

**"SYMBOLIC CONSTRUCTION OF ETHNIC BOUNDARIES :  
A SOCIOLOGICAL REVIEW"**

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C E R T I F I C A T E

Certified that this dissertation titled "Symbolic Construction of Ethnic Boundaries : A Sociological Review" submitted by Miss V.Rajyalakshmi is in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the award of degree of Master of Philosophy of this University. This dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or anywhere else and is her own work.

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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*V. Rajyalakshmi*  
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CHAPTER ONE

**SYMBOLIC CONSTRUCTION OF  
ETHNIC BOUNDARIES :  
A CONCEPTUAL DISCUSSION**

The study of ethnicity, which is an important social category, has become increasingly relevant for the understanding of contemporary social reality. In the third world, the tribes, villages, bands and isolated communities, which have until recently been our traditional subject matter, are everywhere today becoming integral parts of new states and are thus being transformed into ethnic groupings with varying degrees of cultural distinctiveness. Social anthropologists are therefore being increasingly forced to deal with the socio-cultural and socio-political problems raised by the above situation. In developing nations, there seems to be a high degree of correlation between ethnicity and politics, and that is why it is essential to study the political implications and symbolic efficacy of ethnicity. Some like Reisman argue that in developing nations class struggles are being replaced by parochialism and ethnicity (Glazer & Moynihan, 1975 :7). Large masses of persons find inherited ways and old creeds "out-dated" and the validity of new modes and creeds uncertain, there is a sense of uprootedness which has spread throughout entire societies. People in response to the sense of rootlessness tend to form ethnic groupings (Jackson, 1984 :205). As a result ethnic conflicts have also intensified in the last decade or so.

The term ethnicity has been given numerous scholarly definitions. Research on ethnicity has taken a new significance in the post - colonial period as developing nations attempt to define their own identity and their national/ethnic distinctiveness. They write their own history. Groups of people within these nations claim certain rights and recognition on the basis of their belonging to a certain collectivity within a country. An active demand for autonomy is witnessed. The near universality of multi-ethnicity in contemporary states and the cultural and structural persistence of the ethnic factors, have maintained a strong public interest in ethnic phenomena and have stimulated a great deal of research in sociology and other disciplines of the social sciences.

The theme and title of this dissertation is " Symbolic Construction of Ethnic Identities: A Sociological Review". In the present analysis, our starting point is that ethnic identities are not "given" rather they emerge in a dynamic social context which surcharges ethnic symbols making them politically combative. Various socio-economic and political symbols catalyze a process where a particular group tends to behave as an ethnic unit. If ethnicity is not "given" then the question is "where do ethnic symbols come from?" Are they produced by individuals or by society? Even though scholars have debated on this question of the basis of

symbol formation. There is a consensus among them that even if individuals create ethnic symbols, they create them in a context of a group or social process. In other words, in all cases, a group or society is involved in the process of creating an ethnic symbol. This observation leads us to an important related question - how does a particular group using ethnic symbols define its identity (i.e. of joining some and departing from others with respect to the wider society). One of the major aims of this dissertation is get ourselves acquainted with different circumstances under which a sense of identity emerges within an ethnic group.

The majority of ethnic studies have stressed the fact that it is the political context or circumstance which gives rise to many of the ethnic symbols. It is in this political context that an ethnic group or society tries to preserve its cultural heritage and to protect or to win economic and political advantages. Therefore, it is important to understand how ethnic symbols become a means to protect economic and political advantages of an ethnic group. At times, the term "ethnicity" is used as a matter of convenience. Thus, a particular group tries to prove its uniqueness for many socio-economic reasons even though its claim to ethnic uniqueness may have no scientific basis (Sartori, G., 1984 :206). To cite another example, poor



people who suffer a grinding poverty will tend to cling to their community if in any way they feel that their own community is going to be beneficial for them.

A feeling of relative deprivation as a result of competition produces a situation where conflict becomes quite natural (Schermerhorn, 1978 : 92). Conflicting situation arises when social differentiation and social mobility of a group are faster than those of its rival group(s). Cultural and socio-economic deprivations are at the root of these conflicts.

Differences between ethnic groups can be aroused because of different historical past, geographical distribution, cultural, religious and political experiences. Geographical factor hinders their social interaction and promotes isolation and separation. Further, the uneven development of territory and population has also aggravated the crisis. In addition, ethnic ideologies often enjoin an idea of solidarity, even equality among those who share an identity and through this instil a sense of opposition, even superiority towards those whose identities differ.

As mentioned earlier, the focus of this dissertation is to understand how symbols are used to construct ethnic boundaries, especially in a situation of social

conflict?\*

More specifically we will try to answer the following questions: What are the symbols that distinguish ethnic groups? How do the groups construct arguments to sustain their identity against other groups? Where do the groups derive their symbols from? Who-the individual or the group - constructs the symbols? How do these symbols instigate/aggravate ethnic conflicts? In raising these questions, our endeavour is not to test any hypothesis, it is rather to locate the factors, in this case symbols, that contributes to the construction of ethnic boundaries.

All the aforementioned questions will be discussed in relation to three major psychological processes that characterize the formation of an ethnic group. These three major processes are: integration, differentiation and collaboration (Pareek, Vol 13 :1989 :303-351). The first phenomenon is that of development of identity and of the consolidation of the identity of a group. The second phenomenon contributes to the understanding of images and stereotypes, identity boundaries and the feeling of in-

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\* Symbolic elements would include kinship patterns, food, dress, race, caste, language, religious affiliation, etc. By means of these symbols, a group of people view themselves as distinct and different from another group. Individual sharing a system of common symbols develop a common consciousness which help in the formation of a group.

group and out-group. The third phenomenon helps us to understand inter-group conflicts and co-operation. Before I conclude my first chapter, I will briefly give introduction of subsequent chapters.

In order to discuss the above questions, the various concepts and theories involved in the study of ethnicity have to be clarified. This is done in the first and the second chapter.

In the third chapter, we will discuss how objective markers of identity, which are expressed through various symbols, are transformed into subjective experience of the people. I will elaborate this point briefly here. We can think about symbols as "objective reality" that influences subjectivity and help generate the subjective experience of ethnicity which results in "consciousness of kind". To elaborate further, symbols like caste, religion, language, dress, food etc., provide meaning to a situation because of which they evoke specific emotions. The combination of meaning and emotion in the symbols have great impact on the volition of an individual or group. Cohen defines symbols as "objects, acts, concepts or linguistic formations that stand ambiguously for a multiplicity of disparate meanings, evoked sentiments and emotions and impel men to action" (Cohen, A., 1974 : ix). By emphasizing the importance

of symbols, I am not suggesting that they (which we may understand as non-rational force) have overpowering influence on the material conditions of an individual or a group. I postulate a dialectical relationship between material conditions and symbols. I also postulate the same kind of relationship between the rational and non-rational traits in human beings; between reason on the one hand and emotions and moral sensibility on the other.

In the second chapter, apart from the above mentioned questions, I will also be discussing other questions as well.

- (i) We generally refer to the obvious markers like language, religion, caste and race and tend to ignore the subtle one's like dress, food, behaviour and aesthetic sense. This is mainly because one generally considers these non-obvious markers as natural. It is possible that all or most of the ethnic studies are works on ethnic conflicts wherein only the obvious ethnic symbols are studied. But the non-obvious symbols are as important as the obvious ones to understand the question of ethnicity more adequately.
- (ii) Symbols will be discussed at two levels : At one level, they are seen as cultural items reimbued with meaning and value. They are used to stress an ethnic

group's distinctiveness but without being conscious of it. Cultural differences refer to differences in a way of life. We call them cultural items because they are based on traditions - the shared memory of the people. At another level, the symbols are used as a means for the mobilization and organization of an ethnic community. Here the symbols contribute to political identity. Hence political identity is not "given" as "primordial sentiments" but it is created through mobilization around a central symbol. The process is used for accentuating certain factors of differences and minimizing factors of unity. Thus, Cohen argues that "symbols are exploited in all societies whether industrial or pre-industrial by different political interests, and their dominant symbols are thus loaded with multiplicity of political meanings" (Ibid : x). Therefore, he argues, the social scientist specializes in this political interpretation of what are essentially non-political formations and activities. The cultures of ethnic groups are universes of such originally non-political formations and activities that are politicized in the course of social conflict. It is through mobilization that ethnicity is transformed from a purely social or physiological experience into a

political one.

Thus, one often sees that ethnic movements have become one of the easiest means of gaining political impetus in ethnically divergent societies (Navlak, S., 1967 :192). It is a fact that ethnically heterogeneous society has a multiplicity of traditionally autonomous centers which derive support from the respective ethnic section of the population.

(iii) When the degree of subjective awareness is heightened, for instance, in a situation of conflict, members of an ethnic group may deliberately use certain cultural items to stress their separation from the rest of the society of which they are a part. Aspects of culture re imbued with meaning and value lead to the formation of cultural identity. It creates a feeling of internal cohesion and solidarity.

(iv) An ethnic community may be mobilized for articulating political demands and for organizing political action. It then constitutes a "nation" projecting an established ethnic identity into politics (Brass, 1974:14). Acquisition of such a political identity by an ethnic community is not pre-ordained.

does not flow inexorably from the cultural differences. Since the development of an ethnic community does not automatically lead to its political expression, an analytical distinction must be drawn between the two phenomena. The formation of an ethnic identity involving the use of ethnic symbols for primarily cultural purpose may be called cultural ethnicity while its transition to a political identity may be referred to as political ethnicity. These two manifestations of ethnicity are often intertwined though there is a tendency for scholarly attention to be concentrated on the political dimension only. They can occur independently.

Cultural traits acquire a value and meaning for members and are cherished as symbols for their own sake. They have to be renewed and reaffirmed through the adoption of a distinct life-style and manners and through the dissemination of the cherished values. They become symbols to be emulated for gaining status or for promoting solidarity through the strengthening ethnic identity.

In the case of political ethnicity too cultural traits acquire value and meaning and become symbols of differentiation and boundary maintenance. But instead

of being cherished for their own sake, the symbols are used as a means for the mobilization and organization of an ethnic community for competition and conflict over resources. In this situation, ethnic identity becomes political identity. As mentioned earlier, political identity is not "given" but it is created through mobilization around a central symbol.

Finally, a symbol of identity that is of the highest importance in one ethnic community may be ignored or interpreted quite differently by another community depending on the underlying criteria of identity. These underlying criteria of identity have two features- internal and external.

- (v) As far as the question of whether the symbols are "given" or created, the position taken in this dissertation is that they are created in relation to the environment of a particular group or society. Symbols attain an objective existence when they are accepted by others in the course of social interaction within a collective, developing reality of their own. Symbols become obligatory and thus exercise constraint over the individual. Ethnicity is a matter of degree. The constraint that symbols of customs exercise on the individual varies from case to case.



Following Brass, we argue that objective markers of identity like language, religion, race, caste etc are not "given" from which group identity springs (Brass,P., 1974 :14), but are itself subjected to variation. Ethnic identity is not limited to any one element but consists of beliefs, practice or aesthetic choices among others.If the symbols are created, then the question would be: 'who created these symbols'? 'why they created them'? and 'how they are created'? The success of those who create the symbols lies in the link they forge between the individual and the collective consciousness. They make members of the group perceive that the symbols - which are the representation of a collectivity-are something that represent their individuality. At this level, the individual experiences an internal compulsion and responds in ways which are similar or even identical with the responses of others. That is how an ethnic perception, consciousness and action manifests in a situation.

We take the position that no one of the symbols/traits by itself demarcate an ethnic group. But in a series of overlapping and intervening features, which in their profusion and density signify ethnic distinction, one symbol emerges and gains prominence at one time and others remain subservient to it, depending upon the context and

situation. Ethnic symbols are seen as manipulating, adopting its current symbols depending upon the context and situation (Jackson ,1984 :211). When we say identity is contextual, it embraces multiple levels and it changes with the environment. An African student in France will identify himself in one way at home and differently away from home. A person who identifies himself as a member of a small kin-group or clan for some purposes may also consider himself a member of a large ethnic aggregation or "nationality" or "race" for others (Ibid :212-214). The objective markers are susceptible to change and variation.

So far we have discussed various ethnic boundaries and their role in creating certain beliefs and emotions among people who fall within these boundaries. These beliefs and emotions express themselves in the day-to-day interaction with others who fall outside the boundaries. The fourth chapter is an attempt to understand this process of interaction. Inter-group relations contribute a great deal to the process of formation and differentiation of ethnic groups. In this chapter, we pose the following question "when do symbols become prominent?" We take the position that symbols gain prominence in a situation of inter-group conflict. However, we believe that they do operate apart from conflict.

In today's world, ethnic conflicts have become one major form of the relationship between and within nations. Ethnic groups have been mobilized for the pursuit of group's or individual's interests. There are two reasons for the increase in ethnic conflicts. The first has to do with the strategic efficacy of ethnicity in making legitimate claims on the resources of the modern state. The second has to do with the social dynamics that lead to such claims and concerns the fact and the nature of inequality. Apart from conflicting relations, the interaction between ethnic groups could be one of harmony and accommodation. I shall now proceed to chapter two and explore the concepts and theories of ethnicity. In the last chapter, we extended our argument from chapter three that objective makers influence and shape subjective consciousness.

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CHAPTER TWO

**CONCEPTS AND THEORIES  
OF ETHNICITY:  
A CULTURAL BEARING**

The concept of ethnicity is looked at in two interrelated ways, one is "patrimony" and the other is "primordial sentiments". Patrimony is understood as some concrete practices like food, habits, dressing patterns, mannerisms etc. which are being inherited by individuals in a group. These practices give a sense of identity to the individual and the group he belongs to. By primordial sentiment is meant an attachment that an individual experiences in relation to certain factors that marks a group as an unique entity. He perceives these factors as something he is born with not inherited. We call these factors, such as dress, food etc. (for the purpose of discussion) as symbols perceived to be pre-existing. They generate a sense of filial bond to all those who share them. Ethnic loyalty among these groups is very much visible and manifested especially in certain situations of historical, social and economic disparities.

The term identity literally means a state of being identical. A person's identity is always with reference to the social group with which he identifies himself. By "social group" we mean any number of people, large or small, between whom such relations are discovered that they must be thought of together. In a more limiting case the expression "social group" is applied to a small "face-to-face" group of persons to whom Cooley referred to as a

"primary group" (Cooley, C.H., 1909:iii). But quite often the social group tends to grow wider than the primary group. A sense of solidarity and commonness is basic to any social group. As the attributes or foci of solidarity change, the nature of social group changes accordingly. A social group develops its identity through a process Anthony Giddens called "Consciousness of kind". Individuals minds respond to common stimulation and act upon one another through suggestion, example and imitation to produce a social mind i.e. a common consciousness. Through this "commonness", a social group develops an identity. But whenever we say that a social group develops an identity, we implicitly refer to the group's relation to other has no meaning. This is so because, it is only with respect to other groups that any particular group distinguishes itself and thereby asserts its own identity. Various socio-economic and political situations stimulate this process. Identity reflects both likeness and uniqueness. It relates to that which the members of a group share in common and that which at the same time differentiates them from "others". Such group identity is expressed in terms of some common ethos which is characteristic of that group (or at least the member of the group thinks so).

Through the assertion of its identity a particular type of social group develops into what may be called an "ethnic group". The term "ethnic" was used to indicate 'belonging to a nation'. It is a derivative of a Greek word "ethno" which means "nation". An ethnic group is mostly seen as a distinct category which make up the population of a given society whose culture is usually different from that of the ethnic group. The members of such a group are thought to be bound together by common ties of race or nationality or culture. More specifically, the common ties could be in the form of language, religion, common customs or beliefs and certainly a cultural tradition. Paul Brass, in his definition of an ethnic group, sees it as non-politicized, non-mobilised, and objectively distinct group. In plural societies, which are multi-ethnic in nature, almost all ethnic groups are politicized though not necessarily mobilised into action.

According to Enloe, "ethnic groups are those who share clusters of beliefs and values. One value held in common by a number of persons is insufficient to sustain an ethnic community" (Enloe, E, 1973 : 17). One may give examples of muslims. While circumstances and a cluster of values bound them together in a community vis-a-vis the Hindus, other circumstances and other cluster of values split them later



into the Punjabi, Bengali and such other communal factions (Madan T.N , 1974 : 158-183). Morris has distinguished between two concepts -- ethnic category and ethnic group (Morris ,H.S., Vol 5 : 167). An ethnic category is defined by the mere fact of common cultural traits that make it objectively distinct from others. These traits may be involved separately or in various combinations. In the case of ethnic group, shared cultural traits also lead to a sense of belonging to social collectivity. Thus it involves the additional criterion of self ascription by members i.e. a subjective awareness of the distinction. The term ethnic category as defined above is a statistical concept which refers to the fact that certain cultural features are shared by the members belonging to the category. The term ethnic group is a sociological concept emphasizing that ethnic categories make up a field of communication and interaction. Thus, according to Morris this is the distinction between ethnic groups and ethnic categories. He says that for an understanding of ethnic groups in a social system, it is not cultural differentness we need to pay attention to but on group relationships. The self ascription by members of an ethnic group is to be taken only in this sociological sense i.e it is to be considered important only in so far as it is used for purpose of interaction and communication. Members

of an ethnic group must have a feeling of being bound together by common ties. An ethnic group may thus emerge when members sharing certain objective features became conscious of them. This consciousness is aroused by both intra and inter-group interaction.

The ethnic group is the unit of analysis adopted in this study. The process of identity formation which transforms an ethnic group is referred to as ethnicity. Ethnicity does not spring from cultural distinction per se. Ethnicity cannot be understood by taking the ethnic category as the starting point. There can be no natural movement from certain shared traits to the formation of an identity on that basis. A cultural category is of little significance unless it becomes an ethnic group in the sense that the group become aware of the distinction through interaction and communication. The heightened self-consciousness of the ethnic group is regarded as a process of identity formation. Ethnicity, therefore, cannot be defined by reference to "given" cultural traits.

Some scholars like Warner consider race relation as the basis of ethnicity. Scholars like Francis and Gordon considered a sense of "peoplehood" or "we feeling" shared by members of the group as the basis of ethnicity (Francis E.K, 1947 :393-400). According to Francis, the "we feeling"

of an ethnic group does not depend upon the "face-to-face" relation. Rather it is formed from "primary" to "secondary" groups. These characteristics must be present at the early stages of the group's formation. Once certain amount of maturity is reached by the group, these elements may disappear or change. But the cohesiveness of the group is least hampered by these changes or erosion.

Cultural anthropologists like Gluckman, Mithchel and Epstein have emphasised culture as the basis of ethnicity. Identity formation through a conscious effort towards cultural differentiation and boundary definition is cultural ethnicity. It involves the adoption of orthodox life-styles, customs and manners. The concept of culture is far from static. Thus culture must be examined with regard to its own history and also with regard to general principles of cultural borrowing and cultural integration.

According to Cohen, ethnicity is essentially a form of interaction between cultural groups operating within a social context and defines it in terms of degree of conformity by the members of a collectivity (or cultural group) to share norms in the course of social interaction (Cohen.A, 1974 :10-24).

Barth has highlighted the boundary maintenance of ethnic groups (Barth.F, 1969: 10-16). By "boundary" he

meant cultural boundaries. Cultural areas are geographical territories in which characteristic, cultural patterns of dresses, clothes and patterns of behaviour are recognizable through repeated associations of specific traits. These areas usually depend on one or more modes of subsistence that are related to the particular environment which bring them in contact with one another in various ways. This results in involvement of common types of experience. Thus, they feel "comfortable" with common types of experience. Consequently, they feel "comfortable" with each other. Territories, where particular traits are seen or may be said to be seen are ones exhibited by those who set up boundaries around themselves which are mainly displayed in values, attitude and life styles, customs, rituals and personality. The strength of these factors obviously affects interaction between ethnic groups. The basic thrust of studies on "cultural areas" is that people of a definable geographical sector, collaborating in their society, acting on their environment, offer an approximate unit for scholarly attention.

