against different nations and communities. The opposition to such domination, also takes on the primordialist stand either as an efficacious strategy to draw

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<sup>41</sup> Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, p. 54 – 55.

<sup>42</sup> Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, p. 183.

<sup>43</sup> Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, p. 20.

crowds or is forced by the already tagged by the dominant player i.e. the state. In simpler terms, both the extremes feed of each other.<sup>44</sup>

The primordialist conception of group relations, therefore, leads to a very violent conception of world politics. It pits one culture against other, where each culture is seen as a unitary, fundamental bloc devoid of any internal division or dissidence. Moreover, all cultures are fundamentally opposed to each other, aiming for their own dominance through the subjugation of the *other*. Primordialism, thus, legitimizes conflict and violence as the logical consequent of ethnic relations and associations. Violence is inherent in ethnic relation, a fact evident from the awe and astonishment shown by scholars at the capability to produce violence. Often, the works on ethnic conflict start by emphasizing the amount of violence ethnic conflict has been able to produce, corroborated by events and death figures emerging from the different areas of conflict around the world.<sup>45</sup>

### **Methodological Constraints of Primordialism**

Although analytically useful for the study of conflicts, as it simplifies conflicts by reifying actors, primordialism promotes a very problematic understanding of ethnic identity. It limits the existence of an ethnic identity to an unchanging and static culture. It lends credence to a solidified definition of identity, a certain primacy of conflict and leads to a violent conception of world politics and relations. Ethnic identity also is reduced to an analytical tool to understand ethnic conflicts. The efficacy of ethnic identity as a concept is largely limited to its potential to explain the nature and causes of conflicts, particularly in the post – colonial states. Since the constitution of ethnic identity is largely settled in the primordialist discourse, as it is seen contingent on culture, ethnic identity is mostly studied with respect to conflicts and tensions it raises in the modern community.

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<sup>44</sup> America's War on terror has exacerbated the problem of Islamic fundamentalism. Over the years, it has led to the rise to the Islamic State of Syria (ISIS), an organization characterized as extremists by the Al Qaeda itself.

<sup>45</sup> See Cordell, and Wolff, ed. *The Routledge Handbook of Ethnic Conflict*, p. 1, and Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, p. xi.

In addition to such political and academic understanding emerging out of primordialism, understanding ethnic identities in cultural terms, can also result in a methodological difficulty. As differences and conflicts between ethnic groups are largely explained in cultural terms, “the attention is drawn to the analysis of culture, not of ethnic organization.”<sup>46</sup> The method, thus, entails an evaluation of cultures rather than ethnic identity. It makes the process, history and circumstances of ethnic identity invisible while covertly shifting the focus to culture. It, consequently, restricts the scope and canvass of the research to just an observational tool, seriously limiting its understanding and explanatory capabilities.

In addition, there are other issues that crop up from primordialism. The case of immigrants/emigrants, needs specific evaluation. The immigrant community does not have a single identity but possesses different identities in different spaces. An Italian – American seems strongly bound to his/her Italian identity while living in America. However, if he/she goes back to their mother country, even if for a short duration of time, it is the American aspect of their identity that gets highlighted. In Italy, an Italian – American is continuously made aware of his/her American connection. The character of Michael Corleone from the movie *The Godfather* is an apt example. His conduct and mannerism while dealing with associates in the US, is shown to be strongly Italian, through his strong reliance on virtues such as family, loyalty and revenge. His conduct, however, is strikingly different during his stay in Sicily, where he accepts being a stranger to the country as well as affirms his American identity. This reflects a certain dynamic identity which is inexplicable in the primordialist canon. It points towards a situational angle to the identity of an individual, as it represents, in a very reductionist sense, an exercise of a choice by an individual with respect to his/her identity. Primordialism does not provide space for such changes in situations and *contexts*. One has to be either an Italian or an American based on the cultural values one espouses or cultural traits one exhibits. This at one level, solidifies a particular notion of an identity but more importantly pushes a community to conform to dominant value system or accept a certain subservient position

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Fredrik Barth, ‘Introduction’ in, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, ed. Fredrik Barth (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1969), p. 12.

on account of their different culture. The conception of immigrants as second – class citizens in America or that of Muslims in the Hindutva discourse in India, emanate from these kinds of primordialist assumptions.

The relevance of primordialism in the contemporary world is, therefore, under question. In an increasingly globalized world, with constant immigration and emigration, an influence of western culture and values over vast area of human populace, a socially determined identity of individuals, compartmentalized on the basis of their cultural space and social location seems highly problematic. Individuals and groups constantly interact among different cultural spaces through travel, television, and, possibly the most powerful, social media. The quantum of exchange that happens through these mediums makes it immensely difficult to bracket individuals, their actions and politics, according to a certain pre – given, inherited traits. However, there are still cases and instances in the world politics that are besieged with violence due to certain “cultural differences.” How useful is the framework to explain these differences? That is an interesting debate in itself.

Hence, even though primordialism is as old as the term ethnic identity itself, the derivations from it, be it in the political, academic or methodological sphere, are a little problematic. From envisaging a conflict prone, antagonistic world order, to tagging certain populations and groups as pre-modern and primeval, to neglecting diversity and politics in ethnic identity, primordialism harbours many ills. These tendencies make the paradigm gloss over complexities in movements and identities, provide an obdurate and violent conception of politics and, most importantly, relegating different knowledge systems and life – worlds to an inferior status within the modern world – view. Even then, primordialism still holds relevance, some would say even strongly, in the study of ethnic identity. It is still used as a paradigm and still evokes considerable interest in scholars looking to study ethnic relation particularly in relation to conflicts. Such relevance necessitates constant engagement with the paradigm of primordialism.

This is what this chapter has attempted to do. Starting from the very genesis of primordialism, which is connected to the term ethnic identity itself, this chapter has attempted to provide an illustrative enumeration of certain inferences that flow from the framework of primordialism. It was argued, that in addition to affecting studies on ethnic

identity, the framework of primordialism also has political implications. From affixing ethnic identity to conflict, to promoting a violent outlook of world politics, primordialism lends itself to grave political implications. The chapter has also demonstrated how the framework of primordialism, must also be understood as a consequence of the condescending nature of western societies towards the ‘Orient’, which is considered as still not fully modern.

Over the years, primordialism faced immense criticism directed at its basic tenets and assumptions. Methodologically, the criticism was directed towards its claim of ethnic identity being a socially determined attribute of individual. Critics have used both empirical and normative justifications to bring home their point of view. Over the years, primordialism has incorporated certain critical arguments, *mutas mutandis*, within its fold, to counter such criticism.<sup>47</sup> However, the primordialist canon has continued its tryst with kinship and culture. For a significant number of primordialists, these facets remain the cardinal aspects of ethnic identity. There may have emerged differences in how the relation between kinship/culture and ethnic identity is envisaged, nonetheless, primordialism broadly accepts that ethnic identity can be understood in these terms. The ethnic identity is, thus, an ascriptive, a socially ‘given trait’ of an individual. Subsequently, different theories emerged which tried to challenge the presumptions of primordialism, providing an alternate model to understand ethnic identities. Although, these theories have provided different conceptualizations, most of them can be clubbed under a single framework. This framework, ‘constructivism,’ will be engaged with, in the next chapter.

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<sup>47</sup> The concept of decent and kinship was accepted as a myth, a larger emphasis was put on descent than culture. See Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*; p. 52, Cordell, K., & Wolff, S. (Eds.). (2016). *The Routledge handbook of ethnic conflict*. Routledge, p.69, and Chandra, K. (Ed.). (2012). *Constructivist theories of ethnic politics*. Oxford University Press, p. 10.

## **The Framework of Constructivism**

Constructivism as a framework brings about a profound change in the field of ethnic identity, as a result of its significant departure from the ideas and principles of primordialism. The framework has successfully challenged, even undermined, the earlier basis and conceptualization of ethnic identity and ethnic politics. The framework of constructivism, however, does not refer to a structured or a single set of principle but “the term “constructivism” is a post-facto label imposed, not on a unified theory but on a disparate collection of critical insights that shoot down primordialist assumptions.”<sup>1</sup> These assumptions of primordialism, if accepted, lead to a problematic understanding of ethnic identity and politics and political movements around the world. In addition to such constraints, even empirically, the conclusions emanating from primordialism faced several challenges. There is a plethora of empirical evidences and examples that challenge the basic tenets of primordialism, especially its insistence on stable and monolithic nature of ethnic identity.

The curious case of Pathans<sup>2</sup> in Pakistan can be cited as an apt example. The southern Pathans find the behaviour of their co – ethnics, living in the northern Swat valley, so deplorable and disgraceful that they term them “no longer Pathan.”<sup>3</sup> This is mainly influenced by contextual circumstances as Pathans, living in the northern areas, interact with the Punjabi culture present around it. This interaction has led to certain influences of the Punjabi culture, which in any case is the dominant ethnic and cultural identity in Pakistan, over the Pathans in the Swat valley. Such influences have led the southern Pathans to claim that their northern brethren no longer share the same ethnic identity. However, even the southern Pathans concur, that under the same circumstances, as

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<sup>1</sup> Kanchan Chandra, “Introduction” in *Constructivist Theories of Ethnic Politics*, ed. Kanchan Chandra, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Example borrowed from Fredrik Barth. See Fredrik Barth, “Introduction”, in Fredrik Barth, (ed.), *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1969), p. 12 – 13.

<sup>3</sup> Barth, “Introduction”, p. 13.

experienced by the Pathans in the north, “they might indeed themselves act in the same way.”<sup>4</sup> Thus, different factors, which in the case of Pathans are geographical, exert considerable force which can shape, and in some cases, completely change identity of a group, bringing forth varied constructions of a said ethnicity in different spaces and times. The ethnic category of a Pathan is, therefore, neither derived from a shared kinship values nor exists as a solidified – monolithic whole. Thus, identity is not static but is influenced by various factors around it.

Alternatively, a significant amount of literature, on the conflict between Hindus and Muslims in the Indian subcontinent, argues that the division between the two communities was manufactured by the British imperialists to further their own colonial agenda.<sup>5</sup> Thus, antagonism present between these identities today is not primordial but has arisen at a specific historical time due to specific political and social factors. It has a particular starting point in the modern world when identities began to shape up in particular ways defining and consolidating their ideas, practices and enemies.

These examples provide crucial insights. They portray a dynamic conception of an ethnic identity, negating any cultural dependence or primordial nature of ethnic identity. The example of Pathans, brings into focus, the change that occurs in an ethnic identity due to change in contexts, giving rise to different conceptions of a particular identity. Despite sharing common kinship ties, geographical proximity to another cultural group has made a particular group of Pathans tweak their identity. Thus, the Pathan ethnic identity, as it exists in Pakistan, does not conform to the primordial notion of ethnic identities emanating from a shared kinship or cultural connection. On the other hand, the case of religious communities in India, point out to the fact that identities are not pre – given but are curated and brought about at certain times for certain purposes. The values, principles and ideals of an ethnic identity are, therefore, not given but ‘constructed.’

The chapter will be an exposition of the basic tenets and principle of the framework of constructivism. It will deeply investigate the assumptions and generalizations that are a

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<sup>4</sup> Barth, “Introduction”, p. 13.

<sup>5</sup> B. Chandra, et al. *India's Struggle for Independence*, (UK: Penguin, 2016.), p. 408.



part of the constructivist framework while the critical assessment of the framework will be taken up in the next chapter. The first section will set out the conceptualization of ethnic identity, as proposed by constructivism. Furthermore, the section will briefly reflect on the philosophical roots of constructivism. The second section will deal with different ways in which an identity construction can happen, bringing forth the different processes of identity construction. The next section will deal with the other important aspect of the process of construction, namely the agents of construction. The idea is to look into different actors that play their parts in construction of an identity, corroborated with different examples and scenarios. The fourth section will deal with the merits of the constructivism, enumerating different advantages of employing the framework.

### **Constructivist Conception of Ethnic Identity**

Constructivism dissects the category of ethnic identity laying open the *content*, *context*, and the *other* of an identity assertion for investigation. At the same time the study of identity also gets disentangled from the notion of innate and unchanging cultures. Identity, understood in such terms, is not pre – given or static but can be bent, changed, remodelled and reconfigured. It is a constant and continuing *interaction* with the *context*, against an *other* which defines the *content* of a group identity. Ethnic identity, or more generally group identity, may be modelled on cultural codes of a society, but is not contingent on it. Such cultural aspects are not, in any sense, primordial or innate but are constructed to satisfy certain socio – political or individual needs. Ethnic identity or group identity is, hence, not fixed but is situational and relational, which is constantly susceptible to construction.