According to Barth, cultural variation is discontinuous i.e there are aggregates of people who essentially share a common culture and inter-connected differences that

distinguish each of such discrete culture from all others, which means there are discrete groups of people despite flow of persons across them. Another important characteristic of these boundaries is that stable, persisting and often vitally important social relations are maintained across such boundaries. These social relations are based precisely on the dichotomized ethnic status (Barth, 1969 :10). This means that ethnic distinctions do not depend on an absence of social interaction. Behavioural aspects are prime factors in these types of boundary maintenance. Barth argued that he has used these boundaries in the sense of an ideal type. By ideal type we mean, analysis of social phenomenon in terms of the extreme forms of their characteristics. He defined ethnic groups as categories of ascriptions and identification by the actors themselves (Barth, 1969: 19). So Barth's emphasis is more on the culture bearing aspect of different ethnic groups. Thus, the classification of persons and local groups as members of an ethnic group must depend on their exhibiting those particular traits of culture which are considered to be the characteristics of the particular ethnic group. One particular argument put forward by Barth is that the features taken into account in describing an ethnic unit are not the sum of objective markers, but only those which the actors themselves regard as significant (Barth.F., 1969:14). This implies that the different ways the

ethnic group boundaries are maintained are not by a once for all recruitment but rather by continual expression and validation.

Gordon developed the concept of sub-structures and sub-culture of an ethnic group. By sub-structures, he means, "a network of organizations and informal social relationship which permits and encourages the members of the ethnic group to remain within the confines of the group for all their primary and secondary relationships throughout all the stages of their life cycle" (Gordon ,M.,1964:39). By sub-culture he means "the cultural patterns of a sub-society which parallels the larger society in that it provides for a network of groups and institutions extending throughout the individual's entire life cycle". These cultural patterns contain both sexes, all ages and family groups (Ibid: 39). The sub - culture of an ethnic group is distinguishable from that of another group and also from the dominant culture. Thus it forms the basis of inter-ethnic group relations. He also develops the competing models of ethnicity as a series of concentric circles, in order to accommodate the fact that in a modern complex society, an individual often belongs to more than one ethnic group simultaneously. These groups may compete for his allegiance.

Often, when people consider themselves to be culturally different, they also imply to be different on account of descent. Thus, for Glazer and Moynihan, "ethnic groups in contemporary sociological theory relate to all groups of society characterized by a distinct sense of difference owing to culture and descent" (Glazer & Moynihan, 1976 : 4). Weber defines ethnic groups as "human groups that entertains a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs, or both or because of memories of colonization or migration in such a way that this belief is important for the continuation of the non-kinship communal relationship" (Weber M.,1965:306). So, in addition to descent, Weber also includes common experiences under colonization or migration in his definition of ethnic group.

The ethnic phenomenon whether defined in terms of common ancestors, culture, experience or even region, gives rise to "esprit de corps" among the members of a group which gives it a distinct identity (Bhat ,C.S., 1984 :23). These identities are characterized by a name, shared beliefs and symbols and also by a projection of a distinct style of life. Ethnic identity provides an individual or a group requisite base for interaction through identification. At the same time, it also differentiates individuals or groups outside its purview. The identity of an ethnic group or its

members is not only a case of self-identity, but at the same time, it is also an identity which others concede via-a-vis their own.

We have discussed the various concepts and theories of ethnicity above. To elaborate further, I take for consideration the factors responsible for inter-group relations and ethnicity in detail.

#### **CAUSES OF ETHNICITY**

The ethnic factor continues to be a significant element in most societies. To understand the underlying factors responsible for ethnicity is assumed to be difficult because of the complexity and enormity of the phenomena. Broadly, the factors which promotes ethnicity are isolating conditions of life, majority-minority consciousness, attitude of superiority on the part of dominant group. A situation of majority-minority consciousness entails yet another social process which is known as assimilation. Complete assimilation refers to an ideal situation. In actual situation, a given society can be placed on a continuum with complete segregation at one end and total assimilation at the other (Punekar ,V.B.,1978:9). What happens at best is a form of accommodation where the groups involved maintain their respective identities in



whatever form they may be. Certain situations force them to realise that they are separate from others. Through this consciousness they transform into ethnic groups. The concept of ethnicity has mostly come into being as a result of :

- (i) economic, social and political differences and a feeling of insecurity by one group due to the attitude of the other(s); and
- (ii) exploitation of these differences by political, economic and socio-religious elites of the communities who have their own vested interests.

Commenting on the role of ethnicity in Indian politics Paul Brass argued "... There is nothing false about this consciousness that develops around the choice of ethnicity as the identification that best serves the interests of the ethnic groups in question. It often works in both the short and the long run and it sometimes also leads to creation of solidarities that cut across internal class division within the ethnic group. It works because, among other things, it is easier to organize small culturally distinct groups than large multi-cultural class collectivities and because, admittedly, state authorities would rather recognize cultural categories than class categories". Brass further says "It boils down to the simple-proposition that people

pursue their interest in society by forming groups and selecting identification that maximize their advantages in the competition for scarce jobs and economic resource and for political power" (Brass,P.,1984:453). In other words, psychological frustration arising from sub-ordinated position and from the rate and volume of mobility, which poses economic threat especially on the job competition front, explain the rise of ethnicity. Struggle for political power or for material benefits through manipulation of ethnic symbols such as language, religion, etc. tends to lead people to cling to their own community.

To seek an identity is therefore to seek new meaning to things and thereby transcend the existing conditions. One major conviction that has emerged is the "powerful emotional charge that appears to surround or to underline so much of ethnic behaviour" (Glazer & Moynihan, 1976 :151). That charge is strong not only because it is connected with primordial sentiments but also because it is connected with contemporary interests. Bell argues that material interests are well served by ethnicity-based movements precisely because they "combine an interest with an effective ties" (Ibid :153). Another important factor for the rise of ethnicity deals with the experience of anomie and the feeling of alienation. It can be seen as a "mode of

reintegration of population element into structures which are less anomic and less alienative than their members otherwise exposed to" (Ibid :160). In a rapidly changing society, strongly influenced by instrumental and rationality, an ethnic "brand name" becomes important (Ibid :164).

#### **INTER-GROUP RELATIONS**

The manner in which the relations of the members of the group once brought together acquire a certain distinct character is termed as "social process". Interaction among different groups refers to the entire range of social relationships wherein there is a reciprocal stimulation and response between individuals. Social contact and communication are two essential conditions for social interaction. Whenever two or more ethnic groups come into contact, their interaction takes a specific form, which molds the relation between them. In order to understand the mechanisms of this interaction, certain processes need to be highlighted. Social interaction usually takes place in the form of cooperation, competition, conflict, accommodation, assimilation and integration.

A particular group reveals its identity along ethnic lines through its interaction with other groups. Because of

migration, different groups with diverse cultures come to stay in a single territory and a shared space. In such a historical situation, there may occur three different possibilities. First, the incoming groups and the locals may completely fuse into a single group by way of cultural and social symbols. The second possibility is that the outsiders may assimilate the life style of insiders without completely losing their identity. In the Third case, the incoming groups completely reject the lifestyle of the local groups, insulate themselves and continue to live on their own. Such insulation can increasingly isolate the groups and create marked boundaries separating the social space between the so-called "insider" and the "outsider".

The first case is an ideal situation. In the second case, the scope for two groups to separate is seen. In the third situation, where the immigrants remain unaccommodating the development of ethnic identity will depend upon the nature of their interaction with the local population in the wider social activities and organization. As long as the sphere of activity of both the groups are mutually exclusive, there is no clash of interests. This may not develop into ethnic groups. But once this condition is violated, their interests clash and the possibility of ethnic tension emerges (Weiner ,M.,1978 :1-19).

In certain cases, the inter-ethnic group relation takes the form of a relationship between a small group and a large group which in turn emerge from the balance between the element of dominance and subservience. Certain external as well as internal factors force a particular group to feel that their ethnic identity is in danger and their assertion for identity begins. This assertion for their identity operates at two levels.

- (i) The way an ethnic group looks upon itself vis-a-vis the immediate regional context in which it is placed.
- (ii) The identification that the ethnic group demands with respect to the nation-state as a whole.

At the first level, the ethnic group in question feels threatened about its existence as a distinct entity with respect to other ethnic units in its neighbourhood. There is the manifestation of a feeling of relative deprivation. Various economic, political and social developments become casual factors in the development of relative deprivation. At this stage the group in question starts evaluating its standing with respect to the other ethnic units. A real or imaginary feeling of deprivation in one aspect leads it to feel that it is being deprived in so many other aspects. It treats a particular ethnic unit as antagonistic to its interests. At this point, the ethnic

group re-evaluates its identity with respect to the wider society. It tries to identify itself as separate from the other ethnic groups. Here, religion, language, different cultural and social symbols and sometimes territorial domain play their role.

In its effort to identify itself vis-a-vis the other ethnic group-groups, the ethnic group use ethnicity as an ideology. This gradually leads it to the second level, that is, it tries to identify itself as a distinct group vis-a-vis the nation-state as a whole. This may take two forms, that is either it will identify itself as a distinct unit to continue inside the nation-state putting weight on this point, or as distinct unit to recede the continue outside of the nation-state. However, in both the cases an element of withdrawal will be there. In the first case, withdrawal will be in regard to its immediate larger society which may be called sub-nationalism. In the latter case, it will be in regard to the nation-state as a whole, which may be called secessionism which is an extreme form of a particular ethnic group's effort towards the search for self-identification.

Ethnicity is not uniform but it has many forms and fulfills different needs. Cultural ethnicity is oriented towards the need for the status of the members of an ethnic

group and to enhance their sense of belonging to what they would like to think is a united and cohesive community. The group feels that there has been a weakening in the aspects of culture it idealizes as in the case of religious piety. These cultural traits acquire a value and meaning for members and are cherished as symbols for their own sake. They have to be renewed and reaffirmed through the dissemination of the cherished values. They become symbols to be emulated for gaining status or to be promoted for creating ethnic identity and for strengthening solidarity.

Ethnic traits acquire values and meanings and become symbols of differentiation and boundary maintenance. Instead of being cherished for their own sake, the symbols are used merely as a means for the mobilization and organization of the ethnic community, for competition and conflict for resources. Though the actual demands may differ according to the situation, they are always oriented towards attaining some degree of self-determination and autonomy for the community and the preservation and enhancement of its interests.

The perspective adopted here interprets the phenomenon of ethnicity as a process, and this fact must be emphasized because it makes a comparative analysis of interaction between ethnic groups meaningful. Ethnicity cannot be

regarded as just a reflection of pre-existing cultural distinctions based on primordial sentiments that are "given". Thus in the language of research, ethnicity is a variable (Cohen, A., 1974 :10-24). It manifests in different forms and fulfill needs depending on the interactional context. It is a variable that depends upon the structural position of the ethnic group. Hence it should be reiterated that ethnic categories in themselves do not spontaneously form the basis for ethnicity since they are defined only by the objective differences and not by interaction as such. Rather ethnicity must be considered as an "emergent phenomena" - a continuous and variable process that unfolds--contingent on the structural position (Yancy, W.L., 1976 :391-403).

The structural position determines the direction in which an ethnic group will pursue its interests vis-a-vis other ethnic groups embedded in the same milieu. The political form of ethnicity assumes salience when ethnic groups acquire divergent interests. Political identity is established in the perception of disparities in the distribution of resources. Objective conditions of uneven development of ethnic groups serve as catalyst for political mobilization of ethnic identities. Conflict and competition between ethnic groups are rooted in their



feeling of being discriminated in the access to the opportunity structures. The situation fosters harmony, integration and cooperation between ethnic groups instead of tension, conflict and competition (Brass .P.,1974: 34).

Ethnic identity will be aroused due to internal needs of the ethnic group for status or to create a sense of cohesion. There is a process of selection, codification and transmission of the symbols defining a particular ethnic identity in order to mobilize the community. Such a process is crucial in a plural society characterized by diverse patterns of cultural and social differentiations. The society includes a multiplicity of ethnic traits region, religion, language, caste, sect, race etc. It is a multi-ethnic society with ethnic groups based on these traits that overlap or cut across one another shaping the contours of a complex and highly segmented socio-cultural milieu.

Brass regards India as a segmentary system consisting of ethnic groups (Ibid :14). An individual becomes aware of his members in each of these ethnic groups according to the context of interaction and each can form the basis of his identity. Hence the individual has a multiplicity of identities. Thus, an individual's identity cannot be thought as monolithic. It is internally differentiated and each

exerts pressure in different situations. Thus, it is necessary for a successful emergence of an identity that a single ethnic identity is treated as a primary symbol and other identities are either sought to be brought into congruence with it or to be denied. There is a choice of one symbol followed by a manipulation of others so that those identities are subsumed under it. If one defines one's own identities according to a particular trait, the others reciprocate distinctiveness in terms of the same. In the discussion above, one may have noticed that the concept of ethnicity is undergoing changes. Perhaps it is time for us to address this.

#### **THE CHANGING CONCEPT OF ETHNICITY**

The basis of ethnic identity has different foci. It varies from religion, language, caste, and territory. A person's ethnic identity undergoes change in different situations. Thus, identity is basically contextual in character. We may find the overlapping layers of consciousness, and, hence, of identity, unfolding their significance in accordance with the context of confrontation. The relationship between ethnic groups changes as the foci of identification of an ethnic community changes and when in its specific form ethnicity becomes an ideology.

To have an identity is to join with some and depart from others. New ethnic identities have come to fore with a speed that reveals the transitional and relational nature of ethnic phenomena. Ethnic groups are socio-political artifacts and therefore historical entities that are subject to considerable change. Ethnic groups can be organized, regulated and even destroyed. Ethnic identity must not be thought of as something which defines the character of one group in opposition to other for all times. In India the same individual has a number of different identities according to caste, religion, and language and anyone of these might become important then the others. Thus in one context, Tamil speaking Hindus and Muslims might unite to define themselves against "Aryan domination" while in another context Hindus from both North and South India might regard Muslims as aliens among them.

Ethnicity is an alternative form of social organization and identification to class, but it is a contingent and changeable status unlike class. It may or may not be articulated in particular context at particular times. Earlier the concept of ethnicity saw society and economy as separate. The concept has changed because of incorporation and assimilation of new members (Tambiah, 1989 :409-420) for changing the scale and criteria of collective

identity. Ethnic identities are not culturally self-producing nor are they consistent over time. Ethnic boundary cannot remain static (Sandra, W., (ed) 1979, 7-8). It has to be flexible and dynamic. After all, it is the social boundary that identifies "us" in relation or in opposition to "them" and the identity of the group will depend on the acknowledgement by (them) other groups. At the same time not all the ethnic groups shift their boundaries. Thus for instance, a members particular group, 'X' , may interact with themselves but may marry members form the group 'Y'. This is one of the main reasons why the emotional integration of these communities have not been possible. The feeling of "us" and "them" has become so strong that there is no other word then "ethnicity" to express the recognition of significant differences between them. "Ethnicity" is the process by which "their difference is used to enhance the sense of us" for purpose of organization or identification.

In the past there has been change or shift in the ethnic boundary, though the changes have been slow and imperceptible. People have voluntarily affiliated themselves to other ethnic communities. This is known as "voluntary affiliation". However, one thing must be kept in mind -- ethnicity is generally acquired at birth. In the

Indian society, the changing or shifting of boundary by one caste or ethnic group in order to have a better access or opportunity to identify themselves with a dominant group has become a common phenomenon. With the change in the social boundary there has been a shift in loyalties.

As far as values and practices are concerned ethnic groups can shift their positions with regard to some or all of the values and practices. This shift may be due to some specific changes in the socio-economic and political milieu of the groups. Let us here take the example of the proposed temple at Ayodhya which has become a symbol of communal mobilization. The religious-communal mobilization around the construction of the temple has roused a host of questions relating to the state and the civil society (Panikar, K.N., 1991:4-5). At one time the residents of the town proudly claimed that the Babri-Masjid complex as a symbol of religious fraternity and social harmony. Today the situation has drastically changed and some members of both Hindu and Muslim communities, although without any authority or justification to do so, have staked their claims to the area of their respective religious worship. To reinforce their respective claims, communal mobilization has been resorted to through the manipulation of religious sentiments and the appeal to community interests and

identity. Thus, the symbol of harmony years ago has now become a symbol of conflict. What happened to Babri Masjid is only a powerful expression of a process of ethno-religious, activism which over the last few decades has brought about a qualitative change in both our social consciousness and the Indian polity.

We see the whole development of the ethnic phenomenon along economic, political and religious lines. If we come from the synchronic to diachronic level of analysis, we find the whole phenomenon in a continuum, from a normal to a pathological level. At the normal level, there is a alikeness of the members of a particular ethnic community. This results in a sense of unity. This sense of unity distinguishes them from the members of other communities. It explains the question why interests in conflict are subsumed under the communal phenomena. Sudhir Kakkar has emphasized this aspect saying how by taking birth in a particular community, a child is socialized in that atmosphere and how he assimilates unconsciously or subconsciously the beliefs, values etc., of the community. He points out the subservience of the child and later of the adult, to the family group, the subservience in which the individuals own normative identity does not exist independently but depends on the primary group (Kakkar, S. 1979: 15-19). Thus primordial ties without being used as a

tool play important role in generating conflict.

While I have concentrated on the theoretical aspects in the sections above, I will in the section below take up the example of India to explain the concept of ethnicity.

## **INDIA**

There is a general principle which states that ethnicity appears to operate on segmentary principle through fission and fusion at different levels under diverse interactional situations (Myron ,W., 1974 :1-19). Caste group as a functional unit enjoys a common ritual and belief system and generally constitutes a regional and linguistic group. This in turn forms the basis of ethnic identity. Punekar has identified caste, language, region and religion as the four major premises where ethnicity operates in a significant way in India (Punekar, 1974: 98-102). In her view "the ethnic identity of a caste is based on the common origin, further reinforced by centuries of structural exclusiveness, cultural identity, living in a contiguous area and restriction on commensality between castes" (Ibid). So attributes like group identification, social participation at the caste level and common cultural behaviour qualify caste to function sometimes as an ethnic group. It is the cultural

similarities of the members of certain castes which have brought castes nearer to social participation level. In India, language and dialects have taken the name of the region where they have evolved. So in Punekar's view, "To the extent that language characterise a region, language region or linguistic region is a social cultural unit, and language and religion as model of ethnicity coincides " (Ibid).

As far as religion as model of ethnicity is concerned, she argued that "social participation and group identification are strong in religious groups. At language-religion level, and even stronger at the sectarian and endogenous group level"(Ibid). But in actual situation these four i.e. caste language, region and religion are further subdivided on ethnic lines. Thus caste are further divided into sub-castes, languages into dialects, regions into sub-regions and religion into various sects. Punekar's argues is that "ethnic plurality is less visible at these micro-levels when compared to caste, language, region and religion. In her view ethnicity at the national level is the weakest at the moment and the linguistic, regional and religious differences obscure the national bonds both in social participation and cultural context" (Ibid).



Perhaps the most extensive study done on the development of ethnicity in India has been by Myron Weiner (Weiner, M., 1987: 265-267). In his view, the basis of self identity in India is not territorial but ethnic (i.e. religious, linguistic, tribal and caste). This means that people in India generally identify themselves by the ethnic group to which they belong rather than by the place from which they come. Thus a non-Marathi staying in Bombay can call himself a "Bombaywala" i.e, he can assert his independence from any exclusive ethnic identity (Ibid :268-275). Weiner has however underestimated the regional aspect of ethnicity and has unduly extended the cosmopolitan nature of ethnicity into a general category. Thus for example, a Gujarati living in Orissa (no matter whether he is an immigrant from Gujarat or is born in Orissa) is always referred to as a Gujarati and not an Oriya. So here the place of origin becomes important.

According to Weiner "terms for identity need to be understood not only in a cultural and psychological sense, but also as political concepts" (Ibid :275-279). Thus for the dominant communities, the possession of political power ultimately defines their rights and benefits. In his view, "Those who use territorial terms for identity not only signify a detachment from an exclusively ethnic

identity, but they are also asserting a particular conception of their multi-ethnic units "(Ibid :302). Thus, he has given a political dimension to ethnic identity. But at the same time he agrees to the fact that there are conceptual difficulties in distinguishing between territorial and ethnic concept of identity in the Indian political context. He has tried to understand ethnicity at two levels. At one level, multi-ethnic societies have a territorial-political basis for identity, that is distinct from ethnic-based identity. At another level, the ethnic groups express an exclusive claim on a piece of territory. He gives importance to the emergence of regional, cultural identities within a single political framework.

In the view of Lawadowski, "under colonial rule certain groups benefited at the cost of others. After independence those in position of power have attempted to hold on to their status, while others have struggled to become equals. This became the conditioning factors in the emergence of ethnic identities "(Lawadowski ,S., 1980 :206). Thus ethnicity is an integral part of the post-colonial societies. In her view ethnicity has emerged in India from the intensive interaction.

Katzenstein, in her study of Shiv Sena Movement

in Bombay, put differential bargaining power of regional groups as the basis for the development of ethnic identities in India (Katzenstein, M.F., 1979: 193-194). Basing herself on this understanding, she has distinguished between the old ethnicity and the new ethnicity. In her view, the criteria of caste, language and religion formed the basis of old ethnicity whereas the new ethnicity is centered round the phrase of "sons of the soil".

Indian society is strikingly poly-ethnic. The term "plural society" denotes in its original use Asian countries characterized by collection of communities linked together by the commerce and plantation economics of the colonial regime. Today it refers to nations characterized by a plurality of cultures and institutions which are held together in a number of ways. In India, in most of the cities, ethnic communities tend to recreate a replica or a microcosm of their regional, cultural and social environment and preserve a poly-ethnic or plural society.

## **SYMBOLS**

In this section, we shall discuss another important concept of our dissertation namely, symbols. After mentioning the definition of symbols, we shall see symbols as a "definite", "certain", and "closed" and second, symbols

as "open", "polymeric" and "multi-vocal". One popular definition of symbols is that given by Cohen. Cohen defines symbols as "objects, acts, concepts or linguistic formations that stand ambiguously for a multiplicity of disparate meanings, evoke sentiments and emotions and compel men to action". Symbols are in principle never fully self-explanatory, self sufficient or fully autonomous. They are always seen as possessing analogous qualities or are seen to associate fact and thought (Foster, M.L.), and as contiguity (Beathie J.). There is a sense of likeness, intended or interpreted.

A thing, we say is a symbol only if a community regards it as having a referential function. The community tends to see the symbols as instruments of expression (physical, moral, economic, political), of communication of knowledge and of control in isolable changing fields of social relationships in both verbal and non-verbal communication. Simply stated we master the world through signs, ourselves by symbols as symbols are inter-connected in such a way that objects, acts, gestures words are used to further the action. Victor Turner in his studies of symbols tries to see the cognitive and affectual meanings of symbols. (Turner, V., 1975 : 145-162). Symbols are seen as three types of

mean the same thing for another society. It might mean or might be viewed differently. Meaning is the result of interaction.

(i) Political

Here we see symbols as instruments of public control, i.e. as symbols in the maintenance, distribution and exercise of power relations as a device for enabling us to make abstractions, but insists that some end must be in view.

(ii) Ritual

Here symbols are most prominent and rich in concentration. The people in the rituals and objects involved may symbolise other things, by either resembling or by being associated with in some way and then their activities may express attitude held by those whom they symbolize.

(iii) Therapeutic

Symbols are seen as polysenic phenomena. A single symbol has many meanings. It is multi-vocal i.e. the

same 'thing' means or are made to mean, different things for different people. This is particularly the case when the "things" are shared by a large number of people in a given collectivity. Groups, that are otherwise hostile may form coalitions in political fields by emphasizing different signate of the same signans. It does not matter whether the things shared are religious or political symbols. The point is that the party or the person who controls the assignment of "meaning" to the things can also control the reinterpretation. The authority of these groups or person to reinterrupt or maintain the meaning of symbols is traditionally assigned to them.

Symbols are known as "dominant", "core", "key", "master", "focal", "pivotal" or central symbols which constitute semantic system in their own right.

Symbols can be seen as creating group behaviour. This could be explained by taking the example of theory of "clan totems" of Durkheim. Durkheim considered that group behaviour created sentiments around symbols which help to serve, recharge, maintain and enhance collective identity. Symbols that are part of the collective resistance to overcome it. The next important feature to be noted about symbols is the location of symbols.

## LOCATION OF SYMBOLS

It is in the "happenings" that we try to locate symbols. They are seen in social situation dramas, cultural performances, or other social processual units. Symbols are constructed from the cultural history of people. According to Geertz, a culture is an inter-connected culture to be intelligent or "thickly described". Though a study of symbolic acts, the aim is to analyse social discourse and bring out the unapparent meaning of all things. Internal relationships are understood according to the core symbols around which it is organised. Thus the important thing to note is what the meanings of actions are and what they are trying to portray. It is through social action that cultural forms find articulation. Thus according to Geertz, culture is the acted document and is public because meaning is public. The person is constructed out of symbols and definitions from various cultural domains.

Symbols could be public (widely used to communicate what they symbolize) or private (if only to one self and not just for another). Symbols are central to the social dynamic aspects of communication. These aspects change "signification" in temporal socio-cultural processes, that is, they gain and shed meaning with each success or failure in the political struggle. The same society that utilized a

symbol generally invoke ambiguous classification and relational concepts during a conflict. It was often the same concepts concerning the roles and statuses that received a univocal emphasis at one stage and multi-vocal emphasis at another stage. A symbol will not do its work if it does not have (this ambiguity and complexity, in situation of conflict and change). The formation of an ethnic identity is a manifestation of ethnicity involving the use of ethnic symbols.

We have discussed various concepts and theories of ethnicity. In the next chapter, we will discuss the whole question of how objective boundary makers of an ethnic group influence the subjective consciousness of the members of the group and them into action. In order to tackle this question, we need to raise a few more questions |

- (i) What are ethnic symbols ?
- (ii) What goes into the making of their distinctiveness ?
- (iii) How do people use various symbols (language, religion, caste etc) in the formation and definition of ethnic group boundaries and ethnic identity ?

In establishing participation in social networks and social activities and in the formation of social relationships there is a choice of particular symbols



(language, religion, caste, region etc.). All of these together constitute basic ethnic boundary maintenance and ethnic boundary definition processes.

One must remember that groups vary in the type of difference not the degree of difference. When defined as an ascriptive and exclusive group, the nature of continuity of ethnic units is clear. It depends on the maintenance of a boundary. This boundary is the social boundary though it may have territorial counterparts.

Another point to be kept in mind is some factors are more salient for certain cultural groups than others. The importance and meaning of ethnic identities varies with the specific context and with changes in the social milieu and will be more prominent in some situations than others. The features that are taken into account are not the sum of "objective differences, but only those which the actor themselves regard as significant".

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CHAPTER THREE

**THE ROLE OF SYMBOLS IN THE FORMATION  
OF ETHNIC IDENTITY**

Human beings do not respond passively to the stimuli received from the environment or the material conditions of their existence. Not being able to cope with the enormous number of innumerable stimuli biologically, they are forced to synthesise the varied stimuli through a mental mechanism. It is by this very mechanism that they try to communicate to others and to carry on an orderly interaction. I would call this mental mechanism "symbol". Symbols are based on traditions - the shared memory of people. These symbols provide meaning to a situation. They also evoke specific emotions. In other words, the meaning of a situation is enveloped by strong emotions. The combination of meaning and emotion combined in the symbols have great impact on the volition of an individual or a group (Cohen ,A., 1974 : IX). The idea of value is a positive one. Symbols stand for an abstract notion. What one finds symbolized in various ways are more or less abstract notions like power, group solidarity, familial and political authority. Sociologically, this is the most important thing about symbols (Victor, T., 1975 :143-159). They provide people with a means of representing abstract ideas, often ideas which would be difficult or even impossible for them to represent to themselves directly. Symbols emphasize various roles.

Symbolic pre-dispositions have the following characteristics (Turner ,1990: 356-365). They are established early in life, they are frequently and consistently reinforced by later learning, the objects they represent are invested with emotional meaning and they are central to one's self-concept. Because the groups worth can powerfully affect self-esteem, its national, racial, religious or linguistic identities are frequently cited as potent symbolic pre-dispositions. The role of symbols is to meet certain requirements. First of all, symbols play a major role in providing an identity to a group. It thereby enables a member of the group to identify his friends and foes. By providing an identity, symbols also objectify relationship between individuals and organizations. (Kertzer, D.I.,1988: 16). An organization is not a conglomeration of individuals or a loose federation of groups. It is one in which members have a strong sense of solidarity, a set of symbols giving rise to "we-feeling" and a filial bond. Such organisations are highly cohesive. Durkheim stresses the role of rituals (which is a part of the symbol system) in generating and maintaining solidarity. He writes : "It is by uttering the same cry, pronouncing the same word, or performing the same gesture in regard to some object that they become and feel themselves to be in union"(Ibid: 62).

There are various ways to classify human beings and ethnicity is one of the most common ways. An important feature of ethnic classification is "identity". Identity is a concept to describe the individuals sense of who s/he is. Talcott Parsons defines it as "Pattern - maintenance once code system of individual personality"(Dashefsky & Howard, M.S., 1976:5). It is the result of membership in a specific group based on a numberof criteria including culture, history, language etc. It tends to evoke a sense of loyalty to a particular group. Thus, we can say, identity is a sense of solidarity on the basis of certain ethos. Ethnicity is a symbol of peoplehood and of cultural boundary. These symbols constitute the ethnic identity system. "Ethnic identity systems" generally incorporate political goals. The need to protect the autonomy of one's own group, culture, language is what often dramatizes ethnicity (Caste ,J.P., 1987). Ethnic identity systems represent the political aspirations of a group and are effective in mobilizing group members for political goals (Ibid :5). Summer observes that ethnic groups are primarily ethnocentric in character. Ethnocentrism is not simply a matter of intellectual functioning but involves emotions that are positive and negative. Symbols of one's own ethnic or national group or of the values shared by that group (or



both) become objects of attachment, pride and veneration. Symbols of other groups or their values become objects of contempt and hatred. Ethnocentrism destroys boundaries or creates them. Another aspect which is generally argued is that groups secure in their own identity are less prone to have negative attitudes towards other groups.

Boundary is a symbolic concept connoting spatiality. It symbolically encircles individuals and groups who are similar and differentiates them from those who are dissimilar. By boundary maintenance, we mean social distance maintenance, that is the degree of intimacy acceptable to members of two groups. In other words, boundary--maintenance maintain ethnic ideology that differentiates groups. It also means conspicuous differences in one or more of the following characteristics - language, ecology, religion and life-styles (Robert, C. & John, W. 1989: 594-641). Ethnic ideology consists of stereotypes of distinctive attributes. Parsons says all institutions or systems have boundary maintaining mechanism. Boundaries based on various criteria do coincide. For example, 'people who speak the same language are more likely to interact, and their interaction is likely to lead to marriage and reproduction and thus to an increase in genetic and cultural homogeneity. From another point of view, people who interact intensively over time are likely to find a

common medium of communication, to become a breeding isolate through mate selection based on propinquity, to socialize their young to a common set of norms, to regard these norms with positive affect and to see people who differ in one of these many ways as somewhat dangerous or inferior.

The following assumptions about ethnicity and group boundaries represent a widespread form.

- (i) There exists named units which are readily perceived as units by their members, their neighbours and anthropological observers alike.
- (ii) Such a unit, called a society or culture, is in its typical concrete embodiment, population with territorial boundary that represent discontinuities in breeding, language, economy, socio-political structure and culture.
- (iii) In a unit so distinguished from its neighbours, each of the institutional aspects of social action has the properties of an organized entity like a biological system with inter-dependent parts and normally a high degree of stability. One generally argues that boundaries and loyalties are not the general case for non-industrial people. The well-bounded\* ethnic unit/entity is associated with a rather advanced

stage of political development. Where political development has not reached a high stage, groups are likely to exhibit "opportunism" in their alliance, interaction patterns and cultural borrowing, as they seek personal and group advantage unhampered by rigid loyalties. For a well-bounded ethnic entity, a well-defined political machinery capable of making decision is essential (Journal Of Politics, 1990 :356-365).

Social identity theory (Turner, J.) argues that individuals derive their identity from the groups to which they belong in order to enhance their own esteem (Robert, C. & John, W. 1989 : 594 - 641). They adopt a negative perception of all out-groups and maintain their distance from these out-groups. The solidarity in a group increases when it confronts an antagonistic out-group. Groups based on affinities like language, religion, region, caste and so on tend to show behaviour usually associated with ethnic groups, the most characteristic feature of which is an "Us"-against-"Them" attitude. They have emotional bonds and are concerned with the preservation of their type. The formation of an ethnic identity is a manifestation of ethnicity involving the use of ethnic symbols. When we observe ethnic collectivities we do not see "objects" as such but "object indicators" (ethnic

markers) that are symptomatic of collectivities. Ethnic markers are perceptible social characteristics such as race, colour, language, religion and so on that identify a group of individuals as members of a recognizable and distinct social category. If the social category does not exist neither will the characteristic. But markers can be the operative elements of ethnic category even if they are not acknowledged by the particular individuals who inherit them. Therefore, they possess objectivity. As mentioned earlier, ethnic characteristics are not acquired by personal choice but by inheritance or ascription, an involuntary assignment to an identifiable social category. Virtually everyone can be assigned to an ethnic category of some kind and often to more than one (Jackson, R.H., 1984: 211). A Canadian necessarily is either an Anglophone or a Francophone. But in addition, he might also be a Quebecois or an Albertan as well as a Ukraisian-Canadian, a German Canadian, a Chinese Canadian. Such identities need not conflict with one another. But, as I noted earlier, one symbol will gain prominence at one time depending upon the context and time. This applies to both the choice and location of the indicator. Thus, ethnic markers are susceptible to change and variation. While objective facts, such as racial characteristics are necessary to delimit and to explain ethnic phenomena (by providing

stable reference points), it is the subjective awareness of ethnic distinction by the members of an ethnic group and the conflict and collective action growing out of such awareness that are of particular interest to social science. Ethnic identities may form and solidify due to mobility and may weaken by factors such as education and economic prosperity.

We have discussed above general features of ethnic boundary. As we mentioned earlier, we have divided symbols into obvious and not-so-obvious cultural markers. Both contribute to the "consciousness of kind" in an ethnic group. The obvious symbols and language, religion, caste, race and region and the not-so-obvious symbols are food, dress, behaviour and aesthetic sense. First, we will discuss the obvious cultural markers.

## THE OBVIOUS CULTURAL MARKERS

### LANGUAGE

Language is an indispensable tool for all human existence. It is the means of expressing our intricate and complex thought. It should not be seen as just a means of communication(Wadhwa ,K.K., 1975: 5). Language must also be seen as an expression of people's way of life. It is an integral part of their collective personality. Thus

language is used more often than anything else to delimit cultural boundaries. Language is not a given trait rather it is acquired. Studies have shown that the linguistic boundaries are the most rigid things in the world today. They restrict communication in literal sense of the term. A group creates a sense of "we" and "they" among its members which unites the same kind of people and separates others. Thus a group creates an identity. Language has an important place among the bases of group identity formation. It creates unity among its speakers and also defines a line of separation from one speech community to another (Dasgupta ,J.P., 1976: 54).

Linguistic identity is based on the objective markers of language and is expressed through demand for language. In India for instance group loyalty is often expressed in linguistic loyalty. Indians identify themselves with their language not with their region. For example, when an Indian says he is an Oriya or Bengali he does not mean that he comes from the state of Orissa or Bengal but that he belongs to the Oriya and Bengali speaking community (Weiner, M., 1978, :299). In India, territorial or what we call regional identity continues to be strong and the people speaking a different language are called "outsiders". Therefore, most of the ethnic conflict takes

place between an "insider" and "outsider". The fact that inter-regional mobility in India is extremely limited reinforces this identity. Ethnic conflict based on language can be termed as Nativistic Movement.

A linguistic group includes people who speak the same language and related dialects. Most of the time these linguistic groups are related as ethnic groups. A linguistic group is a speech community i.e. it is a group of people who use the same system of speech signal. By a speech community we mean any human aggregate characterized by regular and frequent communicative interaction by means of a standard body of verbal signs. In addition, it is one which set off from other aggregates by significant differences in language use. Thus we can define linguistic group as a group of people who speak either the same language or clearly related dialects, who cherish a common historical tradition and who constitute a distinct cultural group. In India, according to Punekar, language is viewed as an important mark of group identity (Punekar 1978 :12). The natural ties of people to their group is valued more highly than their civil ties in many cases. In India we can find 1652 languages. However, only 15 of them are recognized by the Constitution in the VIII<sup>th</sup> schedule as "national languages". Hence, we find that most of the languages are highly neglected and face the threat of

extinction. The unrecognized linguistic communities feel deprived of a source of their legitimate identity. For those whose mother tongue is one of the 15 recognized languages their identity is defined and is reinforced mainly in linguistic terms.

A situation of conflict may take place between two different language speaking groups. This type of conflict occurs due to a linguistic group's fear of losing linguistic and cultural identity. In India language is both a divisive and cohesive force. The problem arises when it acts as a divisive force threatening the integration of the nation. As one writer mentions, language, with the exception of religion incites the deepest emotions (Chagla ,M.C., 1967 :24). Since, most of the newly developed countries, such as India are multi-lingual, the major problem confronting these countries is integration and it is in this area language poses serious impediments. The problem arises when a linguistically conscious people guided by political motivations preserves the state for special privileges. Thus, language has acquired an important place in the politics of regionalism. Regionalism is often expressed in linguistic terms in India. Thus, language has a tremendous capacity for mass mobilization. A classic example is the division of one Pakistan i.e. West and East Pakistan



into Pakistan and Bangladesh respectively on the basis of language. The language of Bangladesh is Bengali. Although in India several languages have existed for centuries, the emergence of the language-demand on the state has become prominent only after independence. The linguistic issue was so salient that the government of India had to reorganise the states on linguistic line. Thus, in 1956 the states were re-organized and language afforded for easy re-organization. Andhra Pradesh, the state of Telugu speech community, was one among the states formed after the re-organization. This, in turn, gave a feeling among all cultural groups that if they do not have a home state they will become second class citizens. Those who got a home state started feeling that they alone had the right to live and prosper in their state (Oommen, T.K., 1982 :43). This would surely give rise to linguistic conflict in the face of cross-cultural migrations. Thus job competition and language rivalry became prominent features in independent India.

We have discussed the language as a symbol. In ethnic studies, another significant area is the process of constructing ethnic boundary. The construction of ethnic boundary is more explicit in a situation of ethnic conflict. In India, most of the ethnic conflicts are based on the language-factor. To understand this

question we will take the example of the Dravidian Movement in which the boundary on the basis of language is constructed. In the context of the move made by the Congress government to impose Hindi, Annadurai highlights the quality of the Tamil language. Annadurai's central argument on this issue was that language should not be seen as just a means of communication. It must also be seen as an expression of a people's way of life (Annadurai, 1989:24). It is an integral part of their collective personality. Therefore, imposing an alien language on an indigenous population is a political act. It is an act of aggression and domination of the indigenous population. Such an imposition destroys the language of the indigenous people, depriving them completely of a source of their identity. According to Annadurai, this amounts to a cultural genocide. With this example, we have tried to show how an objective marker of a group i.e. language, affects and influences the consciousness of the individual members of the group.