Constructivism, hence, understands identity as constantly changing and evolving. It is not a stable, given feature of a social person but is contingent on different factors, situations, and contexts that emerge around a particular individual. Constructivists, thus “recognize the unstable and changing nature of ethnic identity, which can take different forms depending on which culturally shared items are mobilized by individuals in their quest for

meaningful self-definition.”<sup>6</sup> It involves constant reworking, reinterpretation and reformulation of the context of an individual or group, which involves continuous engagement and reflection of the social position, ideas, politics, and interests of particular individuals or groups. It is a dynamic process and can be taken upon frequently during the course of a lifetime, for some, even daily. Identity construction is, thus, a ceaseless process and “as the individual (or group) moves through daily life, ethnicity can change according to variations in the situations and audiences encountered”<sup>7</sup>

Constructivists are concerned about the process of formation of an ethnic identity. The emphasis of constructivist studies has been to map contextual and relational changes in a particular identity, rather to lookout for reasons and sources of conflict in the cultural content of different identities. Studies usually look at historical, political and economic reasons for the construction of an ethnic identity. Constructivism does not ignore conflict altogether but believes that by accepting identities undergo constant “redefinition and reconstruction, our understanding of such ethnic processes such as ethnic conflict, mobilization, resurgence, and change might profit.”<sup>8</sup>

In the framework of constructivism, culture emerges out of situations and contexts, from interaction and action. Culture is, thus, not static or inherited as proposed by the primordialists. Hence, culture is not the precursor to identity, it is what comes out of ethnic formation. Culture is “seen as a tool kit providing actors with various sources of meaning from which they can draw to create and recreate identities on a day-to-day basis.”<sup>9</sup> Thus, culture loses its overpowering and unchanging influence on identity to a mere contingent and contextual effect on its ‘construction.’ Consequently, a constructivist study is, instead, focussed on excavating factors that influence the formation of an identity, and to understand the politics and practices that emerge out of a particular identity.

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<sup>6</sup> P. Eid, *Being Arab: Ethnic and Religious Identity Building among Second Generation Youth in Montreal*, (Montreal & Kingston: McGill – Queen’s University Press, 2007), p. 22.

<sup>7</sup> J. Nagel, “Constructing Ethnicity: Creating and Recreating Ethnic Identity and Culture”, *Social problems* 41, no. 1 (Feb 1994): p. 154.

<sup>8</sup> Nagel, “Constructing Ethnicity”, p. 153.

<sup>9</sup> Eid, *Being Arab*, p. 22.

Constructivism, hence, puts forth ethnicity as dynamic entity. Ethnicity, for constructivists, “is dynamic, constantly evolving property of both individual and group identity.”<sup>10</sup> Contexts and meanings emerging from it are important in formation of ethnic identities. It uproots the concept of group identity from the ‘social’ and puts it firmly in the ‘political.’ It gives primacy to political arena, where identity assertions happen within an institutional structure and power matrix. Ethnic identity is formed through contestations, interactions and events in the political sphere, and is not socially ordained. Essentially “it is primarily the political community, no matter how artificially organized, that inspires the belief in common ethnicity.”<sup>11</sup> Ethnic identity, thus, becomes a flexible structure that can be modified depending on the context in which actors perform social interactions. Ethnic identity is understood as an effect of different political factors and processes that take place within a society. The constructivists ascribe a certain primacy to the political to change, redefine, or even, reinvent an identity.<sup>12</sup>

Ethnic identity comes into being when “people come to see themselves as *belonging* together – coming from a common background – as a consequence of *acting* together.”<sup>13</sup> Consequently, ethnic identity is constructed when groups engage in action and interaction with different communities and different identity constructions. Since, identity is not socially determined, it comes out of an arena of contestation and interaction between different communities, which involves assertion of different conceptions of politics and identity. Identity consciousness arises in a group when it takes part, collectively, in a political or social<sup>14</sup> *act*. Constructivism, thus puts immense emphasis on ‘social action’ and

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<sup>10</sup> Nagel, “Constructing Ethnicity”, p. 152.

<sup>11</sup> Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, (New York: Bedminster Press, 1968), p. 389.

<sup>12</sup> Nagel refers to a certain use of history and cultural material to recast and reinvent an ethnic identity, using the example of American Indian Movement (AIM). See Nagel, “Constructing Ethnicity”, p. 167.

<sup>13</sup> R. Jenkins, *Rethinking Ethnicity: Arguments and Explorations*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Sage, 2008), p. 10.

<sup>14</sup> The use of the term social here is different from its usage in the case of primordialism viz social ascription. The social in case of primordialism denotes a particular position of a group or individual in a society which provides it with its sense of identity and self. Here the term social is used to denote an arena where different groups and communities exist together.

‘social interaction.’ The emphasis on action largely is a result of the belief that social concepts are embedded in social action and a “subjective perception of reality.”<sup>15</sup> Meanings “are created and located in social action.”<sup>16</sup> Man is a social product created in a social context. The conception of world and its understanding is derived from the specific context that they emerge from. Consequently, the “self cannot be adequately understood apart from the particular social context in which they were shaped.”<sup>17</sup>

Ethnic identity emerges from a social process where definitions about the situation are created, maintained or changed, through action or interaction. There is constant reinterpretation of meanings endowed to situations by different groups, which decide intra - group or inter - group relations. Ethnic identity is constantly constructed and changed, specific to interpretation and reinterpretation of meaning through ‘collective definition’. It signifies “the basic process by which racial [ethnic] groups come to see each other and themselves and poise themselves to act towards each other; the process is one in which the racial [ethnic] groups are defining or interpreting their experiences and the events that bring these experiences about.”<sup>18</sup> Thus, any kind of social order, ethnic identity being one of them, “exists *only* as a product of human activity”<sup>19</sup>(emphasis in original.)

Constructivism, in espousing such a line, puts itself in opposition to other theories which provide different understanding and explanation of social concepts and processes, particularly that of realism.<sup>20</sup> Realism believes that things, objects and phenomena exist

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<sup>15</sup> S. Malesevic, *The Sociology of Ethnicity*, (London: Sage, 2004), p. 8.

<sup>16</sup> Malesevic, *The Sociology of Ethnicity*, p. 64.

<sup>17</sup> Peter L. Berger, and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in Sociology of Knowledge*, USA: Penguin, 1967), p. 68.

<sup>18</sup>H. Blumer and T. Duster, “Theories of Race and Social Action”, in *Sociological Theories: Race and Colonialism*. (Paris: UNESCO, 1980), p. 222.

<sup>19</sup> Berger, and Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*, p. 70.

<sup>20</sup> Realism, itself is a very complex methodological principle and has many sub – divisions and different formulations. For an in-depth study see H. Putnam, Realism and Reason, *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 50, no.6 (August, 1977): p. 483-498; A. Sayer, *Realism and Social Science*. (London: Sage, 1999); C. Wright, *Realism, Meaning and Truth*. (MA: Blackwell, 1986); and K. Dean, et al. *Realism, Philosophy and Social science*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

independently of our minds i.e. they exist independently of whether we believe them to exist or not. In this sense, realism argues that various ideas or phenomena such as mathematical variables, theoretical ideas, causal relations, moral or aesthetic properties, even the external world has an objective existence, autonomous of any human action or interference.

Constructivism challenges such a notion of independent existence of phenomena and concepts. Instead, it imparts centrality to human action to create and construct different concepts and categories. Social entities, such as ethnic identities, do not exist independently but are constructed through human action. It is in relation to a particular context and human action that ethnic identities emerge in a space. Human action, however, is not unfettered and has different conditions that influence and shape it. Consequently, even the processes of the formation of ethnic identities is varied and there are different ways and processes through which an ethnic identity is constructed. These processes include different factors that help in the formation of ethnic identity and, result in, different forms of ethnic identity.

### **Processes of Construction**

The most important factor, in the construction of an ethnic identity, is that of the *other*. The dynamic process of identity construction involves a concurrent process of inclusion and exclusion. The construction of ethnic identity “entail social processes of exclusion and incorporation whereby discrete categories are maintained *despite* changing participation and membership in the course of individual life histories”<sup>21</sup> (emphasis in original). This process of inclusion and exclusion takes place due to constant *interaction* happening across boundaries of ethnic groups or by certain political changes that are brought about within a particular group. Such “social relations are maintained across such boundaries and are frequently based precisely on the dichotomized ethnic statuses.”<sup>22</sup> It is, thus, against a particular group, through a process of exclusion and inclusion, that an identity of a group

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<sup>21</sup> Barth, “Introduction”, p. 10.

<sup>22</sup> Barth, “Introduction”, p. 10.

is constructed. Identity, hence, “is dependent on individual’s relationship with significant others, who may change or disappear.”<sup>23</sup>

Thus, the process of *othering*, which denotes a method or principle that is used to exclude and include members in a group, is an important form of identity construction. The excluded population or the ‘*other*’ is an important reference point around which an identity is constructed. The *content* of an identity is constructed with reference to the *other* and if any change occurs its ‘*other*,’ the identity also undergoes a drastic change. The change in the *other* necessitates a change in the method or principle of exclusion, or if same principle and method of exclusion is continued, then a change in the *other*. This affects the way in which the identity is conceptualized and may even affect its membership. Such a change also impacts the political premium associated with certain actions, for example violence, against the *other*. Thus, a change in the *other* characteristically alters an identity, its content, and in some cases, its politics as well.

The case of Shiv Sena,<sup>24</sup> a regional political organization in the Indian State of Maharashtra, is an apt example. Since its inception, the Shiv Sena has affirmed to a regional - religious identity steeped in culture.<sup>25</sup> However, its political and social course, over the period of its existence, provide interesting observations. Although, the nativist – ethnic push has been a constant in the larger discourse of the organization, it has had to considerably negotiate and renegotiate the method and object of its politics. Initially opposing the influx of the Dravidian community into Maharashtra, specifically Bombay (subsequently rechristened as Mumbai), situations forced the leaders of the Shiv Sena to change its object of hostility, in subsequent decades. This shift was necessitated, among other political factors, by the reluctance of “the south Indians to be good enemies.”<sup>26</sup> The antagonism was, subsequently, directed towards Communists and later, Muslims became

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<sup>23</sup> Berger and Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*, p. 118.

<sup>24</sup> A significant part of the example has been taken from Dipankar Gupta, *The Context of Ethnicity: Sikh Identity in a Comparative Perspective*. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996.), p. 7.

<sup>25</sup> Bal Thackeray famously said that in religious terms he is a follower of the Lord Shiv while in political terms he follows Shivaji, the Maratha warrior.

<sup>26</sup> Gupta, *The Context of Ethnicity*, p. 8.

the primary target of hostilities.<sup>27</sup> This shift of attention over to Muslims brought it closer to the Bharatiya Janata Party, a conservative party espousing a majoritarian ideology termed as Hindutva. It signalled a shift from a regional identity of Shiv Sena to a religion-based identity. As “the Sena realised the futility in carrying on with its emphasis on Marathi identity to earn political benefits and recognised the need to make a significant alteration to their ideological stance,”<sup>28</sup> the basis of its identity shifted from the image of Marathi mannos to that of Hindutva.

This example shows, how a change in scenarios forced a group to alter its identity, significantly altering its political and social actions. However, this is not the only reason that may instigate a change in construction of an identity. Additionally, construction can also take place when communities decide to reinterpret history, values and principles associated with their identity. This inward construction, requires an internal change, realignment and reinterpretation of different ideals, events and practices associated with an identity. The reasons for such an interpretation can be economic, political or cultural. The change exhibited by the case of Fur community of Sudan, is a case, which is driven by economic considerations. The Fur community change their identity from a village based, hoe agricultural community to being nomadic Arabs. This is primarily driven by economic incentives that such nomadic life provides, leading such households to “abandon their fields and villages.”<sup>29</sup>

The change in the conception of Sikh identity, driven by the Tat Khalsa movement, is also an example where a community recasted its own identity.<sup>30</sup> In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a movement emerged in the Sikh community to purge the Sikh identity of corrupt elements, referred as such, by the Tat Khalsa movement. The attack was directed at the Sanatan Sikh identity characterized by plural and syncretic elements. The objective of the Tat Khalsa movement

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<sup>27</sup> Gupta, *The Context of Ethnicity*, p. 8.

<sup>28</sup> Adrija Roychowdhury, “Shiv Sena’s Evolution: From Marathi Mannos to Hindutva, from with the BJP to without the BJP”, *The Indian Express*, June 19, 2018, <https://indianexpress.com/article/research/shiv-sena-anniversary-52-bjp-hindutva-maharashtra-5224004/>

<sup>29</sup> Barth, “Introduction”, p. 23.

<sup>30</sup> H. Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity, and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press), 1994, p. 305 – 306.

was to build a Khalsa (pure) identity of the Sikhs. This reconstruction was initiated by a section of the Sikh community and significantly changed the markers of the Sikh identity.<sup>31</sup>

Thirdly, a construction of identity can be imposed by external forces on a segment of a population, deciding their identity for them. The ethnic identity, as opposed to emerging from the community, is externally curated where certain characteristics are imposed on a group of people by an external actor. The said action can only be taken if the *agent* constructing, holds considerable amount of power over the subdued segment of the population. As a result of such dominance, “the categorised, without the capacity to resist the carrying of identity cards, the wearing of armbands, or whatever more subtle devices of identification and stigmatisation might be deployed, may, in time, come to think of themselves in the language or categories of the oppressor.”<sup>32</sup>In addition to such brute physical force, identity imposition also requires domination over cultural and communicative aspects of the community which can help it to propagate and entrench the conception of the identity, both within the populace and discourses around the world.