## **RACE**

Ethnicity has been interpreted as having a biological base which is sometimes explicitly stated. Ethnic groups stand out as distinctly different groups when they are

based on race, because physical differences are easy to locate. There are some who consider "ethnicity" and "race" as one and the same thing. But this is not so. The concept of ethnicity is much broader in its scope than that of race. It transgresses the narrow aspects of race, culture and citizenship. Scholars do not deny the factors that constitute the making of an ethnic group viz; origin, culture and history but also have laid emphasis on minority groups, religious groups, interest groups etc., which play vital role in the formation of various ethnic groups. Therefore there is no hard and fast rules or yard stick to measure ethnicity. Ethnic differences might be partly based on race in the case of Malays, Chinese and Indians in Malaysia or of Negroes, Indians and Whites in the Caribbean. It also exist in a society which is racially more or less homogeneous as in the case of Pathans in West Pakistan and Afghanistan or in some of the multi-tribal systems in East Africa.

An ethnic group may be defined as a group of individuals with a "shared sense of Peoplehood" based on similar characteristics (Gordon, M., 1964:24), where these characteristics are similar physical characteristics. Such a group is viewed as a racial group by the members themselves or by outsiders. Harold Issac believes that group identity is based on race (Issac, H., 1976: 30-32). Many

social scientists have meant by race a human group that defines itself and/or is defined by other groups as different from them by virtue of innate and immutable physical characteristics. These physical characteristics are the objective indicators of racial differences/identity and are in turn believed to be intrinsically related to moral, intellectual and other non-physical attributes or abilities. Race refer to a group that is socially defined but on the basis of physical criteria. It is a group that mates largely within itself. Racial differences relate to racial superiority. Racism is any set of beliefs that organic, genetically transmitted differences (whether real or imaginary) between human groups are intrinsically associated with the presence or absence of certain socially relevant abilities or characteristics such that they are a legitimate basis of invidious distinctions between groups socially defined as races (Vanden B., 1967 :11). The existence of races in a given society presupposes the presence of racism, for without racism physical characteristics are devoid of social significance. It is not the presence of objective physical differences between groups that creates racism, but the social recognition of such differences as socially significant or relevant.

In some nations, like America, legal definitions of race are designed for the persecution or exclusion of individuals. Race laws and miscegenation codes were part of a pattern of discriminatory laws designed to keep the Black Population socially as well as sexually isolated from whites. In short, legal definitions of race usually reflect prevailing ideas of racial superiority and purity rather than on other objective considerations. (Baker, J.R., 1974:5).

Physical differences differ in a number of ways, some obvious and some not-so-obvious. The obvious ones are: height, weight, shape of the head, shades of skin colour, length of the nose, and other aspects. For example, long-limbed slim bodies of some African Black population are distinguished with the short-limbed, generously fleshed body type found in population of Greenland Eskimos. The essence of these ideas is that a person's race determines his mental and emotional qualities and that all members of one race are superior in such qualities to all members of another race. One could imagine an experiment to determine whether or not racial distinctions are only those of outward appearance or whether there exist internal constitutional differences that would allow one to recognize members of different races as certainly as do differences in outward appearance. Such an experiment was conducted and it

showed that internal qualities are equally important indices of race (Forman, R.R., 1917: 18). The "internal qualities" examined were :

- (i) a sample of earwax,
- (ii) in certain cases even a urine sample,
- (iii) few drops of blood,
- (iv) a set of fingerprints; and
- (v) information about whether or not he could taste a particular compound PTC. For instance, we could distinguish three groups of people, say a group of Whites from Northern Europe, several Japanese and a group of Blacks, on the basis of known average racial differences in fingerprint patterns (Mongoloids have more whorls than Whites or Blacks), blood types (Whites have more RH negatives than either Blacks or Mongoloids), and urine. The Japanese population will have a large number of individuals who will excrete a particular amino acid. Japanese have a dry crumbly type of earwax whereas most Blacks and Caucasoids a more sticky and adhesive type. It is clear that there are profound constitutional differences between racial populations. Let us take two racial groups -- the Mongoloids and the Caucasoids. Mongoloids (Yellow man) have yellow lighter skin colour, straight

hair, a flat face with a low nose bridge and high cheek bones, almond thick lips, and eyes that are brown. The built of the body is often characterized by a long torso with relatively short arms and legs. Finger nails are curved. The Caucasoids on the other hand have white skin and blue-dark brown eyes. Their hair is usually straight. In addition they have high nose bridge, narrow snub, thin lips, and medium body built with long torso.

In addition to physical differences, the racial groups also have to be not only culturally different but also economically and politically unequal--institutionalization of this inequality being an important pre-condition -- for the idea of inherent racial differences to take root. This situation arises mainly as a result of migration. There is an enormous diversity within races. Thus, the concept of race is useful when applied to population rather than to individuals (Vanden, B., 1967: 13). Race, of course, has no intrinsic significance. Racial groups are invariably hierarchized in terms of prestige, wealth and power. Hence, race can be treated as a special case of invidious status differentiation making for rigid group membership, ascribed, closed and rigid (Ibid : 21)

Racist cultures have also been ethnocentric and people have held the theory that their cultures were superior because of their superior genetic pool. Some people become racially prejudiced and others do not. Roles and statuses are sharply defined along racial lines, with a rigidly ascriptive division of labour and a great asymmetry and complementarily in social relations. Social distance between racial groups is maximized and symbolized by an elaborate and punctilious etiquette involving non-reciprocal terms of address, sumptuary regulations and repeated manifestations of subservience and dominance.

#### **CASTE**

Caste system as a particular ethnic trait is viewed often as a particular case of ethnic differentiation. Caste are endogamous. They tend to be biologically self-perpetuating. In traditional Indian Society, people were universally aware of these differences. Yet, castes were not always organized into mutually antagonistic groups. They began to organize themselves into association at a time when people were beginning to feel that caste consciousness would fade away. According to Rajni Kothari, caste is viewed as a political category in India. He concludes, "where caste itself becomes a political category it is futile to argue as to whether caste uses



politics or politics uses caste"(Kothari ,R.,1970:211-12). There is a close similarity between caste system in India and ethnic groups in the United States particularly when we examine the part they play in the political process. In the United States ethnic solidarities are widely used for mobilizing political support while ethnic rivalries are taken into account in formulating electoral strategies (Kuper ,L., 1975 :223-225). In India, caste enters into the political processes in a number of ways. Caste associations have not only acted as pressure groups but have transformed themselves into political parties. In both the U.S. and India, the impact of caste on ethnic identity and the political processes is complex and ambiguous. The political processes brings out not only the cleavages between caste groups but also the possibilities of coalitions among them.

Caste groups are differentiated from each other by clearly defined boundaries. Differences between castes are reinforced by a measure of homogeneity within the castes. We may sum up the characteristics of caste by saying that they are hierarchically ranked groups or categories based on hereditary membership which maintain their social identity by strict rules of endogamy. The rule of endogamy refers to where individuals are expected to marry within a prescribed

group. This is seen as an indicator of maintaining social distance. As in the case of language, where an objective marker of identity gets transformed into subjective consciousness of the members of a group, so in the case of caste. In the caste group, the core principle that relates individuality to collectively is the principle of endogamy. The fact of hereditary membership is of great importance. It fixes the social status of the individual at birth and prevents his movement from one group or category to another. In spite of many exceptions, this factor turns a caste society into an uncommon rigid one. However ethnic groups are not necessarily arranged in a hierarchy and they are not always integrated within a unitary system.

When all marriages do not take place within the group, ethnic boundaries might still be maintained if inter-marriage is governed by the rule of hypergamy by which a man from a higher caste could, under prescribed conditions, marry a girl from a lower caste. The practice of hypergamy acts as an important boundary maintaining mechanism among certain sections of the hill Rajputs in India. Far from dissolving ethnic boundaries altogether, inter-marriage might, under certain conditions, serve to bring these boundaries into sharper relief.

The caste system is based on the notions of dharma and karma i.e. rules and standards of worth would differ from one caste to another. Scholars have noted the presence of tensions and conflicts between castes which would not be expected if everyone accepted without question the position assigned to the caste group within the hierarchical order. Harijans provide a particular example of solidarity based on caste or ethnic identity. In the past, the barrier of pollution kept them segregated from many areas of social life. These barriers have now been legally abolished but the Harijans retain much of their traditional stigma and continue to be socially and economically underprivileged. Their separate identity is given only constitutional recognition.

## **RELIGION**

Now we will concentrate on religion as an ethnic trait and a factor in the formation of ethnic identity. Religious beliefs and practices, as traditionally accepted, are often looked upon as having lost their intrinsic significance due to the impact of modernization and economic development. It is argued that it has led to the emergence of new kinds of differentiation and new identities that undermine traditional modes of organization.

Nevertheless, it is conceded that emotional commitment to religious symbols persists (Gangadharan, K.K., 1975:12).

Religion, however, promotes strong bond among believers despite modernization and creates ethnic identity. Religion and ethnicity are quite intimately bound up. In India, religion is regarded as the most powerful single factor in social life. The simplest explanation is that followers of a particular religion share a common social, economic and political identity. The nature of religion is such that it readily provides the adherents a focal point for identity and solidarity (Smith, 1943 : 188). They share an outlook and a way of life, a set of rituals and customs, a body of laws and social institutions, and a sense of history and destiny derived from their religious heritage. For example, among Muslims the Islamic doctrine regulates all spheres of life presenting an integrated view of cultural, social and personal life (Puri, 1978: 190). It is not just a collection of private religious beliefs but a social code pervading the whole fabric of social life and moulding the believer's social existence. This is embodied in the ideal of creating an organized and cohesive community of the faithful called the Umma. The Muslim community is organized as a single homogeneous entity with the believe in great traditions (The Quran, Hadith and the Shariat). This monolithic entity

consist of a rigid and static structure that resist change. It has a fundamental ethnic orientation in that it can serve as a symbol for identity formation. It continues to be emotionally powerful. It thus, provides a sense of unity and solidarity for articulating political demands (Ibid:192-95). Using the conceptual framework of ethnicity, we can say that the Muslim population of India is just an ethnic category defined by religion. It constitutes an ethnic group only in an interactional context i.e., in its patterns of conflict and cooperation with the Hindus. The Muslim community share a sense of belonging to the abstraction of the Umma, or the Islamic brotherhood, but this awareness of distinction from others arose only in the context of the religion or locality. Therefore, Muslims can be viewed as an ethnic group since they interact and communicate on the basis of religious identity.

The role of religion in individual's life is to answer some important ontological questions. Answers to these questions are found in religious beliefs, practices and worship. When an individual comes across someone else sharing these beliefs and practices, he perceives himself to be an integral part of those believers. Thus, his individual identity is "absorbed" into the collective

identity represented by religion. In South Asian countries, religious identity often articulates itself during in the face of social and political conflicts. Religious identity is frequently used to disguise economic and political interests. They provide the different communities with their distinctive cultural identities but the substantive interests at stake have nothing to do with communalism. Communalism is often regarded as a merger of religion and political identities (Shakri, M., 1980:120-121). How are symbols used in politics? (Kertzner, D.I., 1988:41-42). Symbols have some specific properties. They are "concrete" objects, acts, concepts or linguistic formations; they are "ambiguous" in the sense that they lend themselves for different interpretations; they evoke strong "sentiments" and "emotions" and they impel men to "action". Similarly, politics involves certain imperatives. It needs to have an organisation in which those seeking changes in power relations are clearly identified from those who resist such changes. The individual seeking changes need to develop a sense of belonging to those with identical or similar aspirations.

The emergence of religious identity may or may not lead to its expression in patterns of conflict and tension with other religious groups. However it has been pointed out

that the existence of a religious community in itself does not necessarily lead to communalism. There is no natural tendency for an ethnic identity based on religion to be expressed as a political identity. Ethnicity stresses that tension and conflict cannot be treated as a permanent feature of a relationship between religious groups following naturally and inevitably from the different ideological positions. The tension and conflicts must be understood in their context and as a consequence of the divergence of the religious groups come to represent. Political identity arises only when there is a feeling of being discriminated in the access to the opportunity structure and resources. But religious groups may share interests in other areas which may result in a relationship of harmony and cooperation. Then, cultural ethnicity may manifest as religious identity without taking any political expression.

## **REGION**

A concept of homogeneous region is based on the view that geographical areas must be linked together as a single region when they share uniform characteristics. These characteristics might be economic (such as similar production structures or homogeneous consumption patterns), geographical (such as similar topography or climate),

or even social or political such as a regional "identity or a traditional party allegiance" (Richardson, W.H., 1969:177). The region as the foundation for psychological makeup has been noted. The region gives rise to sentiments, wishes, interests and loyalties. The people are physically dependent upon it since all of their material wants are satisfied in it. It is their greater home, the immediate world that sustain their spirit and embodies all that is familiar (MacIver, R.,1950:152).

Region is an area of which the inhabitants feel themselves a part. There is often a popular sentiment among the inhabitants of a certain geographic region of belonging close together than with the inhabitants of rest of the country. This creates a sense of shared experience, shared background of knowledge which creates a boundary between them and the wider society. Here we take the example of Rajasthan. The charming architecture, attractive colours, traditional paintings, artistic crafts, colourful festivals and multi-coloured costumes allow the inhabitants to feel "united" and a sense of "we feeling" within their region is created. This helps them in distinguishing themselves from people living in other regions. After the integration of the princely states, Rajasthan has one common language. This



generates a group sentiment based on the affinity of tongue, seeking expression in terms of regionality. Rajasthan has centuries old tradition of classical performing acts like Ghomar Dance, Jhumer Dance and Fire Dance. All these features of Rajasthan culture give a sense of belongingness to those living in this region. The "region" is a socio-psychological phenomenon based on a territorial unit.

In language and religion, semantic symbols or signs and beliefs and rituals respectively operate as forts that links the individuals to the group. Similarly a region which an individual shares with others allow him to derive his individual identity.

Thus, we see ethnicity is based on boundaries. More importantly, it is precisely in situations of contact (or where contact is part of the context) that ethnicity becomes active. In isolation it means nothing. Ethnic identity is therefore a function of opposition -- social ties differentiate one ethnic group from another. To be a member of an ethnic group is to participate in certain social networks and therefore to have access to certain social roles and to the resources controlled by members of the ethnic group. Ways of behaving are seen as a product of the social separation of groups rather than as its cause. Further, it

is not necessarily an important part of all aspects of everyday life. Rather there will be certain activities in which ethnicity is more meaningful or central than others.

### THE NOT-SO-OBVIOUS CULTURAL MARKERS

In this section we will deal with the "non-obvious" or the "not-so-obvious" cultural markers that contribute to the "consciousness of the kind" in an ethnic group. While discussing this aspect, we will try to answer the following questions; What are these "not-so-obvious" cultural markers? How do they evolve? How do they generate common consciousness? Do they change? If they do, what are the factors that come into play in the process of change? What is the relationship between the obvious and the not-so-obvious cultural markers? All these questions are discussed with appropriate examples.

Culture refers to a way of life. By "way of life" we refer to the issue of remaining "traditional" is one's way of life. The term ethnicity will be of little use if it is extended to denote cultural differences between isolated societies, autonomous regions, or independent stocks of population such as nations within their own national boundaries. The difference between two ethnic people's, for example, Chinese and the Indians considered

within their own respective countries are national and not ethnic differences. But when groups of Chinese and Indian immigrants interact in a foreign land as Chinese and Indians, they can be referred to as ethnic groups. Therefore, ethnicity is essentially a form of interaction between cultural groups operating within common social contexts.

It has been stated that Indian cities cannot possibly be a "melting pot" of cultures in the true sense of the term, for the cultural heritage, history and traditions weigh heavily on the minds of Indians (Nair, K.S, 1978 : 13-15). In the Indian situation, there is a substantial carry-over of cultural practices among the immigrants. This results in an array of institutions and associations anchored in diverse ethnic and regional cultures of India. Therefore, we find that the immigrant's life and social relationships are mainly confined within his encapsulated and insulated ethnic community.

What are the not-so-obvious cultural markers? Why do we call them so? We consider "dress", "food", "behaviour patterns", "aesthetic expressions" as the not-so-obvious markers. The rationale for grouping these markers as "not-so-obvious" is that they remain as an integral and taken-for-granted part of an individual or a group. They are

integral to a group whose members exhibit an immense consistency in say dressing or in a particular way of eating particular type of food, in a specific manner. These markers are so much a part of the individual or group that they are expressed in their day-to-day living quite unconsciously. Because they are expressed every moment, every day, they remain ignored by scholars in their studies on ethnicity. It is, therefore, in order here to consider a few examples of how these markers find expression in some ethnic groups.

#### **DRESS**

Dress or clothes become identifying badge for all kinds of cultures. There is a distinct identifying garb to go with. One often notices differences in the mode of wearing the dress. In the four southern states of India i.e. Tamilnadu, Kerala, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh the saree and *dhoti* inspite of their variety are the main attire worn by women and men respectively.

The antiquity of the saree goes back to many thousands of years. The surviving compilation of Kautilya's Arthashastra mentions a woman's saree as a simple *dhoti* or loin cloth decorated with patterns and tassels and fastened to the waist with a *patka* or sash tied in a bow shaped knot.

They covered their torso with an *adhni* or veil. In time, twelve pieces combined to form the present saree -- an unstitched one piece complete dress to cover a woman entirely and with great modesty. The saree length as commonly worn is 5.5 meters. But there are also ones as long as 8.2 meters. A stitched and close fitting blouse is essential to this attire. They provide the most beautiful expression of elegance and modesty. The inner end of the saree is first tucked into the under skirt and wrapped around the waist, with the *pallav* portion neatly arranged in folds and drawn over the shoulder. The remaining length is then pleated evenly and tucked into the skirt from the front.

In Tamilnadu the traditional Brahmin women usually wear a 8.2 meters saree or the *Madisa*. A portion of this is tucked between the legs to form a loop around the legs to give better freedom of movement and the remaining length is worn in the normal way.

The quintessentially Aryan *dhoti*, the male attire, which is the genesis of saree as well, continues to be the basic men's wear almost all over India to this day.

In South India the *dhoti* is worn much the same way, all once wrapped around the waist and falling straight.

They are also drawn between the legs giving it a trouser-like utility. The traditional costume is the *Veshti* (*dhoti*) *nagavastram*. A cream coloured unbleached cotton or silk *Veshti* with narrow *zari* border is fastened around the middle so that both ends are free. One end is gathered and brought between the legs and tucked behind. The other end is gracefully pleated. A piece of cloth or the *angavastaram* is worn over the shoulder.

Keralites dress in spotless white cotton most of the time. It also keeps them cool and comfortable in the hot humid climate of the coastal state they belong to. Women here wear the *munduveshti*, a two piece saree of fine cotton with narrow borders and with gold *zari* for formal occasions. The *mundu* is a half saree worn almost like the first half of a saree with an ordinary blouse at the top. The *veshti* tucks into the waist, goes across the shoulder and hangs at the back, very much like a saree *pallav*. The same *munduveshti* is worn by men, in a different way, with a shirt.

Men folk in traditional communities of Karnataka still wear a very distinctive turban, pure white with good edging, tied in an entirely different way than it is done in the north. Women in the coastal Karnataka district of Coorg wear the saree differently, with the pleats tucked at the back and the small end of the *pallav* pinned to the front

of the blouse. Men of Coorg wear *larke chale*, an outfit made dashing by turbans of various kinds, wide sashes and swords and daggers worn for festival and weddings.

The vary exclusive Parsi community of the west coast, and now largely concentrated in Bombay, are the successors of the Persians who migrated to India in the 7th century A.D. The ethnic costume of the Parsi men still reflects the dress of their forefathers -- loose straight trousers, inner vest, long coat and a special cap. The women wear saree much the same way as the Gujaratis, with the *pallav* of the saree coming in front.

In the western region, clothes reflect the cultural interaction of races who came, battled, settled and lived here. The preference for stitched garments for men was probably introduced to this region as early as 1st millenium A.D. when Kushan kings sanctified the use of tailored court dresses. The Scythians who ruled the Gujarat area for over 200 years also Indianised these original costumes into light white tunies, narrow trousers and skull caps. However, in the mild climate of the west, the indigenous royalty and aristocracy continue to wear for informal occasions the classic Aryan fine silk and muslim *antariya* and *uttarya*, the basic *dhoti* and *stole* on the shoulder, as depicted in the Ajanta frescoes. The male costume of west India today

is an amalgamation of these influences.