The example of the African – American identity appropriately explains the process of imposed constructions and its implications. The shape and form of the African – American identity is heavily influenced by the notions and perceptions that the white population of the United States has towards this identity. The values, principles, and positions attached with an African – American identity are not internally decided or changed depending on circumstances but are externally imposed by the dominant white population. The capability of an African – American to sufficiently or considerably affect his/her identity construction is severely restrained.<sup>33</sup> As a result, an African – American identity continues to occupy a sustained subordinate social status, facing systemic oppression and repression.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, p. 382 – 400.

<sup>32</sup> Richard Jenkins “Rethinking Ethnicity: Identity, Categorization and Power”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 17, no. 2 (1994): p. 217.

<sup>33</sup> See Nagel, “Constructing Ethnicity”, p. 156.

<sup>34</sup> Eli Day, “The Race Gap in US Prisons is Glaring, and Poverty is Making it Worse”, *Mother Jones*, February 2, 2018, <https://www.motherjones.com/crime-justice/2018/02/the-race-gap-in-u-s-prisons-is-glaring-and-poverty-is-making-it-worse/>, and Caroline Simon, “There is a Stunning Gap between the



Thus, the *content* of an identity is contingent on many other factors rather than merely on internal cultural aspects. The content of such identities is very much dependent on the communication and interaction with groups that occupy spaces around it as well as the differing political ecologies<sup>35</sup> and contingencies around a particular society. It can be affected by varying conditions, such as economic, which may force groups to change the *content* of their identity. It can be necessitated by the change of the *other*, generated through internal needs or imposed from the above.

### **Agents of Construction**

The process of construction, however, does not occur *suo moto* and rarely involves the whole community taking active part in it. Specific variables play an important part in initiation and maintenance of an identity construction. These can be termed as *agents of construction*. It may refer to a certain individuals, groups or institutions which play an important part in the creation of an identity, and its subsequent promotion and propagation. Basically, the situational and contextual variables that make possible a certain construction of an identity to develop. These interjections made at specific historical – political time can be by different *agents* which have the ability to construct an identity and successfully propagate and preserve it. The question of *agent* of construction, simultaneously, involves engagement with different political concepts and realities that influence an identity construction, specifically that of power and domination.

Historically, there have been many instances when action of certain powerful individuals has changed the path of the identity of that group as well as the course of politics as a whole. The renaming of Muslim Conference to National Conference by Sheikh Abdullah, a leader of Kashmir during its anti – monarchical struggle, is one such example. The creation of Muslim League in India, or Indian National Congress before it, is another.

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Number of White and Black inmates in America's Prisons", June 16, 2016, <https://www.businessinsider.in/There-is-a-stunning-gap-between-the-number-of-white-and-black-inmates-in-Americas-prisons/articleshow/52784813.cms>

<sup>35</sup> Ecology is a term used by F. Barth for context. See Barth, "Introduction", p. 11 – 12.

Ethnic identity and symbols, thus, “are dynamic instruments in the process of power – seeking.”<sup>36</sup> In the course of the development of a political movement or project, the leaders emphasize a construction of an identity most suited to their political needs or political vision, one which may secure them mass support and recognition. The elite try to propagate their vision of a political movement. Although, ethnic identity can have an essence of a ‘shared culture’ but such culture is not inherited but formulated to serve specific political needs. Symbols and cultural differences are constructed and reconstructed as a tool in power struggle to achieve political ends. In such mobilizations, “the traditional culture does not awaken, but is instead transformed and reduced to a few cultural markers – symbols loaded with intense political meanings.”<sup>37</sup>

The Indian Freedom struggle saw such invocation of cultural markers, selectively earmarked, due to their immense potential as tools for political mobilization. Hindu Mahasabha and the Muslim League were the two organizations which reduced religious affiliations to a very few cultural markers such as those of language (Hindi/Urdu) or that of cow protection. Even the Congress, used certain cultural symbols in order to achieve mass mobilization, such as ‘Ram Rajya’ or ‘Ganesh Utsav.’ These invocations neglected the differences and divisions within each, in order to achieve larger mobilizations. Thus, “the process by which elites mobilize ethnic identities simplifies those beliefs and values, distorts them, and selects those that are politically useful rather than central to the belief systems of the people in question”<sup>38</sup>

Thus, the social position of individuals and groups and the amount of power they possess, have important bearing on identity construction. Power refers “simply to relations of domination and subordination”<sup>39</sup> Such exercise of power may be on account of control over social, cultural or economic capital and can be used to achieve political ends. In addition to the elites of the society, power and domination can also be exercised by means of institutional control or hegemony of governmental and state structures. Considering the

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<sup>36</sup> Malesevic, *The Sociology of Ethnicity*, p. 116.

<sup>37</sup> Malesevic, *The Sociology of Ethnicity*, p. 118.

<sup>38</sup> P. Brass, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison*, (London: Sage, 1991), p. 16.

<sup>39</sup> A. Cohen, “Political Symbolism”, *Annual Review of Anthropology* 8, (1979): 87 - 113 p. 88.

scope and structure of the State today, buoyed by technological advancements<sup>40</sup>, it is very important to gauge the role of its structure and techniques,<sup>41</sup> in construction of different identities. Such role is not limited to the contemporary times only. The colonial State has been instrumental in shaping identities through its policies as well as its techniques, like the census,<sup>42</sup> in construction and reifying an identity. Such policies transformed the existing, fuzzy, divisions between communities into to sharply defined, enumerated identities.<sup>43</sup>

The modern state is also an important *agent* that has the capacity to push for a process of “social categorization”<sup>44</sup> – the external process of the compartmentalization of identities that is forced by a dominant actor. Such an imposition may be, over time, internalized and may come to define one’s identity. If the authority is legitimate, which usually is the case with the modern state institutions, then such categorization “might foster ethnic group consciousness.”<sup>45</sup> State, thus, may get involved and steer such social interaction by categorizing certain meanings and affecting the construction of ethnic identities.

Thus, “the phenomenon of ethnicity depends for its social significance on its place in and under the prevailing structures of incorporation, directly or otherwise.”<sup>46</sup> Structures around the world have fostered or created ethnic divisions where these were formerly absent, and

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<sup>40</sup> The AADHAR project of the Government of India which reduces the identity of a human being to just a number. And technologically monitor its movement proves the might of the State in pushing for certain forms of identity

<sup>41</sup> The ideas of techniques of power is borrowed from Michel Foucault. Paul Rabinow, ed. *The Foucault Reader*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), p. 48.

<sup>42</sup> Anderson and Kaviraj point out to uses of census to the state. While for Anderson, it helps in propagating an idea of a nation, for Kaviraj, it influences the relations between different communities. See B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (London: Verso Books, 1991), and S. Kaviraj, Religion, Politics and Modernity. *Occasional Paper* 11, (2014): 163-184.

<sup>43</sup> S. Kaviraj, “Religion, Politics and Modernity” *Occasional Paper* 11, (2014): 163-184.

<sup>44</sup> Malesevic, *The Sociology of Ethnicity*, p. 70.

<sup>45</sup> Malesevic, *The Sociology of Ethnicity*, p. 71.

<sup>46</sup> M. G. Smith, “Pluralism, Race and Ethnicity in Selected African Countries”, in *Theories of Race and Ethnic Relations*, ed. J. Rex and D. Mason, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 198.

ignored or eliminated them where formerly important.”<sup>47</sup> Such a view, not only describes the structure of ethnic identities within a nation – state, but can also sufficiently address the contextual differences present among same ethnic identities existing in different nation - states. The institutional incorporation in each state would correspond to the political power dynamics present in that state. Thus, “identical ethnic or racial compositions may be regulated by different structures in different societies, while societies with differing compositions may have very similar structures.”<sup>48</sup> Ethnic identity, hence, becomes intimately connected to the power relations between different constituent groups and the resultant institutional structure.

The category of nation - state is also used by different communities and ethnic mobilizations to exclude communities or to justify their actions, which in many cases, might involve violence against other communities. The nation - state acts as a medium for creating an outsider. “In ethnic movements, nation – state gets clearly defined, either immediately, or through some rather transparent mediations.”<sup>49</sup> It can be used to justify secessionist movements through invocation of a different idea of the nation – state or by political organizations like Shiv Sena to justify their actions on regional ethnic competitors on account of being exceptionally true to, in some cases defending, the idea of the larger nation - state.<sup>50</sup>

The emphasis of power does not completely negate the role of individual will and agency, in the framework of constructivism. Constructivists do accept space for individual agency but it significantly curtailed. An individual can exercise control over the construction of an identity in very limited sense, when allowed by context and situations to do so. Mostly, in situations where the *other* or imposition of an identity is not too strongly defined or when persons traverse different contextual spaces, individuals may have a space to influence, or choose, a construction for themselves. At such a level, the ethnic identity is constructed through invoking specific cultural markers. Ethnic identity is curated taking into

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<sup>47</sup> Smith, “Pluralism, Race and Ethnicity”, p. 198.

<sup>48</sup> Smith, “Pluralism, Race and Ethnicity”, p. 199.

<sup>49</sup> Gupta, *The Context of Ethnicity*, p. 7.

<sup>50</sup> Gupta, *The Context of Ethnicity*, p. 7.

consideration how an individual perceives “its meanings to different audiences, its salience in different social contexts, and its utility in different settings.”<sup>51</sup> It may still be formulated in cultural terms and culture differences may play a part in organizing identities, such differences, however, are not “objective differences, but only those which the actors themselves regard as significant.”<sup>52</sup> Therefore, there might be certain cultural traits available to people to constitute their identity, it eventually rests on them the characteristics they want to choose, or not to choose. Such choice-based approach is also central to the liberal discourse which exhorts that “the freedom to determine our loyalties and priorities between the different groups to all of which we may belong is a peculiarly important liberty which we have reason to recognize, value, and defend.”<sup>53</sup>

The salience of individual choice and agency becomes apparent in the cases of immigrants or emigrants which have to deal with changing historical, social and cultural spaces. The immigrant or emigrant is confronted with different *contexts* at different places and has different identities specific to each context. The individual, therefore, has to manoeuvre his identity in consonance with thus specific context. The example of Michael Corleone, from *The Godfather* trilogy, as explained in the previous chapter, will, therefore, be interpreted differently by constructivists. The assertion of Michael of his Americanness while in Sicily can be construed as a conscious act by Michael to choose his American identity over his Italian one. An individual can identify as an American in Italy, an Italian – American in the US and an Italian while dealing with different European ethnicities within the US. An Indian – origin American can choose to identify himself as just American while in India or may emphasize his Indian origin. There is, thus, a space for choice of an individual to choose an identity.

However, this choice is severely limited and is constrained by different political and social factors. The case of hyphenated identities brings forth interesting aspects related to this. The identity of Michael Corleone, in the US, is never just American. His Italian identity is always prefixed to his American identity. In the United States “the WASPs (White, Anglo

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<sup>51</sup> Nagel, “Constructing Ethnicity”, p. 155.

<sup>52</sup> Barth, “Introduction”, p. 14.

<sup>53</sup> A. Sen, *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny*, (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2007), p. 4.

– Saxon, Protestants) are the true insiders, the bedrock of American mainstream culture.”<sup>54</sup> The identity of other social groups is constrained by the dominant social categories ascribed to them, which they mostly cannot circumvent.

Hence, constructivism does not provide an individual with absolute choice to choose an identity. The choice is constrained by different social and political factors present around an individual. An individual does have a choice to choose an identity, however, such choice is circumscribed by the limited options available to an individual. Constructivism, thus, does not risk the “emphasizing of agency at the cost of structure.”<sup>55</sup> The framework believes choice to play a limited role in a ‘dialectical process’ of the construction of an identity. In such a dialectical relation, an identity is constructed through an interaction between the contending forces of individual agency and the constraints emanating from the structure.

Notwithstanding, the emphasis on structure, constructivism does brighten up the understanding of the formation of ethnic identity. The admission, analytically, that in the construction of an identity different agents are involved and that none is definite, makes the study of identity more intriguing. It involves various institutions and agents into the politics of ethnic identity, which not only has, developed a more interesting approach to the study of ethnic identity but has also made it more relevant to the contemporary political and global environment. Constructivism, thus, helps in understanding and unwinding the complexities inherent in the political arena, bringing into question not only the present contours of different identities, but also their genesis. The different actors and the different trajectories they invoke, reflect the fact, that the construction of an ethnic identity is in a constant flux. Such dynamism allows intense scrutiny about the role of each actor in the construction of an identity, bringing forth, unknown facets and situations of an identity construction. Constructivism helps in destabilizing the present constructions, opening up new possibilities of understanding a particular identity. The role of agency, power and institutional matrix in construction of an identity, through their interaction, intersections

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<sup>54</sup> Gupta, *The Context of Ethnicity*, p. 6.

<sup>55</sup> Nagel, “Constructing Ethnicity”, p. 156.

and disjuncture provide enlarged scope for understanding an identity, raising important questions for investigation.