A land of strife-torn history, Maharashtrian women dressed for fight and flight. The longer saree worn here with a between legs tuck gave women greater mobility. Perhaps the need for free movement of the fisherwomen of the Konkan coast also sustained this style of wearing the saree. Traditional Maharashtrian women still wear the saree this way. The traditional Maharashtrian sarees are in subdued shades of plain green, blue or deep red with contrasting borders. The saree is of exceptional length, sometimes up to nearly eleven meters. They are to be worn to hang freely or drawn up between the legs giving it the appearance of baggy trousers. The right length of the saree is pleated and tucked in at the waist in the front. The remainder is passed between the legs, pleated and tucked in at the waist in the middle of the back. Men wear *dhotarachkan*, that is, a *dhoti* and a long coat reaching down to the knees.

#### BEHAVIOUR

Behavioural definitions are really a form of objective definitions since they assume that they are specific and concrete ways in which ethnic groups behave or do not behave in relation to one other (Harold, I.R., 1976: 30-31). Interaction is rather more characteristic, more pervasive, and



more evident in simple societies than in complex societies in which people may establish their separateness, with reference to specific attribute while adopting an entirely distinct code of behaviour. Behaviour patterns vary among cultures and among different ethnic groups. For example, evidence suggests that both Black and Mexican American children are generally emotionally expressive. However, Mexican American children may suppress the tendency to be expressive in the presence of superiors, while the Black child would be equally expressive with superior and peers (Phinney and Rotheram, 1982; 302-308).

The description of behaviour patterns permits examination of concrete events and patterns in place of value-laden attributes. For example, evidence shows that Black adolescents talk more loudly and interrupt more in group discussions which can be seen objectively as part of their greater expressiveness. If one attaches positive value to reserve and to restraint, this behaviour is labelled as "offensive" and "aggressive" (ibid: 312). Black and Mexican American children differ with one another regarding the appropriate social behaviour. Eye gaze, for example, is a conventional signal of speaking and listening behaviour: white speakers let their gaze wander but black speakers

look directly at the listener, and white listeners look directly at the speaker, but Black listeners direct gaze downward (Ibid;313).

Berry asserts that there is an universal domain of behaviour. But there is a great diversity in the functional equivalence of this behaviour across cultures. He suggests that these domains of behaviour may be understood broadly as ways of organizing or handling social situations that are common to all cultures (Berry, 1987:310). For example, authority figures exist in all cultures, but there are differences in who is considered an authority, as well as, in how one behaves in interaction with authority. Attitudes, and hence behaviour, toward authority figures vary across a range from extreme deference to a feeling of personal, if not political, equity (Ibid: 311). The Black is seen as more hard working, musical, sensitive, sound, less educated, untidy and materialistic than the White. Boer population is defined as independent, self-reliant, unimaginitive, enduring, and hospitable devout.

Some important cultural features are used by the actors as signals and emblems of ethnic identity. In one kindergarten class, a teacher heard several children calling a child from India "garbage" head because of the

unfamiliar smell of coconut oil that he had on his hair. For children who had grown up with an emphasis on "clean" shampooed hair, the unfamiliar custom of oiling ones hair was associated with being dirty.

Body is the most palpable element that make up this basic group identity. The use of the body language, the pace of conversation and the acceptable entry behaviour are a few of the many dimension that vary among different ethnic groups. Apart from these, mutually conflicting historical perceptions, faith in the veracity of the historical traditions of chronicles, legends and myths and claim to racial, religious and cultural superiority (Asian Studies, 7(1), 1989: 31-50) help in creating a distinct ethnic identity. For example, the Sinhalese mythical history and Buddhist religion have played a significant role in moulding the Sinhalese ethnic perception. The resurgence of Buddhism occurred mainly with an objective to reconstruct the distinct Sinhalese ethnic identity. At the same time it was directed against non-Buddhists, the Tamils and Christians, whom the Sinhalese called the "polluting aliens who had no legitimate place in Sri Lanka".

#### **FOOD**

The consumption of food, like other biologically supportive activities, is an aspect of cultural behaviour

(International encyclopedia of social sciences, Vol 5:508-513). We see a close connection between food and culture. Human food is the prime constituent of social relations. We also argue that it conveys social meanings. In consequence of these social functions, it tends to be organized in systems of rules and usages which cuts across each other at different levels of symbolization (Douglas & Gross, 1981: 1-37). These levels of symbolization define the social contexts and groupings within which a particular kind of food is consumed and/or prohibited. In no society are people permitted to eat, everything everywhere, with everyone and in all situations. This rule-bound aspect makes it an instrument for communication. Several things about the social uses of food is to respond to a range of cultural events. Food creates cultural conformity and this helps in distinguishing groups. Food can be elaborated into an efficient vehicle of communication and excommunication.

In all societies the distribution and consumption of food is an expression of a variety of social relationships -- those of social proximity and distance, religious-ritual fraternity and status, political superordinate and subordinate, bonds within and between families, and the like. The definition of food, always takes place with reference to individuals as occupants of statuses and

categories within institutionalized groupings. In other words, food is used symbolically to represent only some social forms and personal feelings. The way a particular food is served can be read off by members of the culture to indicate a social event. Such a cultural exercise not only helps the members of a cultural group distinguish social events but also helps them in maintaining and strengthening solidarity. However, if members do not observe these symbols, it could lead to weakening solidarity. There are four patterns which govern the distribution of food and hence the consumption of food. Three of these concern the patterns of sharing. These patterns are easily identifiable and clearly illustrate the basic principle - that it is a characteristic of social systems to symbolize social relationships by means of different patterns of distributing and consuming food. The four patterns are|

- (i) recurrent exchange and sharing of food,
- (ii) mutual assistance and sharing in times of need,
- (iii) narrowed sharing, and
- (iv) non-sharing.

Patterns of food distribution and consumption contribute to social and emotional solidarity. The patterns in the consumption of food are almost always governed by cultural symbols. The ways in which food is distributed and

consumed reflects a society's dominant modes of social relationships between groups, especially those pertaining to kinship ties.

In India, the diversity in consumption and preparation of food is a fertile ground to study food cross-culturally (Sur. A.K., 1985:108-109). We notice before our eyes different kinds of diet in different parts of India. Rice is the staple diet of the people of Bengal, Assam, Orissa and other people on the eastern coast of India. In North India i.e., Punjab, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh besides others, elsewhere wheat is the principle diet. Again Bajra and Ragi are the staple diet of the people of the western coast of India. The people of the Eastern region (Assam, Bengal ) eat fish. There is a diversity in the way the food is cooked. In Eastern India cooking is done with mustard oil. But the people of North India use ghee (melted butter) while, the people of Western and South India use either segamum or coconut oil.

#### **AESTHETIC SENSE**

Aesthetics refers to the whole body of generalized inquiry especially relevant to the arts. Aesthetics is the study of man's behaviour and experience in creating art, in perceiving and understanding art, and in being influenced

by art. Work in aesthetics has been principally concerned with music, literature and the visual arts, paying little attention to the performing aspect of even these arts (International encyclopedia of the social sciences, vol 1: 116-121).

Artistic communication is a form of culturally determined symbolic behaviour in which an artist creates or arranges object(s) and/or events, purposefully so as to imply meaning(s) and emotion(s) according to the conventions of a symbolic code, and these objects/events elicit meaningful inferences in the artist himself and/or in others who possess at least minimal competence in the same cultural mode. For 'artistic communication' to occur it is necessary that an artist and his audience share a common symbolic code.

Art creates or relates to motives, skills and other conditions. Creativity has some common origins in personality and environmental circumstances. There are also distinctive influences on creativity. Visual art for example, could be claimed to embody the way the artist perceives that which is represented; if less persuasively, the same argument could be applied to nonrepresentational art. There is the close interaction between the artist's perception of the world and that of

his audience. This effort is made to read an artists personality in his work.

Are variations in modal personality to be found among the determinants of variations of artistic creativity from one people or one epoch to another ? Do the artistic productions of a society express the ways of perceiving and understanding that which characterize its typical members? The art produced in a society at a given time is expressive of themes that preoccupy members of that society.

There is an assumption that art gives symbolic expression to the thoughts and wishes of the members of a society. For example, the artistic representation of curved versus straight lines must be thought of as possibly symbolizing feminine versus masculine. The like or dislike of different colour and different forms has revealed that there are some remarkable uniformities, as well as interesting differences, among people responding to these simple stimuli. The uniformities may, in time, be convincingly shown to have a significance for response to works of art. Thought patterns, language and their grammar, certain carvings, artistic behaviour and their related schemata can be understood on the grounds of aesthetic categories alone. Where we find behaviour that stresses the "formal aspect" of an object and pays attention to the



internal rules which govern the distribution of signs on any wooden surface, it is acceptable to suppose that in this society there is an aesthetic philosophy.

## **MUSIC**

By virtue of his birth in a particular society a person automatically owns the customs, manners, language, music and other items of culture of that society. This may be understood as "bondage of environment". He cannot easily escape them. His culture represents his social behaviour. He can often be distinguished from members of other social groups from his peculiar cultural markers.

There is a close relationship between music, society and culture (Sinha. P., Vol 11 :18-25). The social and cultural aspects of music are apparent, and yet very much concealed from our sight perhaps due to our modern, sophisticated and telescopic approach to music. According to this view, music is solely an entertainer, that is to say an object of art and aesthetic and nothing else. This view sadly overlooks the other roles played by music in society and culture.

By the tunes and patterns, one can understand the technique of music and be able to distinguish one form

from another. The meaning of music derives from the similarity between music structure and human emotional experience : "Music sounds the way an emotion feels". Thus music is part iconic, like visual art, and without speech reference. The iconic quality of music might be linked to the iconic quality of colour or lines of an abstract painting, insofar as they are symbolize a state of emotion. Music of one social group can be differentiated from another. The tunes of the some songs are meant for women and some for men. Some musciologists like Sachs and others are of the view that different races of mankind have different patterns of music. We may even find among our neighbours that the different types of music owned by them sometimes vary concomitantly with the differences in castes, religious beliefs, vocations and other social factors characterizing the singers. The community of people we call tribes can also be distinguished easily from their different patterns of songs and dances. Different tribes of Bastar may be cited as an example of a community based on musical diversity. A Muria and Maria of Bastar are more diversified in their musical patterns than in their dialects. In many parts of India caste-oriented musical patterns are also available. The cattle songs called "badhar gan" have a peculiar tune which is the property of the Mahatos of Bihar. Music, like

language, promotes social cohesion and is an item of communication.

By the tune and scale of a musical piece, one can often distinguish between ethnic groups. It is often argued that one should not put much value on the wordings of these songs. The language in such songs is immaterial. It is the tune of the songs that is more important. For example, Jarwar music, is tritonic, monolinear and expressed in asymmetrical rhythm. Music of the Indian tribes is ditonic, tritonic or tetratonic. It is composed mostly of a single musical line and the rhythm in this music is predominantly asymmetrical i.e., without any regular rhythm. The music of caste groups is tetratonic and pentatonic. A symmetrical rhythm with common time scales of three and four meters is predominant. The music is often multilinear. Greater use of meaningful words and literary ideas is another peculiarity of the music.

#### **TEMPLE**

Hindus from different parts of India worship different gods. But it has been generally found that in ethnically plural societies, people from a particular region tend to frequent a particular temple. People of different regions have a distinct and radically divergent idea of what a temple should be like. The structure of the

temple, the shape of the top, the pujari's dressing, even the colour of the structure and decorations of the idols are different on different regions of India. This is a very clear example of the fact that aesthetic sense creates ethnic boundaries.

### **FESTIVALS**

We call some of our festivals like *Durga Puja*, *Dipavali* or *Diwali*, *Holi*, *Dusserah* etc., as national festivals of India. But the forms and timings of these festivals differ in different parts of the country. Though the Bengalis celebrate the *Durga Puja* wherever they go, it is basically not a national festival but a Bengali festival. We put *Dusserah* in the same category with *Durga Puja* but those who have seen the celebrations of this festival will testify that it is a festival different from the *Durga Puja*, though both are celebrated almost at the same time. Then there is a difference between the *Dusserah* celebrated in the North and in the South. As a matter of fact, these festivals of the Hindus not only take different forms but are also celebrated differently in different parts of the country. The timing of celebration of these festivals differ too. In different regions different festivals are important. Thus, it is *Durga Puja* which is the festival parexcellence of the Bengal people but in the adjoining province of Bihar

it is not so. There *Chhat* is the supreme festival of the year. In upper India, *Holi* is perhaps the more important festival of the people when compared with *Dusserah*. In West India, it is undoubtedly the *Dipavali* or *Diwali* which is the greatest festival.

How do these cultural markers evolve a group? To cope with the environment, the social group develops a dressing pattern, a characteristic food habit etc. A group living in a very hot climate evolves a dressing pattern which keeps the body cool. Similarly those living in a cold region adopt woollen clothes. A group living in a coastal area has fish as its staple diet. In the hot regions, rice is preferred because, it is often argued, that rice gives a cooling effect to the body. Similarly in cold regions wheat is considered as the staple food.

How do these cultural markers generate common consciousness? This arises mainly out of the social environment of a group. Humans live in groups in contiguity: when an individual encounters another group having food habits other than its own, the individual perceives them as the "other". The experience of the "other" necessarily generates a "consciousness of the kind" when he relates to those who eat and dress like him.

In this context, it is interesting to observe two individuals belonging to different ethnic groups trying to affirm the common consciousness of the other when they want to establish a rapport with each other. When a Kannadiga meets a Gujarati and wants to strike a relationship, he is too happy to say that he had been to Gujarat, if he had gone there or even passed through this region. He goes on to say that he knows how to speak Gujarati even if he can speak only a few words. He is sure of gaining the acceptance of the other when he says that he likes a particular Gujarati dish etc. The same process is repeated by the other person. In this process of a interaction what is clear is that the food, dress and the like become a language of a kind and become the media to express one's common consciousness and to gain access to the common consciousness of another person.

Similarly, the same symbols become means of expressing one's animosity to the other in a situation of conflict. When the TAMBRAS (Tamil Nadu Brahmins Association) went on a hunger strike protesting against the alleged discrimination suffered at the hands of the state government, the volunteers of the DK (Dravida Kazhagam) a non-Brahmin Association, sat opposite the Brahmin volunteers and ate "idlis" (idlis - a steamed rice-cake, a common food item in Brahmin households).

Do these symbols ever remain unchanged? In the process of modernization people belonging to different ethnic groups are forced to live and work together with their own food habits, dressing pattern, behaviours etc. This forces people to adopt the habits of others. But these changes do not wipe out the ethnic consciousness altogether. In a metropolitan city like Delhi, it is common to find South Indian restaurants, provision shops, textile shops etc. Even temples with South Indian architectural features are found. It may be difficult to claim that the people are anti-modernist. In fact, they grab any opportunity that modernization can offer for their livelihood. Computer-learning is attractive to people irrespective of their ethnic background. But when it comes to food-habit, dressing pattern, religious rituals, they prefer to hold on to their traditions in these matters resolutely. Sociologists call this "Primordial Sentiments". Therefore, all that modernization can do is to make people accommodate or adopt certain ethnic symbols from outside. The fundamentals ones remain relatively permanent.

In the previous section, we discussed the obvious cultural markers. The question that arises here is whether they are different from not-so obvious ones. The answer is that they are not two different categories. In fact, the

less obvious ones are an integral part of the obvious ones. For an obvious cultural marker cannot be expressed without the religious beliefs or rituals practiced in day-to-day interaction.

All the symbols (caste, religion, language, food) that we have discussed that constitute an ethnic boundary have two features -- *internal* (this is their inherent features) and *external* (state, political or uneven development which facilitate the use of symbols for political mobilization). In the sections above covering obvious and not-so-obvious symbols, we have elaborated on the internal features of symbols that contribute to the creation of ethnic boundaries. Now we will discuss the various external features which help in creating boundaries between various ethnic groups. (Punekar, 1986; 109-119).

(i) Role of Special Constitutional Provisions

The uniqueness of the Indian situation lies in the political and legal legitimization of ethnicity as a "resource". The concept of "minorities" on the basis of religion and language is enshrined in Article 30, Part III of our Constitution. "Caste" as the basis of backwardness is also legitimized by the Constitution in Part XVI. This "need" which has provided protective discrimination has an adverse effect on the total



ethnic relationship. In fact, a ground for ethnic tensions has been constitutionally created.

There is an ethnic basis for the identification of the categories of religious and linguistic minorities, scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and other backward classes (on caste basis) for a special status not the selective provision of opportunities of one kind or another has created a cleavage between the privileged and the not-so-privileged. In a country with limited opportunities this provides cause for tension. It is no longer the feeling of belongingness that is responsible for the cleavage but it is the exploitation of this.

(ii) The Role of Reorganization of States on Linguistic Basis

Language based ethnicity has been legitimised through the formation of linguistic states. Linguistic reorganization of states gave political boundaries to linguistic ethnicity and consolidated it. With this regional ethnicity emerged. Formation of linguistic states have strengthened ethnic patriotism at language-region level, undermining national patriotism to some extent. Conflicts over boundary adjustments between neighbouring states, sharing of river waters,

plan allocations between states are some of the issues which highlight the heightened linguistic-ethnic identity. The Khalistan issue is an example of linguistic-regional ethnicity (religion identified with linguistic-region) conflicting with national patriotism. "The most durable and troublesome conflicts are those where an ethnic or racial group resides in a subnational homeland where ties of blood, culture, language, religion and history come together" (Lambert, 1981 : 199).

The introduction of regional languages as languages of administration at state level and also as medium of instruction, has become "issues" more than practice. People who belonged to a particular region became "linguistic minorities" over-night as a result of linguistic-reorganization legalizing ethnic differences. The "sons of the soil" phenomenon is a by product of the linguistic division of states - a reaction to the "minority" status of the linguistic minorities.

One must note here that the tensions and conflicts are the result of clash of interests rather than we-feeling of the group. It is because in some of the decisions identified above the interests clash at ethnic level

rather than any other. These clashes further strengthen ethnic affiliations. Thus, there is legitimization to ethnic identification.

(iii) The Role of Voluntary Associations

Voluntary associations on ethnic lines -- castes, language, religion - is another activity, initially urban, but later rural as well, which strengthened ethnic identities. The associations provided platforms for groups with ethnic interests.

In conclusion, in poly-ethnic societies like India ethnic loyalties exist and ethnic relationships are complex. Political and economic interests shape the intergroup relations on ethnic basis. Re-grouping on ethnic basis and reinforcing the existing boundaries are common. The various ethnic identities, except the traditional endogamous caste identity, have developed into a "corporate" identity, thanks to the activities of voluntary associations.

Different ethnic affiliations are stressed in different situations. Ethnicity is a "resource". Not only are comprises made on different ethnic identities as the situation demands but also each ethnic conflict is a result of specific "issues". The relevant external environment

plays an important role in ethnic relationship. In India, the specific external environment has been conducive to the strengthening of ethnic affiliations at various levels. As such, affiliation carries a premium. This in turn set the stage in which rival ethnic groups are created.

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CHAPTER FOUR

**ETHNIC INTERACTION:  
CONFLICT AND ACCOMODATION**



In this chapter we will discuss the ethnic factors in relation to two most fundamental social processes, namely, conflict and accomodation. This chapter consists of two parts. The first part will deal with the reasons and the ways by which conflict and accomodation takes place. In the second part we will take up two case studies, one is an example of conflict and the other, accomodation.

#### **ETHNIC DIFFERENCES AND CONFLICT**

Conflict generally arises from a specific kind of relationship between two groups which believe that they have incompatible goals. Ethnic conflict is supposed to be the most violent form of conflict and it arises because of ethnic diversity. Ethnic diversity which is the basis for ethnic differences contains a potential for inter-group conflict (Hall, (ed.), 1979: P. XVII). Ethnic diversity can be one of the most powerful of socio-cultural factors that influence the balance of power within heterogeneous states (Ibid :8).

There are numerous reasons for ethnic conflict. Before discussing the reasons for ethnic conflict, we should make it clear whether ethnic conflict is closer to separatism movement or nationalism. Nationalism refers to

united and systematic political action by people or states to achieve or to maintain self-determination in the international order. It is instrumental in bringing about changes within a society (Ibid :11-12). On the other hand, an ethnic group which tries to seek autonomy outside the control of a specific state with a view to establish a new state centered on ethnicity may be regarded as a group engaged in ethnic nationalism or separatism. This form of ethnic nationalism may have regional, religious and political implications (Ibid :12). This view looks at separatism as a deviant process. However, some sociologists refute to view regionalism or separatism as a deviant process. They explain it as another way of defining nationalism. In this chapter, we will not take any particular view. We will merely present the controversy as it is. Ethnic nationalism is a reality whatever may be its political implications. Separatism is another form of ethnic autonomy which refers to movements seeking complete political independence from an existing state. Ethnic nationalism may be defined as the struggle by minorities for achieving higher economic and social statuses and greater political power. Sometimes this type of movement or struggle implies autonomy on territorial basis which may take a separatist form (Richard ,A.H., 1984: 269-283).

Nationalism is that form of ethnic identity which excludes those who are not members of the local or indigenous ethnic groups. In such a situation, conflict is mainly between natives and migrants. According to Weaves, conflict emerges when the migrants are perceived to be a threat to the socio-economic mobility of the local population. However, he argues that it is not the socio-economic inequalities between the two groups but competition for economic opportunities that generates such conflicts.

The quest for autonomy by ethnic groups always involves power. Dominant groups usually coerce others into subordination. For example, the whites suppress the blacks in South Africa. They also maintain their dominant position by arranging rewards in a hierarchical system favoring groups and individuals who support their hegemony. A more or less similar situation is prevalent in the United States of America. The success or failure of ethnic minorities to maintain their separate identities, institutions and organisations depends upon the outcome of their power struggle (Anthony, R., H.P:5).

#### **CAUSES OF ETHNIC CONFLICT**

A migrant or outsider may see opportunities in those areas in which the local people do not have the skill

or capital. Their investment also follows a similar pattern. Marginal local occupants may be replaced by more efficient migrant entrepreneurs or traders. Katzenstein argues that perception of inequality between two groups is the most important factor in ethnic conflicts (Katzenstein, 1979: 289-291). In conflict the natives seek a new form of equality through preferential treatment. For Katzenstein inequality in socio-economic positions accompanies all other group conflicts. Dipankar Gupta differs from Katzenstein. He maintains that job competition is more important when compared to socio-economic inequalities in such conflicts.

New jobs created in a region may be attractive both to the local people and the migrants, but the migrants may have superior skills and work culture. Being better equipped, the migrants are more successful employees than the local people. Regional development in the area with less skilled manpower attracts skilled individuals from outside. New employment opportunities may be initially attractive for the local people as they are for the migrants. These migrants are likely to help their friends and relatives for further employment. Thus a chain migration is established (Wilson, M., 1978:78). In such a situation, a local political organisation is formed for economic and employment rights of the natives.

Oommen has identified four situations in contemporary India which might lead to ethnic conflict (Oommen, T.K., 1982:59). Firstly, when the entire state is engulfed by varieties of outsiders leading to a cumulative domination by the outsiders in economic, cultural and social aspects of life. In such a situation, the outsiders move into the very centre of the system pushing the locals to the periphery. Political mobilization for self-preservation by the "Sons of the Soil" is the outcome of such a situation.

Secondly, there is a situation when a sub-region in a state draws outsiders thereby reducing the locals of the region into minority. This type of a situation leads to a demand for regional autonomy.

Thirdly, metropolitan cities draw substantial population from other cultural regions and speech communities. In this situation, the local political parties raise "Sons of Soil" type of demand. By and large mobilization in such contexts are directly against middle class white collar workers, professionals and small businessman. This kind of mobilization is confined to particular cities within the region (Ibid :61).

Fourthly, there are situations when tension against outsiders emerges within the state, based on linguistic and cultural homogeneity. This may occur due to (a) disparity between economic development and level of skills and education (b) emergence of new economic opportunities in underdeveloped regions of the state, which are being captured by the people of the more prosperous region (c) production of educated mass, which outsteps the expansion of employment avenues.

Oommen concludes by saying that the conflicts between the outsiders and the locals emerge due to the domination of the latter by the former. Thus in this framework the relationship of domination and sub-ordination involves a perception of power and this plays a very crucial role in precipitating an ethnic conflict. Thus, economic tendencies often conflict with social, cultural and political tendencies within a given space. Both the economic and the demographic balance of different groups alter due to migration and this alteration contributes to conflict.

Thus, ethnic differentiation is a conspicuous feature of so-called plural societies. Again, we can't say that if we do away with plurality we won't face any conflict. First of all, it is practically impossible to have a non-plural society. Society is formed by individuals and one cannot

negate the concept of individual differences, if we keep aside the differences based upon race, sect, culture etc. In an atmosphere of competition for scarce resources, the superior class will discriminate against the weaker class. This relationship of exploitation manifests in the shape of religion, culture, language etc. setting the stage for conflicts to emerge.

Conflicts on ethnic lines are more drastically evident in urban areas since the struggle for resources like employment, wages, housing, occupation, education and political following is more intense here.

Milton J. Easman talks of the dimensions of ethnic politics |

(i) homeland movement and

(ii) immigrant movement.

"Homeland movement" is carried out by those people" who possess their own territorial state. They feel threatened, however, by the "invasion" of aliens who could reduce them to the status of a demographic minority in the homeland and eventually assume the control both of the state and the economy" (Easman, M.J., 1985:438). He further writes: "Homeland movement is directed not at immigrants but at the central state, to protect the homeland, its culture and its economy from neglect or domination by alien central government and the ethnic groups it represents".

He defines "immigrant movement" as the consequence of labour migration into developed societies. The immigrants bring limited economic resources, occupy the position in the occupational hierarchies and experience social discrimination. Sometimes they are also the victims of antiforeigner responses.

Bombwall writes, "the challenge to the nation-state comes from numerically significant ethnic groups which have retained, or have developed or are in the process of developing self-awareness and which demand formal recognition of their distinct identities".

#### ETHNIC DIFFERENCES AND ACCOMODATION

The relationship between ethnic groups is not wholly conflictual. They also have a relationship of accomodation and harmony, this takes many forms :

(i) Integration

An immigrant ethnic group, eager to become a part of the larger society, may exhibit inter-group conformity which demands the complete renunciation of the its ancestral culture in favour of the behaviour and values of the local group (Barth, F.1969 :39).



(ii) Retention

According to Caroline F.Ware, "ethnic groups may occupy a position of self-sufficient isolation or they may have extensive dealings with the surrounding population while retaining a separate identity" (Nair ,K.S., 1978 :13-15). Ethnic distinctions do not depend on an absence of social interaction and acceptance. On the contrary, they are often the very foundation on which particular social systems are build. Interaction in such a social system does not lead to the liquidation of ethnic distinctions through change and acculturation. Cultural differences can persist despite inter-ethnic contact and inter-dependence. When contact and interaction with other groups take place, ethnic communities seek to maintain territorial boundary arrangement.

(iii)Interdependence

According to Herold Eidhiem, "Ethnic groups are social categories which provide a basis for status ascription and consequently the inter-ethnic relations are organised with reference to such statuses".One finds that stable, persisting and often vitally important social relations are maintained across such boundaries and are frequently based precisely on the dichotomized ethnic status. For example in

India, caste based ethnic groups are interdependent on each other (Barth, Op.Cit). There is ritual and economic cooperation. They may provide important goods and services for each other. Caste groups have different niches but remain in close reciprocal interaction.

Sometimes, two populations have a symbiotic relationship. This means that they are interdependent and that any variation in the size of one must have important effect on the other (Calitz, J., 1976: 632-645).

Collaborative relationships prevail when the groups concerned see the various goals or resources available in the society as shareable and competitive relationships prevail when such resources or goals are seen as unshareable (Pareek. U, 1989: 303-315). However, as Sherif has shown, the perception of superordinate goal helps in collaboration. A superordinate goal is not only a goal which is seen as shareable but is also seen as unachievable without the help of the other groups involved in the situation. Thus, the two conditions which become necessary for a collaborative relationship are the perception that the goal is shareable and the perception that the goal cannot be achieved without two or more groups involved working together towards the achievement of the goal. Detailed study of collaborative relationships and the emergence of

collaboration have indicated that there are four other conditions necessary for collaborative relationships amongst the various groups involved(Ibid :303-315). The first condition is that the groups involved perceive that each group has equal power. It is therefore necessary that where such perception does not exist, efforts be made to ensure that all the groups concerned have more or less equal power in the society. Collaborations can only be amongst equals. Collaboration amongst unequal may either result in submission on the part of the less powerful and exploitation on the part of the more powerful, or at the most, nurturance on the part of the more powerful and dependency on the part of the less powerful. The second condition of cooperation is a minimum level of trust among the groups, enabling them to communicate their views and sentiments to each other and sort out such differences as may arise while living together. The third condition is continued communication. Whenever communication breaks down for some reason or the other, stereotypes and prejudices get accentuated. The groups start going downward on the slippery road of mutual accusation and misunderstanding and strong negative attitudes towards each other may develop. The fourth, and the most important condition for collaborative relationships, is the general cultural orientation. Such orientation helps in developing a

general positive attitude towards other groups and may help in building collaborative relationship.

Sometimes, various ethnic groups respect each other and search for definite contributions that each group has made or is making to society. In the past, this was done through the appreciation of various cultural forms like music and dance where even ignorance of a particular language did not matter. Even when people observed untouchability, they respected such forms of art as music and dance, and this gave a satisfactory relationship between various groups. The positive bond that connects several ethnic groups in an encompassing social system depends on the complementarity of the groups with respect to some of their characteristic cultural features. Such complementarity can give rise to interdependence or symbiosis.

We have now completed our discussion of the relationship of conflict and accommodation between ethnic groups. We attempted a theoretical understanding of these issues. To substantiate, I have presented two case studies below.

#### **HINDUS AND MUSLIMS - A CASE OF ACCOMODATION**

Hinduism and Islam are India's two major religious systems. Significant differences in religion between Hindus

and Muslims unavoidably segregate them as members of two entirely distinct and separate "civilizations". At times tension between Hindus and Muslims has been widespread and intense and has occasionally led to bloody confrontation. Such confrontation suggest that there is little hope for an integrated Indian national culture. The fact is, however, that some cultural integration among Hindus and Muslims exists, though primarily in rural communities. It succeeds there because in certain social situations where formal religion does not provide relevant cognitive conceptions for social action, Hindus and Muslims interact on the basis of a common alternative cognitive conception embodied in the shared cultural traditions of their local community (Gupta, G.R., 1988: 150-158). Religious pluralism need not be barrier to cultural integration.

In many villages in India, Hindus and Muslims live and work side by side. In the Dube's study of Shamipet village in Andhra Pradesh, Hindus and Muslims serve together as elected members of the village council and participate in the same general economic system. They also perform certain ritual activities jointly. Of the Muslims, Dube observed that they neither believe in the Hindu Trinity nor in any of the their incarnations. They however share with the Hindus a living faith in the existence of ghosts,

spirits and witches. They participate with the rest of the community in the village ceremonies and sacrifices to ward off cholera, plague and smallpox. They too think that it is necessary to propitiate the local deities and goddesses. The Muslims of Sharimpet attend some Hindu ritual events. The same is true for Hindus who participate in some of the Islamic festivals of the village. Writing of the annual festival for the local Muslim saint Jalal Mryaim, Dube states, "on this day also some persons are possessed, people having difficulties or some pressing problems seek remedies and solutions from those who are possessed by the spirit of Jalal Mryaim.... Although it is primarily a Muslim faith, Hindus attend it in large numbers" (Ibid: 156-157). Thus, we see here how two ethnic groups are in co-operation with each other.

Some studies of urban areas can also be cited to stress the relationship of harmony between Hindus and Muslims. For example, in Raghuraj Gupta (1976), Hindu - Muslim Relationships Lucknow : Ethnographic and Folk Culture Society- which is a study of Dehradun clearly illustrates the fact that often there is a specialization of functions. In this case relationships of competition are replaced by those of cooperation. Dehradun is a low tension area in terms of Hindu-Muslim relationships and the reason for this lies in the economic inter-

dependence between Hindus and Muslims. The majority of the Muslim population in the city consist of recent immigrants from the nearby villages and small towns. The city has a rural character with Muslim and Hindu populations sharing culture and economic life. The Muslims are mainly occupational groups and are self-employed. Hence, they have to depend on the Hindus for the clientele and their economic contacts with them exceed those with fellow Muslims. This fact has a bearing on Hindu-Muslim relationships. "The non-Muslims seldom play the role of economic-competitors for the Muslims. Generally, their services are complementary in nature and hence productive of congenial climate of positive inter-communal relationship" (Ibid). Different ideological orientations do not prevent the Hindus and Muslims from being parts of the same economic system and this has an important social aspect as well. It can form the basis for enduring social relationship as the Hindus and Muslims are daily brought into contact with each other. Friendships develop with reciprocal participation in life-cycle ceremonies. Such enduring relationships are often expressed in terms of fictive kinship as in the case of rural areas.

## ETHNIC CONFLICT : SOME THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

### ASSAMESE AND NON-ASSAMESE : THE CASE OF ETHNIC CONFLICT

Ethnic conflict, particularly based on language, can be termed as nativistic movement. Nativistic movements have led to the recurrence of violence and antagonism between competing ethnic communities as is the case of Assam, Bihar and Maharashtra (Weiner, W., 1978 :265-298). Let us take the example of Assam.

Assam witnessed a protracted struggle launched by the indigenous Assamese to gain control over their own administration and educational system. In this process the Assamese hoped to undermine the position of Bengalis in Assam. Fearful of being overwhelmed in both the cultural and economic spheres, the Assamese turned to politics to establish their dominance vis-a-vis the Bengalis (Ibid :75-79). Thus, we see, that an anti-migrants sentiment took an organised political form. However, in other states in India nativism has taken a less organized and, generally, a less violent form. In several other places like Bangalore, Madras and Hyderabad, there has been substantial violence against migrant communities. It should be apparent that in one fundamental respect the Indian case differs from that of America. The nativist reaction in India is not against foreign migrants. It is against local migrants - often



referred to as "foreigners"- who, however, belonged to another culture (Ibid: 293-294).

The accepted theories to explain/understand nativistic movement are the ones that recognise the influence of essential and temporal circumstances. For example, the effect of a situation of increasing structural discrepancy between the level of collective aspirations and the extent to which such aspirations are realized within the social configuration is emphasized by "Relative Deprivation Theory" (Gupta, D., 1982 :25). According to this theoretical approach, the content of the movement as expressed in the political demands, slogans and style, is, by and large, determined by the cultural and linguistic resources locally available. In particular, the traditional customs of an ethnic group and the religious symbols and spiritual signs that are part of its collective conscience provide the idioms to the members of the group to articulate the experience of deprivation. Through such articulation, collective resistance to overcome deprivation becomes a real possibility. The timing of the political action and of the movement itself is dependent upon the degree of disillusionment of a significant number of members of the group with the way of life and the alternatives available to them.

This collective<sup>/</sup>disillusionment emerges out of the awareness of extreme discrepancy between some available image of what constitutes good life and of life such as it exists. Often enough, the collectivity contrasts the present predicament of life to an imaginary glorious past however a historical that imaginary past may be. The present reality almost always compares unfavorably with the nostalgic memory of yesteryears which is believed to have been snatched away by another group. The good life, however, is generally defined not only as materially a more affluent existence but also as a life of collective self-esteem. The precise moment at which the movement crystallizes is difficult to predict, and the political content of the movement too, as it unfolds, is not easy to foretell. These features will be heavily determined by contingent circumstances including the charismatic character and style of leadership. Individual variability in society thus plays an important role in determining the nature and timing of a social movement whose motivation derives from widespread social and cultural conditions.

In his analysis of nativist movement, Weiner found that the regions having nativist movement share some common features. On the basis of this, Weiner claims that certain conditions give rise to nativist movement:

- (i) presence of a substantial number of migrants from outside the cultural region,
- (ii) existence of some perceived cultural difference between the Migrants and the Natives,
- (iii) the social immobility of the natives relative to the other groups in the population,
- (iv) absence of a simultaneous occurrence of high rate of in-migration and a high rate of out-migration,
- (v) a high level of unemployment among the native middle class whereas substantial proportion of middle class jobs are held by culturally alien migrants and
- (vi) a rapid growth of educational opportunities for the natives, particularly for the lower middle class.

According to Weiner, nativism in India is largely a middle class sentiment. It is competition and not inequalities between ethnic groups which generates conflict. In his view, middle class nativist movement in opposition to migrants tend to emerge in those communities where the local population has recently produced its own educated class that aspire to move into the jobs held by the migrants. (Oommen, T.K., 1982: 59-61). This becomes more prominent in a situation where the employment market in the modern sector is not expanding as fast as the number of entrants. The existing ethnic division of labour may no longer be acceptable because there is increasing mobility or

aspiration for it on the part of the indigenous population. Sometimes, a change in the power structure stimulates competition by giving one group the political resources for modifying or transforming the ethnic division of labour. This in many occasions generates conflict.

#### **A CASE STUDY OF ASSAM**

Assam is located in the North-east corner of the Indian union. Most of the present population now lives in two valleys: the Brahmaputra valley and the Surma valley. The Brahmaputra valley contains, in addition to the Assamese speaking people, a huge migrant tea plantation worker population, largely from Bihar, Orissa and Bangladesh. The Surma valley consists of the single district of Cachar with a predominantly Bengali-speaking population (Weiner, M., 1978 : 82-90).

Assam is an ethnically diverse state. A substantial percentage of Assam's population is made up of migrants. Dissimilarities are found in every sphere: culture, religion, language, etc. Various ethnic groups have contributed in their own way towards the unique fusion of a new community which has come to be known in later times as Assamese. Assam, however, has remained predominantly Tibeto-Burmese.

Assam got its name from the rule of Ahom who reigned for six hundred years in Assam. During this period, Ahoms were absorbed by the Assamese speaking people (mainly Hindus) who lived in Brahmaputra valley. The Ahoms gradually took control of the hill areas and dominated the hill people such as the Nagas, the Mizos, the Khasis and the Jantias. The powerful Ahoms ruled over Assam for so long that in the course of time they not only adopted the Hindu religion but they also forgot their own Ahom language and adopted Assamese (Gait, E.A., 1963 :10-20).

The Mughals were successfully resisted by the Ahoms. British rule came to Assam in 1824 when the British dislodged the Burmese invaders who had conquered the province in 1819. The battle is known as the First Burmese war. The Burmese vacated Assam under the treaty of Yandabo (Weiner, 1978 :82-103).

The British then took possession of Assam. They annexed Cachar in 1832 and Jantia hills in 1835. In 1874, The British separated Assam from Bengal and Assam was administered by a chief commissioner. On the partition of Bengal in 1905, Assam was united with the Muslim dominated province of East Bengal which was resented by all. In 1912, the British Government annulled the partition, reunited East and West Bengal, re-established Assam as a separate

chief commissioners province that included the predominately Bengali Hindu district of Cachar.

In 1937, a minority Muslim league government came to power which encouraged the inflow of Bengali Muslim migrants into Assam. But the Congress came back to power in 1946 and rejected the Cabinet Mission Plan of including Assam in the Muslim zone in the east while dividing the country. Finally, Assam remained in India but the Muslim minority district of Sylhet was transferred to East Pakistan/Bangladesh (India, 1980)

Even without Sylhet, Assam remained one of the most diverse cultural regions in the Sub-continent. It included three groups of native people, the Assamese-speaking Hindus, the hill tribes (mainly Garo, Khasi and Naga) and the indigenous plain tribes (known as Bodo or Kachari). Apart from these indigenous people, Assam had a large number of migrant communities which included tribal labourers from Bihar and Orissa mainly belonging to Shanthal, Oraon and Munda tribes who were employed in the British tea gardens. Bengali-muslims mainly from East Bengal settled on land along the Brahmaputra valley. Bengali-hindus, originally from in East Bengal settled in Cachar district and in all the towns of Brahmaputra valley where they held middle-class jobs. Marwaris, an enterpreneurial community

from Rajasthan, engaged in trade, commerce and money lending. The latter set up a few industries and bought tea plantations from the British. One would also find a scattering of other migrant communities such as the Nepalis, Biharis, and Oriyas, who worked as casual labourers in construction projects, and Punjabis, who worked in the transport industry and small business concerns (Ibid).