### **Merits of Constructivism**

Constructivism, hence, provides a much more comprehensive analysis of ethnic identity on number of counts and is, therefore, propitious for a number of reasons. It provides different resources to analyse ethnic identity, thus, enlarging the scope of group identities. It brings into focus different factors and facets of ethnic identity, which remained neglected in the primordialist framework. It disentangles the concept of ethnic identity from culture, thus, providing opportunity for varied understanding of it. Ethnic identity is constantly being constructed - reconstructed at different movements of time in different spaces by different people. This provides a broad canvass where the different components of each identity construction can be taken into account and investigated. A group identity is not predetermined by the culture it encloses but can be formulated keeping the specificities of *context* and situation in mind. Since, ethnic identity can be constructed by different actors and institutions, it gives an option of choosing the prism through which the understanding of an ethnic identity can be undertaken. It, hence, brings forth different perspectives regarding ethnic identity, eventually enriching the study as a whole.

The notion of the *other*, characteristically, reinterprets conflicts between groups. Antagonisms, for constructivists, are not static as they do not arise from pre – given cultural stuff but are contingent on different situational and contextual changes. Since, changes in ethnic identity composition occur frequently, the category of the *other* is not a fixed category and is subject to constant renegotiations. The nature of antagonism between groups can change over time as the very configuration and *content* of an ethnic identity is dynamic. This dynamism, subsequently, affects the relations and interaction of an identity with different identities around it. The nature of antagonism is, then, dialogical rather than confrontationist. This, leaves room for different identities to discuss and deliberate on their differences rather than promoting a hardened violent outlook.

Lastly, concluding the arguments of this chapter, I want to emphasize that constructivism does seem more conducive to study ethnic identities in the contemporary world. It gives space to different identities and politics that an individual or a group may ascribe or practice. It, thus, provides different avenues of belonging to an individual confronted with an increasingly globalized space, increasing communication avenues and decreasing distances. Also, it provides a preferable understanding of world politics for two reasons. One, it refutes a violent and intractable conception of global conflicts. Conflicts emerge out of certain historical reasons and, thus, products of specific circumstances and events. The uncovering of such historical reasons and circumstances helps to broaden the understanding of the conflict. Constructivism, thus, provides a much vast and interesting tool kit for understanding and explaining ethnic identity.

This chapter has provided a detailed analysis of constructivism and its different facets and assumptions. While primordialism promotes a conflictual study on ethnic identity, constructivism is concerned with excavating the historical or cultural factors, among other things, that give rise to a particular identity. Constructivism understands ethnic identity as constructed by different processes and agents, thus, providing different and multiple levels of identity constructions. It opens up the category of ethnic identity and ethnic conflict to a more comprehensive and thorough understanding. Thus, the framework of constructivism has several positive implications, which make it more acceptable and relevant for undertaking a study of ethnic identity.

This does not signify that constructivism as a framework is bereft of any shortcomings or criticisms. There are few limitations that emerge from the framework of constructivism which can seriously affect its explanatory potential. These will be discussed in the next chapter. The next chapter will examine the different conceptions of the Kashmir conflict that emerge from the framework of primordialism and constructivism respectively. Concurrently, the chapter will try to ascertain the different limitations of each framework that emerge from their understanding of the Kashmir conflict.



## *Evaluating Primordialism and Constructivism: An Illustration of Kashmir*

The earlier chapters have put forth a detailed exposition of the two frameworks of primordialism and constructivism. The principles of these frameworks and their conceptualization of ethnic identity was put forth. Each framework has specific assumptions, which affect the understanding of ethnic identity that emerge from the respective framework. Thus, each framework puts emphasis on different facets of an ethnic identity in accordance to its own different assumptions.

This chapter will employ these frameworks in a specific space to further understand the way these frameworks make sense of identity discourse in a conflict area. The resources that each framework provides to understand an identity discourse and the specific issues and facets that achieve prominence in each framework will be ascertained. The ways in which the conflict is framed by each framework will also be analysed. The desirability of the framework of constructivism and its limitations would be brought forth. The chapter will employ the example of Kashmir to understand that manner in which each framework makes sense of the identity discourse and conflict that exists in Kashmir.

It is, however, important to mention that this chapter will not be providing a descriptive account of the conflict in Kashmir. The intention of this chapter is not to provide specific reasons for the conflict. It is an endeavour to emphasize and enumerate different representations and multiple understandings that come out of the conflict of Kashmir. The attempt is to enlist that how a change of framework leads to a significant change in the conceptualization of the conflict. Also, the region of Kashmir is chosen as the illustration due to its specific relevance to contemporary times, particularly in India. The region of Kashmir sees a great amount of conflict and violence and has, as a result, been a staple in the popular and media discourses. Kashmir region has witnessed numerous protests, militant attacks and state violence which have kept the issue and the region in the limelight. Additionally, there are different intra – community and inter – community tensions that exist in the region of Kashmir, which provide more depth to the conflict. Thus, the Kashmir

conflict is a pertinent illustration to understand the divergent and complex ways in which different frameworks make sense of an ethnic conflict.

The Kashmir conflict is a territorial dispute in South – Asia. The conflict is recognized by the United Nations (UN). The Security Council has also passed a resolution in this regard.<sup>1</sup> The resolution recognizes India and Pakistan as two parties to the dispute. The UN favours a plebiscite, which seeks to give the population of the region, the right to decide their future – to either join India or Pakistan. Kashmir conflict, however, encompasses much more complexity than what is inscribed in the UN resolution. In addition to India and Pakistan, China also controls some territory of this region, part of which was ceded to it by Pakistan. This makes China a party to the conflict as well. Also, there are many groups in Kashmir region which espouse an independent, sovereign state of Kashmir, independent from both India and Pakistan and, hence, are not satisfied with the UN resolution. These factors add extra layers of complexity to the conflict, making it one of the most complicated and bloodiest conflicts in the contemporary world.

The violence has particularly accentuated since the advent of armed violence/struggle in 1989. The resultant violence has claimed many lives, while at the same time, maiming, both physically and mentally, many more. It has also led to the migration/exodus of a large section of the minority Kashmiri Pandit community. After a brief ebb during the first decade of the twenty – first century, the militant violence has revived in the last few years. However, it is now coupled with public protests and popular movements putting life in a permanent state of increased risk. These dimensions have put immense spotlight on the conflict, including the daily lives of the population. Different aspects of the lives of Kashmiri people have been scrutinized to understand the reasons and effects of the conflict. None, possibly more deeply, than the aspect of Kashmiri identity.

The identity discourse of Kashmir has a chequered history. There is a multitude of work that have attempted to engage with the identity discourse of the Kashmir region. As a result, many different conceptualizations regarding the Kashmiri identity have come up. Each of these conceptualizations espouse a particular conception of the dispute and, consequently,

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<sup>1</sup> See the United Nations Security Council Resolution 47, adopted on April 21, 1948.

carry significant political implications. The chapter will explore the ways in which the Kashmir conflict and its identities are understood from a primordialist and a constructivist perspective. The chapter will initially engage with the framework of primordialism, followed by the constructivist framework. Finally, in the last section, the chapter will provide a critical assessment of the framework of constructivism.

### **Primordialist Reading of the Kashmir Conflict**

As explained in the second chapter, primordialism believes that a conflict emerges from the rigidity of identities that are present in a given space. Primordialism puts forth an essential idea of an ethnic identity based on a given categories of human existence. Ethnic conflict is “based on ascriptive group identities—race, language, religion, tribe, or caste. “<sup>2</sup> Since, these identities are ascriptive and given, hence, monolithic and solidified, different identities come in conflict with each other. Thus, conflict is natural between two ethnic identities as “ethnic identity is often accompanied by hostility towards outgroups.”<sup>3</sup>Hence, primordialism explains a conflict as being based on the inflexible nature of ethnic identities. In a study of Kashmir conflict, therefore, primordialism would make sense of the conflict by emphasizing the rigid nature of different identities involved in the dispute. Thus, a primordialist viewpoint of the Kashmir conflict would invoke the “givens of social existence” to explain and understand the reasons of conflict in Kashmir.

In the broader space of South Asia, the framework of primordialism would argue that the conflict of Kashmir emanates from the antagonistic nature of majority identities of Kashmir and rest of India. The framework, essentially, emphasises on the Muslim majority character of Kashmir and the Hindu dominated character of the Indian nation. The Kashmir conflict is, thus, a conflict between religiously disparate communities. Such an understanding of the Kashmiri identity and, consequently, that of Kashmir conflict ends up portraying the dispute as a corollary of the Hindu – Muslim conflict prevalent in the Indian sub – continent. Such an essentialized conception, also ends up understanding the Muslims of

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<sup>2</sup> Ashutosh Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 7.

Kashmir as a subset of the larger Muslim community of the sub – continent, sharing similar religious principles and practices.

On the other hand, if the difference in the religious character of the majority communities is accepted as the reason of conflict, then the conflict was inevitable outcome. The interaction of these communities within the rubric of a common nation was, therefore, bound to raise conflict. Primordialism would, thus, emphasize an inherent tension between Kashmir and rest of the Indian nation. The very accession of the state of Kashmir with the Indian nation is, in this sense, a recipe for conflict. It would emphasize that the inherent schism between the Hindus and the Muslims, inevitably, gave rise to the conflict. The primordialist conception of the history of the dispute is would also portray the emergence of the conflict as an unavoidable outcome. Additionally, the resolution of the conflict, emerging from the framework of primordialism, would also stress on the containment and incorporation of such entrenched differences, without challenging the basis and constitution of such differences.

Thus, primordialism entrenches sharper identities and extreme positions of the Kashmir conflict. The reduction of the conflict to the religious character of the two communities make it easier for extreme positions to consolidate and gain traction. Thus, extreme and intractable positions rely on primordialist understanding of the conflict to further their goals and political interests. These extreme positions exist on the both sides of the divide and derive particular political benefit from the primordialist conception of the conflict. In case of Kashmir dispute, the Hindutva identity in India, and the Islamist identity in the region of Kashmir mutually benefit from the primordialist conception of the conflict.

The primordialist conception of Kashmir conflict is beneficial to the proponents of the Hindutva identity on two levels. The insistence on an Islamist conception of Kashmiri Muslim identity, helps the Hindutva ideologues to demand and support the muscular policy of the Indian state in Kashmir, legitimizing it as an offense on fundamentalist Islam. At the same time, the aspects of the Kashmir conflict are used, by the proponents of Hindutva, to categorize the broader Muslim community living in India as anti – national and traitors, by

labelling them as the same community <sup>4</sup> This helps the proponents of Hindutva in propagating their anti – Muslim tirade and consolidating the Hindu vote – bank. It is, for this reason, that the issue of Hindu exodus of Kashmir is repeatedly used to establish a fictitious conception of a Muslim threat.

This strategy is not very different for the proponents of the Islamist identity in Kashmir. The Islamist ideologues use similar language and ideas to garner traction for their conception of Kashmiri Muslim identity and the Kashmir dispute. The interpretation of the movement for Azaadi as an Islamic Jihad, the conceptualization of the Kashmiri Muslim community as a subset of the global Islamic ummah and interpreting the Indian rule as Hindu domination, are a few tropes that proponents of Islamist identity use to propagate their conception of Kashmiri Muslim identity and their version of the conflict.

Thus, extreme positions reinforce each other. The dominance of Hindutva in the rest of India would provide the Islamist conception of Kashmiri Muslim identity an impetus to gain hold over the public discourse in Kashmir and the entrenchment of an Islamist discourse in Kashmir would embolden the Hindutva identity. Both these conceptions, hence, are mutually dependable and feed off each other. Both these conceptions adhere to a primordialist, religion based, conception of Kashmiri identity and Kashmiri conflict, which is most suited to their political conception and political interests. These positions, however, have consequences. These not only render the Kashmiri conflict intractable but can also promote and legitimize violence, something that has happened in the region of Kashmir.

The Hindutva and Islamist descriptions, however, do not provide a complete or honest picture of the Kashmir conundrum. The Islamist conception of Kashmir conceals important aspects of the Muslim identity of Kashmir that challenge its assumptions. One, Islam in Kashmir cannot be considered totally devoid of any influence of Hinduism or Buddhism, religions that dominated the landscape of Kashmir before the onset of Islam. There was a

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<sup>4</sup> Dipankar Gupta explains how the category of the nation – state plays an important role in justifying hatred against certain communities. See D. Gupta, *The Context of Ethnicity: Sikh Identity in a Comparative Perspective*. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 9 – 10.

significant impact of Hinduism on the nature of Islam that developed in the Kashmir region, giving it a distinct character.<sup>5</sup> The rest of India has also witnessed a symbiotic relationship between Islam and Hinduism.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the Muslims of Kashmir, or of India, cannot be termed as cultural opposites of the Hindu population, as there are a significant number of shared practices, norms and values that exist between the two communities.

The other problematic aspect arising out of such understanding is the solidification of the whole community into a monolithic entity, adhering to a singular political preference. Even if one accepts the common brotherhood of Muslims of Kashmir and rest of South – Asia, it cannot be automatically concluded that both would ascribe to a common political view. A section of Muslims in India, led by Muhammad Ali Jinnah, fought for the creation of Pakistan, but Sheikh Abdullah supported accession of Kashmir to India. Although, one cannot conclusively argue that Sheikh represented the majority view, but it is, nonetheless, accepted that he had considerable influence.<sup>7</sup> Thus, a certain section of Muslim population of Kashmir formulated their position on accession independent of their religious identity.