#### **ASSAM AND ITS MIGRANTS**

The demographic and economic scene of Assam have changed drastically over the years. Since the British rule migration was on such a scale that the percentage of indigenous people in the Assam valley has dropped. Migrants have affected Assam's socio-economic life in a variety of ways.

There were three distinct migration flows of both Bengali Hindus and Bengali Muslims into Assam during the British rule. One consisted of Bengali Hindu administrators who came with the British to run the administration. The second stream was made up of tea plantation labourers. Finally, there was the land hungry Muslims who primarily came to cultivate the virgin land of Assam.

The British created new opportunities by cultivating rich tea plantations whose products were largely exported. In 1830, Governor General Bentick took steps to create a tea industry in Assam. In the beginning one major obstacle towards the creation of a tea industry was the lack of adequate local labour supply. The British first thought of importing Chinese coolies from Singapore to work in tea gardens because they had some knowledge regarding the cultivation of tea. But due to tensions developing between the Chinese and the Indians this proposal was abandoned (Ibid). So the British looked for a labour market inside India. They recruited indigenous tribes from the hill areas of southern Bihar and Orissa. Migration again rose during the second world war when tea garden labourers were employed by the British armies to build roads and aerodromes to defend Assam against possible Japanese invasion from Burma.

Marwaris were basically a trading community from Rajasthan who arrived there to play the role of moneylenders, dealers and exporters of the local commodities. They practically succeeded in monopolizing trade in the Assam valley. Though they were small in number, the Marwaris, through their control of important economic activities, were the most visible and influential section of the migrants.



The singular feature of the increased migration is that Assam has the highest number of migrants from dissimilar linguistic background. Though Assamese is the state language, a large number of Bengalis, Punjabis, Hindi speakers and tribals with their own languages and dialects are found in Assam. According to 1971 census, Assamese and Bengali form the largest linguistic blocks.

#### **BENGALI MIGRANTS IN ASSAM**

After British rule was established in Assam, the British required officials for administrative purposes. Initially they hoped that the high ranking officials from Ahom government could be used but they were found them to be unfit and unsuitable for the British administrative structure. So the British increasingly imported trained Bengali officers to work in Assam. These Bengalis were experienced in the British way of administration. So the Assamese functionaries gradually lost their position of wealth and power. Even for revenue collection the British appointed Bengali tehsildars. Since the Bengalis were the first social group in India to study in British-created missionary and government colleges, they were the first to occupy the professions which were opened by the British. They dominated most of the professional fields as doctors,

lawyers, teachers and journalists. They were also clerks in railways and were employed in large numbers in the of mass communication sector. Since there is a similarity between Assamese and Bengali languages, the Bengalis were able to persuade the British government that Assamese was only a corrupt and vulgar version of Bengali (Bhattacharya, B.K., 1973:7-19). For along time this point-of-view was dominant. But in 1871, some Assamese with the help of American missionaries persuaded the British to recognise Assamese as a separate language and to use it as the medium of instruction in schools throughout the Brahmaputra valley. Earlier Bengali was the medium of instruction in the schools and teachers were predominantly Bengalis. Gradually the Assamese perceived themselves as having two sets of alien rulers. This was because the Bengalis never tried to identify themselves as Assamese, rather they deliberately maintained a distinct culture, preserved their language and resisted any assimilation into the Assamese stream. The Bengalis, in fact, had tried to assimilate the Assamese into their own culture and way of life (Karat, P., 1978: 83).

The Assamese middle class, equally a product of British administration, was operating at a level lower than that occupied by Bengalis. By the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Bengalis were well placed in every sphere of life. They were

exploiting all the opportunities created by the British. The Bengalis dominated the administrative and professional structure and constituted the middle class in the state. The Assamese took up jobs in tea plantations as laborers. They were reluctant to do trade and commerce as they lacked the capital and the experience. This is why the natives failed to integrate with the new order rendered by the British and the migrants succeeded as they had the right aptitude and skill for such jobs (Weiner, 1978 :115).

#### **CONFLICTS BETWEEN ASSAMESE AND BENGALI**

After the separation of East Pakistan/Bangladesh the Sylhet referendum reduced the Bengali population in Assam. It also resulted in the migration of Bengali Hindus into the bordering districts of Assam. Assam had its first heavy influx of Bengali Hindus in 1946-47 from Bangladesh. Fortunately for the Assamese, the Bengali Muslims and Bengali Hindus were unable to come together politically, for their hostility toward each other was greater than that towards the Assamese. Even the Bengali Muslims sided with the Assamese at times and expressed Assamese as their mother tongue to the census enumerators (Ibid, 125-130).

Assamese fear and anxiety about losing their cultural autonomy dates back to 1837 when Bengali was introduced as

the official language in schools. This was strongly opposed by certain vocal sections of the Assamese society. By recognizing and imposing Bengali language upon the Assamese, the British in turn put them (the Bengalis) in a more advantageous position. The social domination of Bengalis in Assam and other states was thus reflected in the domination of Bengali language. The fear of Assamese was reinforced when Bengalis demanded in 1953-54 that the districts to Goalpara be incorporated in West Bengal and that a new state, Purbanchal, be established by carving out a chunk of territory from Assam. They further wanted to convert Assam into a bilingual state in the 1960's (Assam District Gazeteer, 1960 : Vol vii).

At the time of state reorganization from 1953 to 1955 most of the Bengalis demanded the formation of "Purbanchal State". The genesis of the demand was that, since the major part of Sylhet was cut off from India at the time of partition, the Bengalis in Assam, who culturally and even demographically felt that they belong to Bengal, found themselves isolated. The Assamese strongly opposed this move. But neither of their demands got accepted by the States Reorganisation Commission (Ibid :75). This is why most of the conflicts in Assam find their root in Assamese-Bengali confrontations.

After independence, tensions emerged when the Congress government in Assam not only tried to improve the general development of Assam but also tried to improve the position of the Assamese speaking people by using state power. With the expansion of education, language policy became the major bone of contention between the Bengalis and the Assamese. The state government consolidated its effort for the establishment of Assamese as the exclusive language of the state and medium of instruction in schools. The conflict had its root in the intention of Bengali Hindus to enforce their own language and culture on the natives in direct contrast to other migrant communities like Nepalis, Oriyas and Biharis who gradually accepted the culture and language of Assam and identified themselves with the Assamese. Even the Bengali Muslims announced Assamese as their mother tongue. Due to the presence of a large number of Bengalis in Assam, the Bengali Hindus preserved their culture, ritual and marriage among themselves and practically created another Bengal in Assam (Amrit Bazar Patrika Nov 28 1972 ).

## **THE ASSAMESE MOVEMENT AND THE STRUGGLE FOR CULTURAL AUTONOMY**

### **GENESIS OF THE MOVEMENT**

However, the language issue is not an isolated item of discontentment among the Assamese. It is the culmination

of mounting frustration borne out of genuine grievances spread over decades. A movement soon emerged seeking justice for the Assamese. The various factors contributing to the socio-economic genesis of the movement are

- (i) Lop-sided development of the Indian economy.
- (ii) High inflow of immigrants threaten to disturb the ethno-linguistic balance and the politics and economy of the state.
- (iii) The indifferent attitude of the centre has led to the deprived feeling among the people and the same is manifested in the people nativistic movement in the state (Patel, S.J., 1980).

The low level performance of the Indian economy as a whole is characterized by the pattern of uneven development. Due to this, the whole of North-east remained relatively under-developed. This provided a suitable ground for the growth of social tensions like the movement in Assam. The rate of uneven development can be traced back to the colonial period (Ibid :25).

In 1826, when Assam passed into the hands of the British East India Company, its economy was very backward. The British monetised the economy and foreign capital

entered to encourage and to develop tea, coal, oil and transport industries. But the effect on employment, income and further development in the state continued to be very limited. To make the situation worse, a substantial portion of the surplus derived from the industries continued to be sent outside the state (Guha, A., 1977:56-64).

The changes that the British brought about benefited mainly the British rulers, their supporters and agents in India. Most of these agents in Assam were immigrants. The Marwaris, the traders-cum-money lenders, monopolized internal trade as agents of the British trading Houses of Calcutta, who in turn worked for their metropolitan counterparts in London. Bengalis with their early initiation to English education and the British administrative system monopolized government jobs and professions.

Apart from the above socio-economic reasons for the movement, there was another-the Bengalis. The case of the early Bengali migrants into the state of Assam was different because they were just a handful and the condition of communication routes had virtually compelled them to cut off links with their homeland. Hence, they merged with the Assamese population. But gradually the Bengali migrants started concentrating in certain location or pockets and

today in Assam there are some villages and townships which are inhabited predominantly by Bengalis.

Their concentration in particular regions and their homogeneous ethnic background tend to give a distinctive identity to this immigrant population (Bhattacharya , 1973 : 10-18). The Bengalis with the numerical strength and cultural distinctiveness not only resisted assimilation, but also competed with the Assamese for an equally dominant role in the state. Thus, there was a feeling among the natives that if this immigration continued at the present rate, then the Assamese community would lose their cultural identity. Moreover, natives consider these immigrants a threat to their ethno-linguistic identity. The fear intensified because the Bengali speaking population increased. There was indeed a danger of the Assamese being swamped by the immigrants (Ibid : 15-19).

#### **EFFORTS TO PRESERVE CULTURE**

During the British rule the Bengali elites dominated. Later during Nationalist Movement, the Assamese elites emerged victorious as they were the major force in the state government. Subsequently, as time went by, the struggle for power intensified between the immigrant elites and the Assamese elites. A major portion of these immigrants from



East Bengal were Bengali Muslims. These people acquired land in Assam because of the flexible land laws before Independence. In due course, they became big landlords by utilizing the cheap labour of the East Bengal immigrant labourers.

Since independence the Assamese-dominated Congress party was committed to the development of the Assamese people. As a result the educational standard of the Assamese people increased substantially. For the first time, Assam saw the emergence of an educated middle class.

For this aspiring class, the Bengali Hindus stood as an obstacle. The Assamese were not prepared to remain subordinate. The new government tried to remedy this situation by giving preferences to the natives in administrative jobs and essential economic facilities. The natives were treated as "sons of the soil". Official measures were taken to place Assamese in professional positions. The natives demanded that their culture and festivals should be legitimately recognized. They developed their own cultural identity and tried to check the inflow of un-assimilated migrants.

The elite class of Assam of bureaucrats, contractors, transport owners, planters and industrialist of medium-size industrial establishments. The urban elite in order to enhance their power strengthened their position in

the rural areas. This is why the Assamese urban elites are keen to drive out a large number of immigrant settlers in the rural areas, so that their power base would expand among the remaining indigenous people. Hence a sense of conflict grew over the years between the Assamese and the immigrants expressing itself in various social upheavals and movements (Werner, 1978: 100-120).

The Assamese also tried to develop a strong sense of linguistic nationalism to check Bengali domination. The linguistic associations of Assam, viz, "Assam Sahitiya Sabha" and "Assam Jatiya Mahasabha" became pivotal organizations in building linguistic nationalism. Assam Sahitiya Sabha in its annual conference in 1959 adopted a resolution urging upon the government of Assam to declare Assamese as the official language of the state by 1960. Since it touched the issues of employment and cultural identity, language policy became the focal point. The Bengali then favoured a dual policy of giving equal status to Assamese and Bengali which would ultimately mean equality of opportunity in employment, and equal political and social statuses. The Assamese viewed this dual language policy as the perpetuation of Bengali dominance in both cultural and economic spheres (Guha, G., 1980 : 3-6).

In spite of the reasonable demands made by the Assamese movement, one cannot ignore the anti-muslim attitude of the Assamese movement right from the 1940's. In the name of anti-Bengali agitation, Assamese upper caste Hindu communal youths attacked Muslims on several bloody occasions climaxing in the "Nellie Massacre" in which thousands of Muslims including children were killed. From then onwards this anti-Bengali agitation revealed its true saffron colour.

In 1972, the Guwahati university passed a resolution calling for the introduction of Assamese as the medium of instruction. The university had jurisdiction over the Brahmaputra valley as well as over the predominantly Bengali Cachar district. But the Academic council made two concessions to the linguistic minorities in the state, viz.,

- (i) English was to be retained as the medium of instruction for a period of time and
- (ii) Students would be permitted to answer in English, Bengali as well as in Assamese in their examinations.

Immediately after the resolution was passed, Assamese students demonstrated demanding the withdrawal of Bengali as an option. Students boycotted classes and agitated under the leadership of the All Assam Students Union (AASU). Facing strong protests, the Academic Council withdrew the option

of taking examinations in Bengali. This caused an uproar in the Bengali-dominated Cachar district. A case was filed in the Supreme Court citing the violation of the Article 30 of the Indian Constitution which assures protection for linguistic minorities. The state Assembly passed a resolution reaffirming the decisions of the Academic Council of Guwahati and Dibrugarh universities and simultaneously passed a resolution for a separate university in Cachar district where the Bengalis would receive education in their mother tongue. Opposition to this resolution came from all the important Assamese organizations (The Statesman, 1972:July 1). According to them, the linguistic minorities of any state should not stand in the way of regional language being made the state language. This led to strong reactions by the Bengalis in the state. The Bengalis said that the language policy was aimed not as usurping the Bengali language but at driving out the entire Bengali population from Assam. These fears were also shared by many tribals in the state (The Statesman, 1972, Dec,23). The Bodos protested against the imposition of Assamese language in Bodo medium schools and they have been demanding the retention of English (Indian Express, 1972, Dec,3).

## ASSAM AGITATION

Among the organizations spreading the movement, the AASU was the strongest. It consisted of democratically elected students from college unions in Assam. The basic idea behind the movement, as stated by the leadership, is that as a result of the continuous inflow of outsiders the native Assamese might lose their majority status and cultural identity in the near future. Moreover, they had declared that it is their legitimate right to fight for their own cultural identity. The AASU had always been on the forefront in the past struggle on issues such as the establishment of a new university, agitation for Assamese as a state language and medium of instruction, etc. So when the foreigners issue presented itself, the student leaders, along with other local parties and organizations, took it up as nationalist and patriotic duty. Their seemingly non-political nature and lack of vested interest earned for themselves massive support from the people of all walks of life (Guha, A., 1980 : 1699-1720). The regional parties were also associated with it.

The Assamese were determined to push the issue of Assam for Assamese. Their determined efforts for Assamization was led by All-Assam Students Union and Assam Gana Sangam Parishad. The movement continued till 1985 when the Assam

agreement was signed between the AASU and the Central Government. This movement was very successful as it received the support of the Assamese people. It also received world-wide recognition. Finally, the agreement was signed on August 15, 1985 after a settlement was reached and the agitation was called off. The main provisions in the agreement were as follows

- (i) All foreign nationals who entered Assam after 1971 would be repatriated.
- (ii) All migrants who came after 1966 would be deprived of voting rights.
- (iii) Boundary walls would be constructed along border lines to check infiltration.
- (iv) Steps should be taken to preserve Assamese culture in Assam.

The Assam Assembly was dissolved and fresh elections were held in which the pro-Assamese party, Assam Gana Parishad, came to power (Ibid:1700-1720).

So, finally through political struggle the Assamese managed to assert their political dominance in Assam. The Bengali migrants suffered a set back due to their inability to successfully assimilate with the natives.

Thus, we conclude by saying that the nativist movement of Assam was the result of long process of frustration, relative deprivation and overall tension on the people of the state. It is an anti-Bengali movement. There is a certain degree of closeness between the Assamese and the Bengalis as they both hail from the same linguistic and cultural formation. However, instead of creating harmony, this closeness has contributed to antagonism and bloody conflicts.

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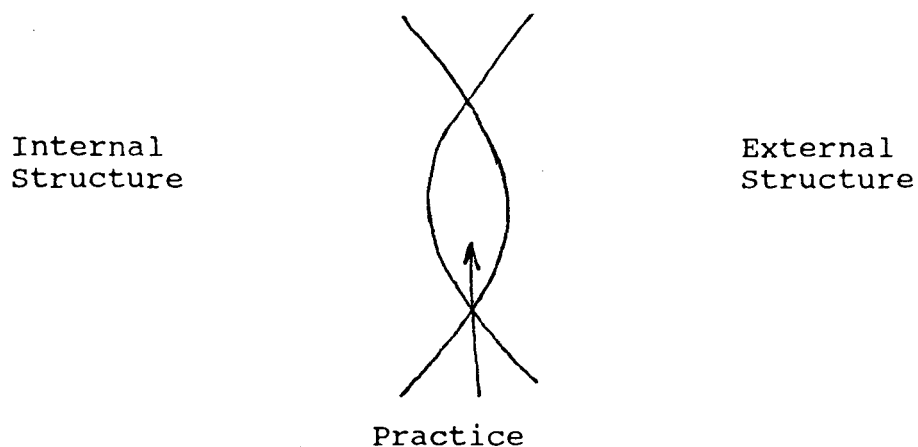
CHAPTER FIVE

**OBJECTIVE MARKERS AND  
SUBJECTIVE CONSCIOUSNESS**

Objective cultural markers that influences subjective orientation have been touched upon in chapter three. In this chapter we will attempt to study this issue in greater detail. We will exclusively deal with the question of how objective cultural markers influence and shape subjective consciousness. Thus, the chapter will attempt to understand not only how cultural traits permeate an ethnic consciousness but also, the nature of that consciousness when it is so permeated.

Before we take up for discussion our central concern it may be in order to state our position regarding the relation between society and individual i.e. the objective nature of society and the subjective nature of the individual. According to Durkheim, social facts are "things". They are external to the individual and coercive in character. Social facts are reality sui-generis. Social reality is an object of knowledge, of cognition or of misrecognition. In contrast to Durkheim's conception, the other schools place the individual at the center of their theoretical concerns. The focus is on the individual act and the experiential reality of social action. The social determinants of human action is acknowledged but they are not considered as primary. Unlike the two extreme schools, Bourdieu takes the middle path to rectify the question of "objectivism" and "subjectivism"

To explain this, Bourdieu formulates the concept of "habitus", "space" and "field". As a result of these conceptual innovations, Bourdieu is able to build a "science of dialectical relations" between the objective structures and the structured dispositions within those structures which are actualized and which tend to reproduce them" (Bourdieu, 1987:16). In other words, "externalization of internal structures" and "internalization of external structures" are linked simultaneously. The following diagram explains the relation between the external and internal structures.



The relationship between the objective cultural markers and social consciousness will be viewed at two levels. First, the cultural markers that operate in the day-to-

day interaction will be studied. Second, the ways by which the objective markers of ethnic boundaries create a distinctive consciousness in a political context will be taken up.

Anthony P. Cohen in his book The Symbolic Construction Of Power argues that "commonality" which is found in a community need not imply a "uniformity". (Cohen, A.P., 1985: 61-69). It is a commonality of forms (ways of behaving) whose context (meanings) may vary considerably among its members. The triumph of community is to contain this variety and to check the that its inherent discordance so that it does not subvert the apparent coherence which is expressed by its boundaries. The important thrust of this argument is that relative similarity and differences is not a matter of "objective" assessment. It is a matter of feeling, a matter which resides in the minds of members themselves.  
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Thus, even if the members of an ethnic group they recognize important differences among themselves they may see themselves to be more like each other than like the members of the other communities. This is precisely because the meanings they attach to symbols may differ even though they share the symbols. Indeed, the common ownership of the symbols may be so intense that they may be quite unaware or unconcerned that they attach to them meanings which differ from those they follow.