An important consequence of the framework of primordialism, which may be unintended, is that it tends to focus its attention on events or regions that are most likely to corroborate its conception of conflict or identity. In other words, the place and region that gains traction is that, in which polarities are most manifest. This ends of invisibilising and negating other regions and factors that are also a part of the conflict. For example, in the Kashmir dispute, the area under profound attention is the valley of Kashmir, after which the conflict derives its name. The geographical area of the Valley is less, compared to the other two regions of the state – Jammu and Ladakh. However, in the studies as well as the larger discourse, the region continues to hold prominence. This can be explained by the explicit existence of strong polarities in the region, primarily between Hindu and Muslim communities. The

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<sup>5</sup> Riyaz Punjabi, "Kashmiriyat: The Mystique of an Ethnicity," *India International Centre Quarterly* 17, no. 2 (1990): 100-16.

<sup>6</sup> Tara Chand, *The Influence of Islam on Indian Culture*, (Allahabad: Indian Press, 1963), p. 32.

<sup>7</sup> See Mridu Rai, *Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects: Islam, Rights, and the History of Kashmir*, Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2004), p. 270 – 273, and Chitrlekha Zutshi, *Languages of Belonging: Islam, Regional Identity, and the Making of Kashmir*, (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2003), p. 227 – 238.

Kashmir Valley witnessed the mass migration of the Hindu community in the 1990. Both the communities – Muslims and Hindus, have separate conception of the events that transpired and reasons for the migration. The reasons, notwithstanding, the migration in itself is a huge polarizing event and has continued to be used politically, both in the rest of India and the state.

The Valley has also been the most affect by the violence that engulfed the region, which has resulted in huge loss of life and property. The Valley has also witnessed glaring abuses of human rights over the past three decades of violence. It has, lately, also been the centre of mass protests and mobilizations. These factors, present in the Kashmir valley, make it a perfect corroborative evidence for the conception of conflict that emerges from framework of primordialism.

Primordialism conceptualizes the internal dynamic of the Kashmir region in similar terms. The framework of primordialism divides the people of Kashmir into identities based on several ascriptive characteristics. Predominantly, the population of Kashmir is divided having six mutually different identities. These are Kashmiri Muslims, Kashmiri Pandits, Jammu Muslims, Jammu Hindus, Ladakhi Buddhists and Ladakhi Muslims. All these six identities reflect a different cultural core from the each other, on account of their religious, linguistic and geographical differences. A primordialist framework depicts these identities as mutually antagonistic with different aims. There is, thus, a relative antagonism between these communities. Each community is argued to have a different perception of the dispute and espouses a different vision of its future. The Kashmiri Muslims<sup>8</sup> are considered the most ardent supporters of Azadi which is not supported by other communities such as the Jammu Hindus or Kashmiri Pandits.<sup>9</sup> Thus, political preferences are derived from specific religious and cultural content of an identity.

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<sup>8</sup> Kashmiri Muslims is different from Muslims of Kashmir as the former is specifically linked to Kashmir valley while the latter is used to describe the complete Muslim population of the Kashmir region.

<sup>9</sup> See Navnita Chadha Behera, *State, Identity & Violence: Jammu, Kashmir, and Ladakh*, (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2000), p. 15, and Sumantra Bose, *Kashmir: Roots of Conflict, Paths to Peace*, (MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 172.

Hence, in addition to promoting a very reductive understanding of the Kashmir dispute in the larger arena of South – Asian politics, primordialism also provides a very closed explanation of the internal dynamic of Kashmir region. The primordialist conception of ethnic identity, as a monolithic identity derived from kinship, religious or cultural ties, divides the region of Kashmir into a number of singular – monolithic identities. Primordialism understands each of these identities emanating from a separate and solidified cultural matrix. Consequently, these identities are at odds with each other, as hostility towards outgroups is inherent in the primordialist definition of ethnic identity. The difference between identities are constituted on their different ascribed social values and principles, which also determine their view and vision of the conflict. Primordialist framework, thus, depicts a fractured and fragmented picture of the Kashmir dispute. The solidified and monolithic conception of these different identities adds a further layer of intractability to the Kashmir conflict.

There are, however, deep flaws in such an understanding of the internal dynamics of the Kashmir dispute. The first point of challenge is the very conception of solidified identities and regions. The Jammu division of the state of Jammu Kashmir, for example, has been formed by administrative fiat and hardly has any historical roots. The Poonch Jagir that forms a part of the Jammu division, has had historical tensions with the rest of Jammu.<sup>10</sup> The districts that form the Poonch Jagir have substantial majority of Muslims as compared to the remaining districts of the Jammu division. This also applies to the Ladakh area which includes the districts of Kargil and Leh, where the former has a substantial Muslim majority and latter is dominated by the Buddhists. Even the category of Kashmiri Muslims, which by far is the most homogenous groups, suffers from internal divisions and stratification. Although most commentators believe that Kashmiri Muslims are the most ardent supporters of secession from the Indian Union, it is also a fact that all the Chief Ministers (Prime Ministers till 1962) of the state, except one, belong to the Kashmir Valley. The leadership and the area of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), the official name of the area

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<sup>10</sup> The area of Poonch rebelled against the Jammu monarchy in the early 1947, controlling parts which later became Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK). for details see Christopher Snedden, *Kashmir: The Unwritten History*, (New Delhi: HarperCollins), 2013, p 37.



under Pakistani control, is derived mostly from the Poonch region and does not include any substantial part of the Kashmir Valley. The leadership of the Muslim Conference, that demanded accession of the state to Pakistan, was dominated by people belonging to the Jammu region.<sup>11</sup>

Also, different ethnic identities, that are considered antagonistic, have historically come together and taken part in movements and politics together. The two important cases would be that of Kashmiri Muslim and Kashmiri Hindus and Kashmiri Muslims and Jammu Muslims. The Jammu Muslims and the Kashmiri Muslims possess different cultural content, are geographically separated and speak different languages. However, in the fight against the autocratic rule, they both came together. These two communities together formed the Muslim Conference in 1932, to fight the autocratic rule of the Dogras.

Perhaps, the case of Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Hindus is most profound. These two groups, which are presently significantly antagonistic, also have a history of common political movements and struggles. The Kashmir for Kashmiris movement and formation of the National Conference, are important examples of collective struggle waged by the two communities. The Kashmiri for Kashmiris movement, was launched by Kashmiri Pandits, to stress for representation of Kashmiris in the Dogra administration. However, the movement spoke, not only for the Pandits, but for the larger Kashmiri community, breaking political and communication barriers between Pandits and Kashmiri Muslims.<sup>12</sup>

The birth of the National Conference is even more important. The National Conference was formed after renaming the Muslim Conference in 1939. The attempt was to build a common platform for different communities of the state, not limited to the majority Muslim population. Hence, the National Conference espoused a secular outlook of politics, trying to incorporate the non-Muslim classes of the State in the fight against the Dogra

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<sup>11</sup> Rai, *Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects*, p. 280.

<sup>12</sup> Rai, *Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects*, p. 251.

aristocracy. They were also successful to certain extent and many Pandit leaders joined the National Conference, significantly affecting the politics of the state in years to come<sup>13</sup>

These events clearly exhibit that the contemporary antagonism present between different identities is not natural. Thus, the understanding of the identities, as well as the Kashmir conflict, that emanates from the framework of primordialism is deeply problematic. It fails in sufficiently explaining the different facets of Kashmiri identities and Kashmiri Conflict. The identities and politics of Kashmir have undergone varied and complex transitions and do not fit into the monolithic and solidified compartments originating from the framework of primordialism.

The other problematic aspect, which emerges from the framework of primordialism, is its propensity to bracket individual action and club it with the socially ascribed position of an identity. There might be an example of certain individuals, who defy the perceived dominant position of an ethnic identity. For example, Kashmir Muslims supporting the Indian rule and Kashmiri Pandits supporting independence. The framework of primordialism does not provide an ample space for such dissidents and relegates them to the margins.<sup>14</sup> Thus, by emphasizing a primordialist conception of ethnic identity, the framework of primordialism, makes it possible for dissent to be neglected or subdued. An individual has to adhere to pre – decided norms and values of his/her ethnic identity, seriously constraining any possibility of independent action.

Thus, the primordialist vision of Kashmir conflict is fraught with problematic outcomes and inferences which, as discussed in the second chapter, arises from the very principles

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<sup>13</sup> The most prominent among these leaders was P N Bazaz. He and Sheikh Abdullah also started a newspaper called *Hamdard* which became the mouth – piece of the National Conference. See, Rai, *Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects*, p. 275.

<sup>14</sup> The example of Prem Nath Bazaz illustrates this point. A vociferous supporter of right to self – determination, he was sidelined by his own community, even forced to change his residence. See Paramita Ghosh, “Pandit Prem Nath Bazaz – A Misunderstood and Revolutionary Kashmiri Pandit”, *Hindustan Times*, July 16, 2016, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/pandit-prem-nath-bazaz-a-misunderstood-and-revolutionary-kashmiri-pandit/story-MXcRZoUTA3kcJcf3pseGTK.html>.

and assumptions of the framework. Understanding different ethnic identities present in the region of Kashmir as emanating from a cultural core, based on kinship, language or customs, does not sufficiently explain the various dimensions and issues related to the Kashmir conflict. These different identity formations in the Kashmir conflict have not remain confined to a monolithic or antagonistic structure and have historically transcended these primordialist barriers. The framework of primordialism fails to take into account different dimensions of the Kashmir dispute and, hence, ends up providing a very reductive and insufficient understanding of the conflict.

### **Constructivist Reading of the Kashmir Conflict**

Constructivism, on the other hand, opens up possibilities of a diverse and plural understanding of ethnic identity and ethnic conflict. Constructivism provides many possibilities of thinking about situations of dispute and conflict. Constructivism, as explained in the previous chapter, puts onus on action and interaction, denying a cultural basis of ethnic identity. These actions and interactions are influenced by circumstances and contexts, that are present around an ethnic identity. Constructivism, thus, emphasizes a *context* specificity of an ethnic identity. For constructivists, an ethnic conflict, between different ethnic identities, is not an inescapable outcome of a continuous unfolding of history. It emerges from particular contexts and situations. Ethnic identity emerges out of action, in the political sphere which is not static, but changes both spatially and temporally.

The framework of constructivism raises many questions that are hardly engaged by the framework of primordialism. Since, the conflict is not an inevitable consequence of an essential difference between different communities, the main concern of the framework of constructivism is to understand the reasons that led to the present state of conflict. Why did a conflict emerge in a particular context? Consequently, if conflict was not ever – present, was there a time when the situation was better? Finally, what led to the sharpening of identities that led to a state of conflict? These questions emerge from the framework of constructivism because it adheres to a different conception of identity and conflict, from that of primordialism.

To begin with, the genesis of a dispute does not lie in the cultural and religious composition of the place. It is not a conflict between different communities. It is not an outcome of the religious difference between different communities, nor a result of a distinct culture of the disputed region. The ethnic identities are not enclosed by their geographical location or religious and customary associations. The constructivist vision of the genesis of the dispute would rather emphasize on the political contingencies and contextual constraints that led to the emergence of the dispute. Constructivists would look at the conflict emerging from specific political contexts.

The constructivist conception of the Kashmir conflict, in the broader arena of South Asia, stresses on the different political and historical factors that contributed to the rise of conflict in Kashmir. The framework of constructivism, would emphasize on different factors such as the vacillation of Hari Singh, the last monarch of Kashmir, the revolt of in the Poonch Jagir, the tribal attack on the Kashmir valley and the petition of the Indian government to the United Nations, as important factors that led to the Kashmir dispute. Thus, the focus of the study shifts from enumerating few cultural and religious differences to evaluating the dispute through actions and events of different actors involved in the Kashmir conflict.

Hence, in addition to removing the inevitability of the conflict, the framework of constructivism also negates the notion of intractability of the conflict. Since, conflict emerges out of specific events and moments, it can be resolved by ameliorating the effects and outcomes of such events and moments. Conflict is, thus, not an inherent property of difference, it is constructed by specific political and social contingencies that in turn can produce sharpened and polarized identities.

Constructivism, also challenges the monolithic and essentialised conception of different identity constructions present in Kashmir. The framework of constructivism opens up the constitution of different ethnic identities within the region of Kashmir. Constructivism depicts ethnic identities originating from political necessities and historical moments. The vision and perception of different communities that exist in the region of Kashmir, is not contingent on their given or socially ordained cultural practices but are formed due to interaction between these different communities existing under a common political setup.

Thus, the content of each identity is influenced by the ideas and values of different communities and is not independently determined.<sup>15</sup>

The framework of constructivism uncovers the formation of each identity separately. Each identity construction has evolved over a period of history, constantly renegotiating and reinterpreting its ideas and principles. Constructivism, as explained in the previous chapter, proposes three separate processes through which identities are constructed. An identity construction can occur in relation to an *other*, excluding and against which an identity defines its content. It can also occur when a group reinterprets its own principles and ideas in accordance with changing perception of the history or contemporary political needs. Thirdly, a construction can also be imposed by a dominant entity, which ‘categorizes’ a group in a particular mould of identity. These three processes provide different views – points of an identity construction and illuminate different ways in which an identity construction can be conceptualized.

These processes reflect upon the fact that constructivism not only believes in the constructed nature of ethnic identities but also of narratives and history as a whole. Constructivism makes it possible for different and diverse accounts to emerge for the construction of a particular ethnic identity. The construction of an identity can have vastly different accounts and vast differences of opinions regarding the process of formation of an identity. It provides different ways in which an identity or a conflict is presented, understood and constructed. There is no single account or chain of events that lead to a particular conflict but a diversity of historical, cultural and political accounts that make sense of an identity and a conflict. Thus, constructivism negates the primacy of one particular account and leaves the construction of events and history fairly open.

These different processes and explanations reflect upon different nuances and facets of an identity construction. The historical roots of identities, the political conditions that make the construction possible and the different contextual events that have contributed in its

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<sup>15</sup> Fredrik Barth argues that differences between communities are not a product of isolations but emerge as a result of interaction between them. See Fredrik Barth, “Introduction” in Fredrik Barth, (ed.) *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1969), p. 15 – 16.

development are brought to light. It also makes an identity construction dynamic and susceptible to change. An identity construction can have multiple iterations which can co – exist or can exist in different spatial and temporal locations. It is also important to note, that constructivism, in its endeavour to uncover the roots of a particular identity construction, also reveals differing and diverging constructions that might have existed with the dominant construction. This helps to uncover several obscure historical moments and greatly enhances the scope to bring out novel elements in the study of a conflict or an identity.

The openness of accounts, vastly enriches the study of different identity constructions, prevailing in Kashmir. The three processes of construction, mentioned above, significantly widen the perception of Kashmiri Muslim identity, highlighting facets that did not evoke concern in the framework of primordialism. The framework of constructivism engages with different historical constructions of the Kashmiri Muslim identity, bringing to fore the reasons of their constructions as well as the politics that emerges from them. There are two major conceptions with regard to the Kashmiri Muslim identity. It is either defined in terms of ‘Kashmiriyat’ or is conceptualized as a ‘fundamental – Islamist’ identity. The framework of constructivism disentangles these identities from the ascriptive categories and explores the contexts and reasons for their emergence. Constructivism excavates the historical dimensions of the construction of these identities to understand the nature of the identity before and the changes that have occurred in it over time. Such plurality of narratives results in a holistic understanding of the Kashmiri Muslim identity.

The development of both Kashmiriyat and Islamist identity can be understood as a result of political and contextual factors at a specific moment in history. They had particular *others* against which these identities came into being. Kashmiriyat emerged from the movement against the monarchical rule of the Dogra dynasty. The antagonism towards the Dogra identity was an important component in the formation of this identity. The construction was aided by the oppressive policies of the Dogra rule towards the Kashmiri Muslims, which awakened a sense of belonging among them.<sup>16</sup> Kashmiriyat was also

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<sup>16</sup> For a detailed discussion of the role of Dogra rule in the rise of Muslim consciousness in the state, see Rai, *Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects*, p. 224 – 287.

constructed through a process of reinterpretation of Kashmiri history by a certain group of the population, which in this case was that of the National Conference. The interpretation of the National Conference highlighted the Sufi – syncretic nature of Kashmiri Islam, to portray a pluralist and secular idea of Kashmiri Muslim identity<sup>17</sup>, as opposed to a more Muslim centric approach of the Muslim Conference, which was revived by the political adversaries of Sheikh Abdullah in 1941.<sup>18</sup> Thus, the formation of Kashmiriyat also consisted an internal tussle between the different groups community to reinterpret the history and culture of Kashmir to make it more conducive to their own political visions.

These processes can also be seen in the genesis and formation of the fundamental - Islamist identity. Although, initially its influence was constrained by the idea of Kashmiriyat, it became very powerful and influential in the 1980's. There were many reasons or the same. Just like the primordialist, the constructivists would also relate the development of the Islamist identity to the changes occurring in the Indian polity, albeit with a slight difference. The rise of Hindu fundamentalism, characterized by the political prominence achieved by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its ideological partner, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) did play a part in the development of Islamist identity in Kashmir. The Ram Janambhoomi movement initiated by these two parties, culminated in the demolition of the Babri Masjid in December 1992 and produced a ripple effect across the sub - continent. These events provided necessary impetus for the rise of Islamist identity in Kashmir. The identity concept of *Hindutva* proved to be a perfect *other* for the Islamist identity to consolidate. The fear of Hindu dominance proved effective in entrenching the Islamist conception in the Kashmiri society.<sup>19</sup> The difference, however, between the primordialist and the constructivist version of the afore – mentioned relation between *Hindutva* and Islamist identity is that primordialism looks at it as an inherent phenomenon while constructivism understands it emerging from specific political and historical context.

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<sup>17</sup> For detailed discussion see Zutshi, *Languages of Belonging*, p. 245.

<sup>18</sup> Rai, *Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects*, p. 280.

<sup>19</sup> See Gull Mohd. Wani, *Kashmir, Identity, Autonomy, and Self-rule*, Srinagar: Apple Books, 2011, p. 27.

This process of *othering* was complemented by the growing emphasis on Islamic *Ummah* aided by the victory of Mujahideen in Afghanistan.<sup>20</sup> The defeat of the Soviet Union by Islamic militia, gave a fillip to the politics that promoted an Islamist version of Kashmiri Muslim identity. The proponents of such politics attempted to reinterpret the Muslim identity in Kashmir as a subset of the global Islamic *Ummah* and tried to reconceive the Kashmir struggle as Islamic jihad.<sup>21</sup>

An alternate constructivist explanation, of the development of these identities, stresses the factor of imposition in the construction of Kashmiriyat and the Islamist identity of Kashmiri Muslims. These identities and their principles, in a certain degree, were also imposed on the community to protect and promote specific political interest. Since the idea of Kashmiriyat was cardinal to the politics of Sheikh Abdullah and the legitimacy of the Indian State, both took immense interest in consolidating, strengthening and entrenching the concept of Kashmiriyat. The ascent of Sheikh Abdullah to the post of the Prime Minister of the state of Jammu and Kashmir provided him with institutional means to propagate his conception of identity. The Jammu and Kashmir Information Bureau was used to promote the idea of Kashmiriyat.<sup>22</sup> The media, specifically the local, became an important source to disseminate the idea of Kashmiriyat and the “concept of *Kashmiriyat* was a recurrent theme in the local Urdu dailies of Kashmir.”<sup>23</sup> The archives of the state were curated keeping in mind the politics of the National Conference. This resulted in accordance of preference to specific sources and discarding conflicting accounts. For example, the archives only preserved the papers that supported the National Conference during the movement against the Dogra rule.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, the national song (*Quami tarana*) was also chosen keeping political considerations in mind.<sup>25</sup> Thus, different institutions and structures were used to consolidate the idea of Kashmiriyat as the dominant construction of Kashmiri Muslim identity. The Indian National Congress, which was ruling the Indian

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<sup>20</sup> See Bose, *Kashmir*, p. 111.

<sup>21</sup> The Hizb – ul – Mujahideen and Jamaat – e – Islami are important proponents of such an idea.

<sup>22</sup> Wani, *Kashmir, Identity, Autonomy, and Self-rule*, p. 26.

<sup>23</sup> Mohammad Ishaq Khan (1983) *Perspectives on Kashmir*, (Srinagar: Gulshan Publishers, 1983), p. 22.

<sup>24</sup> Zutshi, *Languages of Belonging*, p. 263.

<sup>25</sup> Wani, *Kashmir, Identity, Autonomy, and Self-rule*, p. 27.



state, also had deep interest in the concept of Kashmiriyat. The concept of Kashmiriyat was politically useful for the Congress and “the Congress leadership played a great role in popularizing the concept of *Kashmiriyat* so as to check the influence of the two-nation theory of the Muslim league in Kashmir.”<sup>26</sup> The idea of Kashmiriyat, has since formed the base of Indian claim over Kashmir and has been frequently invoked in political discourses and speeches.<sup>27</sup>

The Islamist identity, on the other hand, became politically efficacious for the Indian state to counter the armed militancy that erupted in Kashmir after 1989. The fundamentalist construction of the Kashmiri Muslim identity provided a certain legitimacy to the Indian State to clamp down on the armed militancy in the region. Tagging Kashmiri Muslims as fundamental made it easier for the Indian State to justify its excesses which included torture, rapes, enforced disappearances and murders. The efficacy of the Islamist construction increased after the attacks on the World Trade Centre in the United States. It allowed the Indian State to tag the struggle in Kashmir with the phenomena of Islamophobia and War on Terror, further legitimizing military excesses in the region.

On the other hand, this ascription of a fundamentalist Islam to a certain political group such as the Muslim United Front (MUF) was also necessary for the National Conference to maintain its hold over Kashmiriyat and a plural conception of Islam that emerges from it. The National Conference also used this strategy against the Muslim Conference, during the movement against the Dogra rule, when the politics of each party was conjoined with the conception of Islam they adhere to.<sup>28</sup>

These different and divergent conceptualization of ethnic identity constructions, also raise the question, whether same identities underwent a transformation from an identity based on Kashmiriyat to an Islamist identity or an altogether new identity came up. There is,

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<sup>26</sup> Mohammad Ishaq Khan, *Perspectives on Kashmir*, (Srinagar: Gulshan Publishers, 1983), p. 20.

<sup>27</sup> In addition to the Indian National Congress, its opponent the Bharatiya Janata party has used the term quite significantly. The most famous iteration would be that of former Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, a member of the BJP, who invoked the idea of Kashmiriyat, Insaniyat and Jamhuriyat (Kashmiriyat, Humanity and Democracy).

<sup>28</sup> For details see Zutshi, *Languages of Belonging*, p. 118 – 168.

however, no single explanation that emerges from the framework of constructivism. There might be few scholars and academicians who may argue that there is a transition from a “quietistic syncretic Islam to a militant Islamic fundamentalism.”<sup>29</sup> Such scholars argue that there has been a change from a syncretic Islam to a more Wahabist Islam,<sup>30</sup> conceptualizing the movement in communal colours.<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, the genealogy of these groups can be traced back to the political adversaries of Sheikh Abdullah during the Dogra period. The Muslim Conference and its leaders, who were politically defeated by the National Conference and Sheikh Abdullah, propounded an Islam that is similar to the Islam that is now tagged to political parties such as Jamaat – e – Islami and others. Thus, these identities do not emerge as a result of a transition but have existed since a long time. Thus, even in this respect, constructivism makes it possible for different opinions and accounts to emerge.

Furthermore, constructivism also helps to bring to fore the times when situations and relations were markedly different between different communities present in the region of Kashmir. Hence, it helps to reconceptualize, inter – identity relations in the region of Kashmir. Inter – group animosities and antagonism, just like intra – group attributes, are dynamic and have historical roots. These animosities emerge from specific historical or political moments and change in accordance with changed contexts and scenarios. The relationship between the Jammu Muslims and the Kashmir Muslims is an important example. Both these communities have had periods of mutual cooperation and political

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<sup>29</sup> Ashutosh Varshney, “Three Compromised Nationalisms: Why Kashmir has been a problem” in *Perspectives on Kashmir: The Roots of Conflict in South Asia*, ed. R. G. Thomas, (Oxford: Westview Press, 1992), p. 198.

<sup>30</sup> See Chitrelekha Zutshi, “The New Wave of Anger in Kashmir is not just about Poor Governance but about Preserving an Identity”, August 21, 2016, <https://scroll.in/article/813484/the-new-wave-of-anger-in-kashmir-is-not-just-about-poor-governance-but-about-preserving-an-identity>; Y. Sikand, “Changing Course of Kashmiri Struggle: From National Liberation to Islamist Jihad?”, *Economic and Political Weekly* 36, no.3, (2001): 218-227; and A. Narain, “Revival of Violence in Kashmir: The Threat to India’s Security,” *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* 8, no.7, (2016), 15-20.

<sup>31</sup> Nitasha Kaul, “The Communalisation of a Political Dispute”, *Aljazeera*, July 26, 2017, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2017/07/kashmir-communalisation-political-dispute-170725082030871.html>.

antagonisms. This relation between the two communities, according to the framework of constructivism, is a result of the change in the *other* of these identities. For both these communities, during the Dogra era, the primary *other* was the Dogra state. As explained earlier, the policies of the Dogra rule played important part in fostering the Muslim consciousness in the state. It is because of these political reasons that the Muslim communities of the Jammu region and the Kashmir Valley came together and formed the Muslim Conference in 1932. The party had representations from both the areas and claimed to represent the Muslim population of the princely state. This bonhomie, however, was short-lived and differences cropped up with the increasing potential of the freedom struggle. The rechristening of the Muslim Conference in 1939 on the insistence of Sheikh Abdullah, to incorporate religious minorities into the fold of the struggle, side-lined a group which subsequently broke away from the National Conference and revived the Muslim Conference in 1941. The revived Muslim Conference largely consisted of the leaders from the Jammu area which was also its prominent base.<sup>32</sup> The National Conference was, on the other side, was dominant in the Kashmir Valley. This exacerbated the divide between the two communities.

This divide was further solidified by the division of the province into Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) and Jammu and Kashmir (JK), with Muslim Conference controlling the former, National Conference, the latter.<sup>33</sup> The partition also removed the Dogra state as the primary *other*. With the Muslim Conference supporting accession to Pakistan and the National Conference supporting the accession to the Indian Union, these parties ended up being the primary *other* of the each other. The dominance of the Kashmir region in the politics of the Jammu and Kashmir created further antagonism between the two communities. The division was also fostered by an artificial distance created by the two communities by administrative fiat. The regions inhabited by these two communities is connected by the Mughal road, named after the Mughal rulers, who used it to travel to Kashmir. The road, however, faces extreme neglect and apathy from the government which has paid scant attention to the development of the road. This has created an artificial

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<sup>32</sup> Rai, *Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects*, p. 280.

<sup>33</sup> Snedden, *Kashmir*, p. 112.

distance between the two regions as travel is rerouted through a longer route passing through the Jammu city. This has created a strong barrier in communication between the two regions entrenching the divide between the two communities and hampering any political or social coalition between these two identities of the state.

Thus, constructivism helps us to understand the specific emergence of the antagonism between the different communities of the region, opening up the resources to a broad understanding of the conflict. The hostility between different groups is not given and natural but is a result of specific historical events and trajectories that identities have taken. The different identities and the visions are not static but have evolved over a period of time. This opens up the avenues to locate roots and not consider the conflict as a natural outcome on account of differences based on certain ascriptive identities. Conflicts are politically created in certain historical and contextual situations. They are not inherent in an ethnic identity but are a result of certain political events that lead to them.

The most important aspect of constructivism, however, is its ability to challenge and undermine different brackets and categories that constraint the study of ethnic identity. The categories of Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh that exists on the political landscape of Kashmir are political constructions rather than any natural divisions. These divisions, which have a separate administrative structure till the level of the Divisional Commissioner, have also promoted segregation and disconnection between different communities of the State. Each of these divisions have internal differences which are not sufficiently interrogated.

By unravelling these different political factors and processes that create divides and unions, giving rise to certain identities, constructivism portrays ethnic identities as inherently fluid and instable. The framework of constructivism helps in understanding identities as dynamic, constantly changing and constantly under threat. The construction of an identity is a perpetual process which consists of a continuous negotiation with the context. Moreover, constructivism also directs the attention towards different other variables such as categories and history that are attributed to an identity. Constructivism, therefore, encourages careful examination and interrogation of different categories and attributes of an ethnic identity. This significantly enlarges the scope and canvass of an ethnic identity. It also enhances the scope and possibility of political action. As constructivism depicts a

political space in continuous flux, it enhances the possibility of different constructions and ideas to emerge.

### **Assessment of Constructivism**

Although the framework of constructivism theoretically allows a certain depth in the study of ethnic identity, it has its own set of limitations. Some difficulties arise out of the term identity as a “category of analysis.”<sup>34</sup> Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper in their article, “Beyond Identity” put forth an interesting critique of constructivism. They argue that in the analytical field the idea of a constantly reshaping and changing identity is difficult to apply. The overemphasis on the principles of fluidity and dynamism “allows putative “identities” to proliferate. But as they proliferate, the term loses its analytical purchase because “if identity is everywhere, it is nowhere.”<sup>35</sup> Thus, they argue that the term identity needs to be replaced with other concepts and categories which have specific connotations, as opposed to general applicability and use of the term identity.<sup>36</sup>

Arguing against Brubaker, I contend that such an enterprise is flawed at different levels. One, there are many movements and situations around the world that still use and subscribe to the term identity. The replacement of the term identity, on a discursive level, would be taking away the discursive field far from the actual manifestation of the concept on the ground. This would, possibly, entrench the divide between academic understanding and the popular perception of a problem. Even if we accept, that over time, these new categories and classifications would gain hold and may also change popular perception, would it not be, then, an imposition of categories on a population, seeking to change their perception of their own movement? Is it not akin to pushing a conception from the top, trying to mould a movement and its perception forcefully?

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<sup>34</sup> R. Brubaker, and F. Cooper, “Beyond “Identity”,” *Theory and Society*, 29, no.1 (2000): p. 2.

<sup>35</sup> Brubaker, and Cooper, "Beyond "Identity".", p. 1.

<sup>36</sup> Brubaker and Cooper suggest to replace the term identity with different analytical concepts such as self – identification and categories. See Brubaker, and Cooper, "Beyond "Identity".", p. 15.

In any case, the dynamism and the fluidity of the framework of constructivism is a theoretical concept which, in any case, faces numerous structural constraints when applied in the field. The theoretical conception of fluidity is politically emancipating but unviable as a tool for a social scientist. Politically, the notion of fluidity makes it possible to envisage different and divergent constructions coming up. It is empowering to believe that at any moment any construction of an identity can occur, grossly enriching the politics of a community. The success of the construction, however, is dependent on the amount of attention it is able to grab. However, such considerations, on a theoretical level, hardly impedes the process of construction. As a social scientist, one does not have that liberty. A social scientist has to engage with prevailing ideas and structures that exist in the society. A discursive construction of an identity has to confront the lived experiences of the populations as well as the events and moments that hold a strong place in the collective memory of the area. Thus, an identity has to be pegged on historically imagined or popularly imagined concepts, ideas and symbols. Most importantly, a social scientist has to engage with the history of the place, of which he/she is constructing an identity. A construction is also *context* specific and, consequently, has to engage with the constraints and limitations of that moment that he is engaging with. Such constraints can range from a paucity of sources to the changing nature of the moment. Thus, the practical application of the term identity is intrinsically constrained to allow over – stretching of fluidity and dynamism, as Brubaker and Cooper argue.

Nonetheless, there are other issues that crop up from the framework of constructivism, specifically from the application of categories and concepts in the practical world. The concern is that the over - stretching of the fluidity and dynamism of identity, mentioned above, should not be replaced by an over - emphasis of structural constraints. It is inevitable that in a given moment, on which a constructivist study is based, a social scientist would encounter certain terms and categories that already exists in the field. For example, if one conducts a study of the Kashmir conflict in the present moment, a social scientist would invariably encounter categories such as Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Hindus among others. However, the uncritical application of such terms would render the constructivist part of the research seriously compromised. This is because, these terms have essentialist roots and have been conceptualized based on primordial categories. The category of

Kashmiri Muslims emanates from the works of Walter Lawrence, a British official, who conceptualized the category based on physical features, cultural traits and religion.<sup>37</sup> The category of Kashmiri Muslim identity has, since, been used as a cardinal category to understand the politics of Kashmir without any thoughtful reconsideration. This limits the scope of constructivism, reducing it just to a “cliché”<sup>38</sup> in which “one often finds constructivist and groupist language casually conjoined.”<sup>39</sup> These tendencies can result in an unwitting validation of a primordialist conception of an identity or conflict.

Additionally, there are other categories that are pushed forth by the dominant power or institution of the place, such as the state. The modern state has the ability, through its different institutions and mechanisms, to appropriate “not only legitimate physical force but also legitimate symbolic force.”<sup>40</sup> The symbolic force “includes the power to name, to identify, to categorize, to state what is what and who is who.”<sup>41</sup> The dichotomy of ‘mainstream’ and ‘separatists’ that exist in the political landscape of Kashmiri politics is an important example of how the state is able to push certain categories and classifications. The ‘mainstream’ tag given to parties and leaders that contest elections and are more or less in support of the Indian rule. The ‘separatist’ is the term given to politicians and parties that demand secession from the Indian state. The interesting part, however, is that even in studies that argue for a case of secession of Kashmir, characterize the parties in favour of Indian rule as mainstream.<sup>42</sup> This, even though, they acknowledge that there is a deep distrust of the common masses with these parties, as they are thought to be patronized by the Indian State and the media. The use of mainstream, therefore, inverts the very framework of constructivism, accepting a statist and a dominant position of representation of Kashmiris.

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<sup>37</sup> Walter R. Lawrence, *The Valley of Kashmir*, (Srinagar: Kesar Publications, 1967), p 248 – 318.

<sup>38</sup> Brubaker, and Cooper, "Beyond "Identity", " p. 11.

<sup>39</sup> Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity Without Groups*, (MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 3.

<sup>40</sup> Brubaker, and Cooper, "Beyond "Identity", " p. 15.

<sup>41</sup> Brubaker, and Cooper, "Beyond "Identity", " p. 15.

<sup>42</sup> Arundhati Roy, “Azadi: The Only Thing Kashmiris Want” in Tariq Ali et. al, *Kashmir: The Case of Freedom*, (London: Verso, 2011), p. 37 – 44.

Therefore, it is important to critically evaluate each category before employing it in a particular research. The idea is to keep in mind the basic analytical tenets and principle of the framework of constructivism. The choice of a category needs to be undertaken after a careful examination of each category, the historical events and moments that are attached with it and the inherent political bias in its genesis. A field throws up different identities to choose from. The dominance of a particular conception of identity does not mean that the dominant identity is the only identity construction that exists in a particular field. In many conflict areas, there are constructions that challenge the dominant identity, some of whom are fairly organized. The need is to be aware of the inherent biases that are present in different categories that are employed to study a specific subject area and different other constructions that are available to study the same subject area.

In addition to a tendency of employing essentialist categories, constructivism also has a tendency to study ethnic identity during moments of sharp divisions. Ethnic identity is an important part of the daily life of an individual and a community. It is employed as a tool in the process of social differentiation as well as in the process of self – definition, both by individuals and communities. It is an important component of the daily lives of individuals and groups. These attributes of an ethnic identity are not sufficiently explained in different constructivist studies, which usually emphasize on moments of conflict and tension. Thus, the framework of constructivism, just like primordialism, has a tendency to pick up potential moments and areas of conflict, as the source of study and evaluation. Unlike the primordialists, however, the framework of constructivism does not imply that such a moment of conflict is the only way to understand an ethnic identity or ethnic conflict. In the framework of constructivism, there is always a possibility of a different understanding to emerge.

Hence, another important method to negate such structural constraints would be to constantly look beyond the obvious. Events and historical occurrences, which are hidden from the popular eye, need to be brought back into the light. Emphasis should be given to lesser known movements to open up the discourse about particular issue or identity. These events reflect a different, sometimes divergent, conception of the politics and identity of



the community. Thus, a different historical trajectory might come up which may provide a more comprehensive and relevant understanding.

In addition to these methodological limitation, constructivism, as a framework, is also incapable of explaining specific instances of sharply defined ethnic identities, some of which have persisted over long periods of time. There are many conflicts and tensions that have existed between two communities or within the confines of a nation – state that have persisted for quite some time. The Kashmir, Palestine and the Tibet disputes have raged for more than seventy years now. The ethnic issues related to the ethnic community of African – Americans continue to exist since few centuries. Although, it cannot be denied that there have been significant improvements in their social and economic position, African – Americans continue to face considerable systemic discrimination and exploitation. The contours of the conflicts of Palestine, Kashmir and Tibet might have changed, but the element of conflict still pervades in these communities. These conflicts negate the aspect of instability that constructivism accrues to a category of ethnic identity. The structure of hierarchy and the *other* has remained stable in these identities for a considerable amount of time.

To conclude, this chapter employed the instance of the Kashmir conflict and Kashmiri identity to evaluate the frameworks of primordialism and constructivism. Each framework provides different resources and emphasizes on different facets of the Kashmir conflict. While the framework of primordialism focusses on the ascriptive factors such as religion, constructivism looks at different historical and political factors that have contributed to the emergence of the Kashmir conflict. In essence, for the primordialists, the conflict arises from the different religious identities that dominate the specific region of Kashmir and the rest of India. It tries to conceptualize the problem in the larger Hindu – Muslim divide present in the region of South – Asia. The identities for primordialists are solidified and monolithic, bracketing individual behaviour and action and, more importantly, reducing the perception of an individual towards the conflict to his ascribed ethnic identity. Constructivism, on the other hand, opens up the social and political history of the conflict to reveal different events and moments that have led to the Kashmir conflict. The framework of constructivism focusses on different situations and occurrences that led to

the development of different identities such as Kashmiri Muslims, Kashmiri Hindus and Jammu Muslims among others. Constructivism emphasizes on the dynamic and changing nature of these identities revealing the moments of co – ordination and difference among these different groups.

The framework of constructivism, however, has its own set of constraints and difficulties. The concept of dynamism and fluidity raises important conceptual issues regarding categories and classifications. Since a constructivist study is based in a moment, it is face with categories that exist at that specific moment. These categories can have essentialist roots or may be derived from a statist perspective, which severely compromise the objectivity of a research. Additionally, such an uncritical application of different categories may, unwittingly, entrench a dominant or primordialist perspective. On the other hand, constructivism has a tendency to pick movements of conflict as a reference point to undertake a study of an ethnic identity. These two facets bring the framework of constructivism imperiously close to primordialist notions and principles, if care and criticality is not maintained. Also, constructivism is not able to sufficiently explain the intractability of certain conflicts and identity constructions that exist around the world.

Even after such limitations, it cannot be denied that constructivism does provide a frame to understand different moments scattered around different historical setup. The analytical and methodological content of constructivism does render histories, associations, relations and identities of different communities flexible, dynamic and full of interesting possibilities. It can help studies to escape the trap of ending up at monolithic, solidified identities. These possibilities can lead up to ideas and knowledge that may help to further understand the issues around the world and to positively influence these issues, especially that of conflicts. Most conflicts present in the world today have been there since a considerable time, if not a long time. Studies after studies have come up with different solutions and remedies for the problems. Most of the conflicts, however, have survived, some even exacerbated. The need, therefore, is to revisit the categories and history that is associated with these conflicts. To question the events and identities that we consider as given and true. Constructivism, through its basic analytical principles, provides this

opportunity. This might drastically change the narrative of an identity construction and may open up possibilities of peace.

## *Conclusion*

To sum up, the dissertation engaged with the frameworks of primordialism and constructivism, used to study the phenomenon of ethnic identity, reflecting upon the different nuances, influences and inferences that emerge out of each framework. Each framework adheres to specific assumptions and principles which shape the conceptualization of ethnic identity emerging from these frameworks. These conceptions provide different, sometimes divergent, conception of ethnic identity and other adjunct concepts. Each framework posits a structural edifice on the study that employs it, conditioning and constraining the study in a number of ways.

In addition to influencing the conception of identity, these frameworks also influence the way the politics, history and culture of a community is understood. The influence of these frameworks is thus, not limited to mere conceptions of identity, but also affect the perception of political movements, historical occurrences and conflict present within or between communities. These conceptions also emanate from particular values and tenets that each framework propounds. Thus, different sectors of group and community life are necessarily affected by the way their identity is conceptualized by the frameworks of primordialism and constructivism.

Primordialism espouses a closed, reductive and essentialist understanding of ethnic identity and ethnic conflict. Ethnic identity, for primordialism, emerges from the ascriptive categories of human existence which include kinship, religion and language. Such conceptualization imparts the category of identity with a monolithic, unchanging and inherited character. Ethnic identity is, thus, a socially ordained component of an individual or community life which is passed from one generation to another through a codified culture.

Primordialism, thus, also essentializes the category of culture. It defines culture as a closed entity whose existence is specific to a geographical area, linguistic group, religious denomination or any other ascriptive association. Hence, similar to its conception of ethnic identity, culture is also stable, static, and an unchanging identity. Further, primordialism

makes ethnic identity contingent on such conception of culture. An innate and stable culture leads to a solidified and firm ethnic identity. The culture is conceptualized as a unique phenomenon attributable to a single community. Since, culture determines the *content* of an identity, different identities would, invariably, emerge from different cultural conceptions. Primordialism, therefore, imagines culture as the major element of difference and, consequently, conflict between communities.

Consequently, the closed nature of culture and identity leads to a problematic understanding of conflict within or between communities. Since, ethnic identity, for primordialists, is based on a solidified and monolithic culture, the conflict arising between different ethnic communities arises from such incompatible cultures. Thus, conflict, in the framework of primordialism, attains an inherent and intractable character. The roots of conflict are present in the very constitution of ethnic identities and interaction between the different ethnic communities would, therefore, inevitably lead to conflict. Thus, for the framework of primordialism, the phenomenon of conflict is intrinsically related to the concept of ethnic identity. Hence, the primordialists perceive ethnic identity as a “bloody phenomenon”<sup>1</sup> and usually look ethnic identity and ethnic conflict as mutually intertwined.

This perception of ethnic identity and ethnic conflict also allows an ideological and biased usage of the term ethnic identity by the primordialists. Ethnic identity is confined to a particular geographical space where it is more likely to evoke violence. Essentially, ethnic identity has a more urgent nature in the post – colonial societies where, it is argued, that these affinities still hold a dominant position vis – a – vis individualist conceptions of identity.<sup>2</sup> This signifies a certain condescending and prescriptive understanding of the nature of the society as well as problems existing in these communities. These communities are, hence, considered ‘developing’, as these societies and have not achieved ‘modern – developed’ sensibilities. Therefore, pre- modern or *primordial* group affiliations, such as ethnic identity, still hold sway over these communities. The prominence of ethnic ascription is, hence, an outcome of the backwardness of these societies. Thus, the

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<sup>1</sup> Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 140.

<sup>2</sup> Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, p. 18.

primordialist conception of ethnic identity lends itself, quite problematically, to the modernization discourse, which tries to impose a blueprint of modernization for the developing countries.

In addition to such imposition on societies, the primordialist conception of ethnic identity, also imposes limits on human agency and human will in choosing an identity. Since, primordialists believe that identities are socially determined, it entrenches the power of the community over the individual. The identity of an individual is determined by the cultural markers of his/her community. Hence, an individual has no say in the determination of his identity. It is a socially ascribed identity, which he/she naturally becomes a part of on account of his/her birth or location,

In the contemporary, globalized world, a reductive conception of ethnic identity is hardly able to make sense of the different experiences that individuals go through, as mobility and travel has increased exponentially over the past century. An individual is rarely rooted to a place, culture or community and is greatly influenced by ideas from different geographical, cultural and religious spaces. This makes it impossible for an individual to adhere or ascribe to a single identity, or even a single conception of an identity, for a long period of time. This makes the identity conception emerging out of the framework of primordialism out of place for a globalized individual.

All these facets also emerge from the primordialist reading of the Kashmir conflict. Primordialism perceives the dispute to emerge from the different religious composition of the dominant communities in Kashmir and the rest of India. In this sense, it essentializes the conflict as a dispute between culturally and religiously distinct communities of the two regions. Such a conception makes conflict an inevitable outcome of tension between these distinct communities, neglecting political and historical events that suggest otherwise. It also relegates the issues and problems that exist between different groups and communities, within the region of Kashmir, to their divergent cultural constitution and ancestral ties. The conflict of Kashmir is, thus, reduced to a dispute between sharply divided identities both within the Kashmir region and in the broader area of South – Asia.

Constructivism, on the other hand, challenges these notions of primordialism. Constructivism refutes any given or natural existence of ethnic identity or any other

phenomena that emerges from it. Constructivism envisages a *contextual* understanding of ethnic identity which argues for a situational emergence of ethnic identity. Ethnic identity, is not derived from the cultural constitution of a community but emerges out of specific political context and necessities. The contexts and situations change spatially as well as temporally, giving rise to different historical constructions as well as diversity of constructions within a community.

Constructivism, thus, does not look at identities as monolithic, given or closed. There are different versions and visions of the same identity which can emerge out of different historical compulsions or different contexts that an identity faces in different spaces. Identity is, in this sense, fluid that can change and remodel both spatially and temporally. Therefore, a community can have different identity constructions at different historical moments as well as different groups of the same identity can adhere to different conception of that particular identity.

This fluidity is possible because constructivism does not believe ethnic identity to be culturally rooted or socially ordained. Ethnic identity is constructed through action, of individuals and groups, or through interaction between different communities. Constructivism does not look at identities as closed ascriptions but as affiliations emerging out of action or interaction that helps in constructing a relation of sameness or difference. A conception of identity is entrenched by continuous action based on such constructed sameness or difference. Ethnic identity construction is, hence, a continuous process which requires constant reinterpretation of the context and continuous assertion of a particular conception of identity. Hence, it destabilizes the term identity, conceiving it to be perpetually unstable and vulnerable.

This fluidity is also possible because the framework of constructivism does not believe in one single way in which an identity can be constructed. Constructivism makes it possible to conceive multiple ways of the construction of an identity. An identity can be constructed through different processes, with each process highlighting a specific angle of identity construction. An identity can be constructed by a process of *othering* where the *content* of an identity is developed in response to an adversarial or excluded group. It can also be constructed by self – reinterpretation of a community, necessitating a change of identity.

Finally, it can also be imposed by a dominant powerful group on a subordinate population. Constructivism, thus, does not produce a single blueprint of how an identity can be constructed.

Constructivism does not only destabilize the category of identity. It goes on to argue that history, moments and events that are associated with an identity conception are also constructed. This can lead to two broad conclusions about these facets attached to an identity. One, that the history attached to a construction of an identity may be also constructed by the same *agent* that constructed that particular identity. In this sense, the history would have a pertinent bias that supports and promotes the ideas and values of the identity, usually portraying the identity construction in a favourable light. Such a construction of history would emphasize those specific events and moments that corroborate the understanding it is attempting to project.

On the other hand, the constructed nature of history can also imply an element of fluidity in the historical understanding of an ethnic identity. It can mean that there is not a single version of the history of an ethnic identity. Instead, there can be multiple opinions and conceptions on how a certain identity came into being. These different conceptions can touch upon different facets and factors that may have played a part in constructing an ethnic identity. Such fluidity of history can also throw different events and moments that have helped in shaping the identity in the present form, bringing forth events and moments that were hitherto obscure. These new moments can help in diversifying a construction of an identity while at the same time may be used to challenge the dominant notion of an identity. Constructivism, in this sense, keeps the possibility of arriving at something new or something else, both politically and discursively, open.

Thus, the framework of constructivism not only makes us aware of the ways in which power can affect the constructions of identities, through *agents* and institutional mechanisms, but also makes it possible to conceive a different trajectory of ethnic identity or a method to oppose the dominant conception of an identity. The framework accepts a certain relevance of power but does not completely reduce an identity construction to the vagaries of it. The modern state or a group of elites may have an advantage in constructing or imposing an identity but even these constructions are inherently unstable and vulnerable.



There is, therefore, a persistent chance of attacking, opposing and removing such constructions from their places of power.

In addition to bringing into consideration different facets of identity, the framework of constructivism also takes care of other issues that emerge out of the framework of primordialism, particularly that of multiple identities. In the contemporary globalized world, where individuals are constantly shifting between places, the idea of a changing nature of ethnic identity which emerges from a particular context seems more plausible. It is better suited to explain the complex ways in which a contemporary individual confronts identities.

The most important aspect, however, is the conceptualization of conflict that emerges from the framework of constructivism. The framework of constructivism does not believe conflict to be an inevitable outcome of ethnic identity and ethnic relations. Instead, it tries to understand the specific conditions and reasons that are responsible for the emergence of conflict between different communities. A conflict between communities is not bound to happen but occurs due to certain situations and events. Constructivism excavates such situations and events to deeply understand the reasons of conflict so as to provide more effective solutions. It also makes it possible to envisage a reality where ethnic identities can peacefully co – exist without any conflict, which is not possible in a primordialist framework, as primordialism believes that ethnic identities inevitably evoke conflict.

The framework of constructivism understands the conflict of Kashmir on the same lines. It tries to focus on the different historical and political factors that led to the emergence of conflict in the region rather than focussing on the cultural and religious composition of the communities. It tries to unfold different historical events and moments to better understand the genesis of the conflict. It also provides better understanding of inter – regional and inter – community divides that exist in the region of Kashmir, disentangling the antagonisms between these communities from the cultural content of different communities. Constructivism, thus, provides multiple and diverse conceptions about the Kashmir conflict, reflecting upon its diverse facets and factors.

There are, however, certain constraints that the framework of constructivism is confronted with, which have been discussed in the fourth chapter. Among these, I want to reiterate one

which I consider to be the most pressing. The concern is the tendency within the framework of constructivism to employ essentialist categories that can have primordial roots. There are many categories and classifications that exist in the field of ethnic studies that have emerged from the framework of primordialism and are entrenched due to their continued use over a long period of time. While undertaking a study of a particular identity, at a particular moment, constructivist studies necessarily encounter these categories. The problem, however, is the tendency to employ these categories uncritically which may, unconsciously, legitimize primordialist conceptions regarding an ethnic identity. Such use of essential categories can significantly limit the explanatory potential of a constructivist framework. The point is to continuously reiterate the basic tenets and principles of the frameworks, which not only consider ethnic identity as constructed and fluid but also the history, events, moments and, most importantly, categories that are attached or employed to study and ethnic identity.

In the end, however, I want to reaffirm that constructivism as a framework provides a more diverse, deep and dynamic understanding of ethnic identity and other concepts related to it. It opens up the category of ethnic identity to a more in – depth and broader understanding. It not only reflects upon the contemporary issues related to an ethnic identity but excavates different historical roots and factors that led to the current situations inflicting an ethnic community.

Finally, I want to also enumerate certain limitations that I encountered while undertaking this research, which have invariable become a part of this research. This work is a qualitative one and has, thus, not engaged in any kind of field study. The conclusions are mainly drawn from the way different secondary literature that studies or employs the frameworks of primordialism and constructivism as well as the conflict of Kashmir. The engagement with primary literature is limited to certain newspaper articles, magazine articles and few governmental and institutional archives.

Thus, there are important questions that still remain unanswered, which would require a necessary engagement with the field. There are few questions that I have in mind which can be used for further research on this concept of ethnic identity. These are as follows: Is there any difference between the discursive or academic conception and the popular

conception of ethnic identity? Do individuals, groups and communities invoke similar identity constructions while engaging in daily, routine engagements with each other, as opposed to in political movements and processes? What are the reasons of choice when an individual or a community is confronted with multiple identities in the same space at the same time? These questions, I hope, would probably lead to further our understanding of these frameworks as well as that of ethnic identity.

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