Symbols are effective because they are imprecise, and their meaning "subjective". They are, therefore, ideal media through which people can speak a "common" language, behave in apparently similar ways, participate in the same rituals, pray to the "same god", wear similar cloths, and so forth, without subordinating themselves to a tyranny of orthodoxy. Individuality and commonality are thus reconcilable. Just as the "common form" of the symbol aggregates the various meanings assigned to it, so the symbolic repertorie of a community aggregates the individualities and other differences found within the community and provides the means for their expression, interpretation and containment. It provides the range within which individuality is recognizable. It continuously transforms the reality of differences into the appearance of similarity with such efficacy that people can still invest the "community" with ideological integrity. It unites them in their opposition, both to each other, and those "outside". It thereby constitutes and gives reality to the community's boundaries.

While discussing the symbols in constructing ethnic boundaries, we argue that the symbolic expression and affirmation of boundary heightens people's awareness and sensitivity to their community (Cohen, 1985 :61-69). Certain

symbols occupy prominent place in the repertoire of symbolic devices through which community boundaries are affirmed and reinforced. It is the very ambiguity of symbols which makes them so effective and powerful as boundary markers of community. Symbolic power may be defined as a capacity to impose and inculcate means of understanding and structuring the world.

Another way of showing the relationship between symbolic objectivity and ethnic consciousness is by highlighting the point that in a Hindu society the principle of stratification namely caste hierarchy is reflected in food (Cohen & Mariott (ed): 1957: 133-138) and other practices associated with food. Food has always been and still remains men's most important concern. There is a hierarchy in the people of what they should eat and how they should cook and what rules they have to follow in inter-dining. Inter-dining is an important social practice in all societies. Khare observes that food is an observable law, it is a reflection of coherent group of moral rules and conditions. Food, in this view, is an example of rules, relations and conditions (Khare, 1980 (1-3); 519-540).

Indian social stratification is governed by the concept of purity and pollution (Ibid). Social stratification refers here to the unequal ranking of caste, with brahmins

at the top who require the service of the other castes to lead a pure life. They feed on Pakka food ie. those prepared in the finest manner. The caste below are said to serve their betters, to eat ordinary Kaccha food, to consume "dirty" things like garbage, beef, pork etc. Kaccha food refers to food cooked in water and Pakka food refers to food cooked in ghee (Khare, 1976: 52). One often finds that persons of different castes struggle to assert and to establish a caste-ranked order through ascription of relative "cleanliness" and "dirtiness" of certain differentially valued features of diet. For example, vegetarian (clean food) is eaten by brahmans and those who consume pork are kept at the bottom. Social ranking is thus organized by the kind of food that is consumed

A cardinal assumption of ranking in terms of food could be formulated very simply givers are higher, receivers are lower. If a member of caste A gives food to a member of caste B, then the whole of caste A must be regarded as higher than caste B. If a member of the receiving caste B also gives food to a member of caste A, then caste A and B are of the same rank. Concern for transitivity is evident whenever three or more units are involved. If A gives to B and B gives to C, then A is higher than C even if there is no direct transfer of food from A to C.



Food and services are closely linked. In everyday life food is often the pay of servants. Giving a service implies the readiness to receive some kind of food and giving food implies an expectation the service will be rendered. Gaining dominance over others through feeding them or becoming dependence on others through being fed by them appears to be comprehensive goal of actors in the system of transactions. Purity and pollution, among other values, are used as expressions of achievement toward these goals. Dietary or occupational purity and pollution, regarded as attributes of caste, do not correlate well within the rankings found either in transactions or in opinions. However, major distinctions in verbalized opinion among higher and lower blocs of caste correlates closely with distinctions in the transfer of food, pollution and other symbols of dominance and subordination. The distinction of "high" versus "low" corresponds with a shift from net creditor to net debtor status in food transactions. Styles and tactics used in managing these transactions vary with high and low rank and differ from caste to caste.

Leach in his work Culture And Communication argues that individual items of observed behaviour and individual details of customs can be treated as analogous to the

words and sentences of a language (Leach, 1985: 36-38). But the artistic representations of common objects follow widely different conventions in different cultures and this seems significant. It is perfectly possible that every individual perceives this world to be what his or her cultural background suggests.

While raising this question of objectivity and subjectivity, K.P.Rao highlights the role of cultural patterns suggesting that it is not just an individual cultural trait that generates individual consciousness. It is the cultural pattern, a configuration of various cultural traits that influences and shapes individual consciousness (Rao, 1946 :25). According to Rao, a civilization is said to be a pattern of culture which is shared in common by a number of individual persons. Indian civilization is a pattern of culture which is shared in common by millions of individual Indians. What is the relation of the individual to his culture-group? It is true that no two individuals are so identical that they cannot be distinguished. Nevertheless, it is said that the individual of a culture-group has so much in common that each represents all.

Seba Eldridge speaks of "the intimate relationship between the individual and the group, one might also say, their complete identity", and adds that a group is nothing

more than its members related in definite ways and cooperating in certain ways. The individual makes a group and the group makes or remakes the individual in all phases of life. The individual adapts himself to the social heritage of the group into which he is born. The culture of that group is the basis of his behaviour. That explains why a New Yorker eats with a fork and not with chopsticks. Thus, an individual born into a group, acquires its civilization, learns how to respond to it, adjusts himself to it, and eventually reaches the point where any opposite response is accompanied by strong negative feelings or quit. This applies to all social groups. The individual in each become conditioned to his culture, just as in our own society we become conditioned to ours. Our antagonism against outsiders is often nothing more than emotional reaction against the individual who is adjusted to another culture and who consequently stands out as markedly different from ourselves in behaviour and ways of doing things. He is adjusted to a different pattern. His has a different social heritage. His habits and reactions are different from our own. Hence, the antagonism. The intimate relations that create an identity between the individual and his culture-group is considered, by Eldridge, as perhaps, the most basic fact in the whole realm of sociology.

To support the argument that how an individual item like food generates common consciousness in relation to other cultural traits such as dress, religion etc, Kotona Apte quotes "food habits contributes significantly to the identity of a society because of their relationship with other aspects of the culture" (Arnott,M.L.,1977:251-256). For instance, food habits are often closely associated with religion. "Fish Fridays", "Kosher Kitchens", and "Bread and Wine" that symbolize the body and blood of Christ are all part of Judeo-Christian beliefs. Examples from Mohammedanism are the pork taboo and Ramazan, when no food is allowed from sunrise to sunset.

To sum up, the unwritten norms that govern the ways by which food items are selected, cooked and shared enables an individual to recognize the group he belongs to. Similarly, by adopting a particular dressing pattern he comes to recognize his group. He looks at those who share the same food habits and those who dress like him as an extension of himself. He looks at himself as an individual manifestation of that group in which he has placed his trust. He sees his individuality in the collectivity and the collectivity in his individuality.

Ethnic boundary markers such as race, caste, religion, language etc. play a substantial role in the political

processes in in society. While discussing the relations between the boundary markers and politics vis-a-vis the subjective consciousness of an individual one has to necessarily refer to "symbols". It is symbols which provide an organic link between the boundary markers and the political process. Political processes is a form of social interaction. Any interaction becomes an impossibility when the interacting individuals do not share a common system of meaning and symbols that constitute this meaning system (Cohen, 1979: 88-100). That's why symbols have come to be defined as the shared meaning of a group.

Symbol (or ethnic marker) is a mere mental construct and as such has no relevance for conducting a political process. These symbols become powerful political tools when expressed in and through material object, a gesture, a sound etc. It is here that an object, a gesture, a language associated with a caste, religious or linguistic group become a symbol for that group. The symbol could be a food item (a physical object), song (sound) and many such things. Thus, the cultural traits provide, so to say, the raw material for symbolic representation. This will facilitate political expression and mobilization.

The thrust of any political process is to create a specific consciousness among the individuals. An attempt to

study the ways by which ethnic markers generates political consciousness has to first begin with an understanding of the nature of symbols. The main argument here rests on the importance of symbolism in politics. One often argues that people are more influenced by symbolic forms than by utilitarian calculations. However, human realities are not provided at birth by the physical universe but rather must be fashioned by individuals out of the culture into which they are born and the experiences they have i.e., experiences that bring them into contact with other people and with various parts of nature. The world out there confronts each individual with an infinite number of stimuli yet no one can deal with all of them. We must be selective in our perceptions and those aspects of the world that are selected must be further reduced and reordered in terms of some system of simplification (or categorization) that allows to make sense of them. This order is largely provided by the symbol system we learn as members of our culture, a system that allows us for both social creativity and individual idiosyncrasy.

The symbol system is the primary means by which we give meaning to the world around us. They allow us to interpret what we see. Through symbols we deal with chaos of experience and create order. One must keep in mind that

though symbols give people a way of understanding the world, it is people who produce new symbols and transform the old. Cultural symbols though seemingly apolitical have political implications. Cohen holds that most of the symbols that are politically significant are overtly non-political (Ibid : 89). The most dominant symbols are bifocal. They are rooted on the one hand in the human condition (life crises) i.e. in existential problems which Cohen calls "selfhood", and on the other hand, in the relation of power.

Those forms that are clearly and formally political tend to be signs not symbols. Because they lack ambiguity and are unidimensional (not bifocal) they become politically efficacious only when they acquire non-political meaning in addition to their formal, direct connotations.

Power is considered as an aspect of nearly all social relationships. Therefore, Cohen defines politics as "the distribution, maintenance, exercise of and struggle for power with a social unit" (Ibid : 98). The problem of this definition is that it makes the study of politics co-extensive with the study of all society. It views politics as power relations within state institutions. As it stands this definition cannot be applied to tribal, pre-industrial societies.

Power relations are objectified, developed, maintained, expressed or camouflaged by means of symbolic forms and patterns of symbolic action. Symbols are related to culture. Culture often covers both "utilitarian" and "normative" traits, both objective and subjective phenomena. Symbols forming a part of culture have ideological functions. The concept of ideology is often caught in the web of conflicting opinions. But the generally accepted definition is that ideology is an epistemological concept i.e. it addresses the following question, "how do men know their world?" The ambiguities in culture and ideology can be overcome by studying the symbolic performances that are objective, collective, observable and verifiable. In political symbolism, various types of symbols are analyzed in their involvement in the relations of power. This involves lifting their ceremonial performance out of their ordinary sequence to examine their relation to political functions like authority or boundaries of group.

Cohen has made a significant contribution to the study of the relationship between symbols and politics. He argues all symbols are essentially linked to power relation in a society. He says "power relations are objectified, developed, maintained, expressed or camouflaged by means of symbolic forms and patterns of symbolic actions"(Ibid: 89).



This view has been contested by Firth who has accused Cohen of "reductionism". Firth argued that not all symbols are related to power relations. For example, the symbols used during life crises like birth, death etc., are not linked to power relations. Cohen responds to this criticism by explaining that symbols in life crises are in fact power symbols. He says that life crises such as death, initiation, birth though are universal are not identical among different groups. There are differences in the ceremonialization of such crises. I think Cohen's view explain-the symbolic reality better and I am in agreement with his views.

The following is a summary of Cohen's response to his critics. All crises of life are interrelated and form the basis of the human condition. In all societies nearly all crises are ceremonialized but often unequally. In some societies, one crisis is emphasized and made to serve as an articulating idiom of political organisation; in others, two or more are equally emphasized. An affliction can be attributed to mystical causes - the anger of the dead, or the wicked activities of witches, and it is the insight of the divine that decides which is the relevant cause in each particular case.

Why is the symbolism of life crises so universally manipulated in politics? The answer is in the nature of the "existential problems". They are not amenable to scientific scrutiny and solutions. Symbols are ambiguous and therefore, manipulable. They derive their ambiguity and manipulative power from their association with the existential problems which are not amenable to scientific scrutiny. Symbols play on the sentiments of the participants and sway their beliefs. Thus, they become effective tools for propagating particular political beliefs.

What is the relation between beliefs and sentiments generated by symbols? Cohen seems to visualise a unidimensional relation. He sets priority of symbols over beliefs. He writes, "often in these circumstances, it is not the belief that gives rise to ceremonials but ceremonial that can conjure up and give definite form and structure to belief" (Ibid: 98). Repetitive performances of ceremonials enhance the consciousness of people about the existential problems involved. The second reason why the symbolism of life crises is so universally politicized is its intrinsic potential for becoming an impelling force, a valence, a categorical imperative, an "ought" that can move people to action from the inside, the immediate incentive of reward or punishment. This is different and distinct from the "contractual, utilitarian, rational pattern of action".

Both these types are interrelated and are applied in the political context. The difference is a matter of degree.

The study of political symbolism involves exploration of the source of the obligatory in symbols. Regarding the nature of obligation, there are two schools: One is intuitionists i.e. obligation have merit of its own and the other utilitarian i.e. obligation is born out of egoistic calculations and efforts to maximise benefits (Ibid: 100). They are interrelated. The object of inquiry is to isolate the two variables and show the nature of the causal or dialectical relations between the two. "the obligatory in symbolism is a phenomenon sui generis, having its own impelling force, which, though always interrelated with the political constraints of the collective, remains essentially irreducible".

Victor Turner has made an attempt to identify and define the source of obligation. He identifies two poles within the structure of symbols, namely: sensory (arouses gross and basic emotions) and ideological (arouses norms and values). During a ritual, symbols allow an interchange between these two poles. While the norms and values gets saturated with emotions, the basic emotions are enabled through their contact with values. Turner's attempt explains only the working of symbolic techniques, such as

colours, music, dancing and the use of the human body and not the obligatory in symbols. Moor and Myerhoff argue that the obligatory character of symbols are derived from their "traditionalizing effect"- that means interpreting new materials in a traditional way and perpetuating old tradition. They have been criticized for their attempt to indicate only the dynamic nature of the symbolic process. It does not speak of the inner source of "obligation".

Cohen tries to explain by focusing on the dynamic nature of the "selfhood" vis-a-vis power and symbolism. Selfhood--the oneness of an integrated psyche--is not innate but comes about by interaction with "significant others". This contributes to the creation of a body of symbolic beliefs and practices. To the extent that symbolic beliefs are involved in the formation of self, we form our selfhood by participating in symbolic actions. These symbolic actions are provided by one's interest group, Like lineage, tribe or ethnic group. These groups organise themselves through manipulation of the obligatory when they cannot do it through formal, contractual means. The self reacts to this in many ways, including the creation of new symbolic patterns that are free from utilitarian interest.

Symbolism is involved in politics in many ways. We choose to focus on just one, that is, "ritual". Though the concept of "ritual" in anthropology is generally used as something related to religious sphere, we use it as a property of the secular sphere--ritual action has a formal quality to it. It follows highly structured, standardized sequences and is often enacted at certain places and times that are themselves endowed with special symbolic meaning. Ritual action is repetitive and, therefore, often redundant. But this fact serves as an important means of channelizing emotions, guiding cognition, and organizing social groups.

Rituals are usually defined as action wrapped in a web of symbolism. Ritual action not only gives meaning to the universe it also becomes a part of the universe. As one observer noted, "Through ritualized action, the inner becomes outer, and the subjective world pictures becomes a social reality". Ritual gives meaning to our world as it moves through the past to the present and the present to the future. This helps us to cope with two human conditions. Firstly, it builds confidence in our sense of self by providing us with a sense of continuity. Secondly, it gives us confidence that the world in which we live today is the same world we lived in before and the same world we will have to cope with in the future.

One of the perennial problems people face is coping with the frustrating indeterminacy of the world. People respond to this indeterminacy by doing what they can to fix a single, known reality so that they can respond to it appropriately and understand their place in the world. The very fixity and timelessness of ritual are reassuring parts of this attempt to tame time and define reality. But even though there are certain psychological and even physiological bases of rituals, understanding its political importance depends on recognizing the way ritual serve to link the individual to society.

According to mainstream western political ideology, ritual occupies at best a peripheral, if not irrelevant, role in political life. The image of "political man" as a rational actor who carefully weighs his/her objective circumstances and decides the course of action based on an instrumental calculation of self interest leaves out culture and all that makes us human. Though we are rooted in the physical world and are much affected by material forces, we perceive and evaluate them through our symbolic apparatus. Ritual is an important way by which we communicate our understanding of the world achieved through symbols.

Each society has its own mythology detailing its origin and sanctifying its norms. Some of these revolve around

great men while others revolve around notable events that, whether having a historical basis or not, are defined through a web of symbolically constructed meaning.

Ritual practices are a major means of propagating these political myths. The symbols at the heart of ritual observances are part of the tissue of myth that helps to structure the understanding of the political world and the public's attitude to the various political actors that populate it. Once constructed such symbolic understanding of the political order is resistant (though not immune) to change. Here again, there is a conflict between the view that humans are rational actors and the view that stresses a more complex interaction of the symbolic with the material. In the former view, changing a person's political opinion is a matter of logical argumentation and the marshalling of facts. But the resistance of beliefs to change through such a rational debate has long been recognized.

Not only does ritual have this cognitive effect on people's definition of political reality, it also has an important emotional impact. People derive a great deal of satisfaction from their participation in rituals. Rulers have for millennia (indeed, for as long as there has been rulers) attempted to design and employ rituals to arouse

popular emotions in support of their legitimacy and to drum up popular enthusiasm for their policies. But, by the same token, rituals are also important for revolutionary groups who must elicit powerful emotions to mobilize people for revolt.

In conclusion, we can say that, ethnicity has become more salient because it can combine an interest with an affective tie. It provides a tangible set of common identifications (language, race, dress etc.). In the competition for the values of the society to be realized politically, ethnicity can become a means for claiming place or advantage. Ethnicity seems to have become a badge that one can wear more openly and one can show as a mode of personal self-assertion. Ethnic groupings become ready means of demanding group rights or providing defence against other hostile groups.

The upsurge of ethnicity is a cultural game in that it allows individual whose identity has been submerged or whose status has been denigrated to assert a sense of pride in what he regards as his own. In equal measure it is a means for disadvantaged groups to claim a set of rights and privileges which the existing power structure has denied them. Ethnicity can be regarded as an enclosing device which carves out a recognizable social collectivity. It



also provides a commonness that establishes a diachronic continuity. Viewed in this way, ethnicity would refer to social collectivities which may be divided into types based on particular markers of distinction like race, religion, language and dress. These types may be ranked in terms of their degree of proximity to the principle of genetic closure.

I have tried to answer a number of questions that I have raised in the beginning of the various chapters of this dissertation. In the first and second chapters, I have defined the various concepts and theories involved in the study of ethnicity. The concept of ethnicity is looked at through patrimony which explains membership behaviourally and which goes into making the primordial ties among the members of the given group. Primordial affinities and attachments refer to the identity a person is born with or acquires at birth. It is distinct from all secondary identities that a person acquires. The concepts and theories referred to claim that classifications of persons and local groups as members of an ethnic group must depend on their exhibiting a particular trait of the culture of the ethnic group.

Ethnic identity is distinguished from ethnicity in that ethnicity refers to group patterns and ethnic identity

refers to the individual's acquisition of group pattern. Ethnic identity is conceptually and functionally separate from one's personal identity even though the two may reciprocally influence each other. Among many definitions of ethnicity, the American Heritage Dictionary (Glazer & Moynihan, 1976: 6), defines ethnic group as|

- (i) The condition of belonging to a particular group.
- (ii) Ethnic pride.

The first of these two definitions fits well to an objective condition. The second, however, is subjective.

We have taken the view that an ethnic group is "socially" defined on the basis of cultural criteria. Identity is "condensed" around symbols or cues. Symbols provide the focal point for people to feel close to one another. It is through symbols that ethnic boundaries are constructed and perceived. Ethnic boundaries canalize social life. The role of symbols is to meet all social and cultural requirements. First of all, symbols play a major role in providing an identity to a group. It, thereby enables one to define his friends and foes. Through such symbolism, the relationship between individuals and organizations are objectified.

We have seen that a single identity is not consistently and uniformly expressed but is subject to variation and change. Group boundaries are fluid, group membership is problematic. Ethnicity is not an ascribed trait which either remains constant or is eroded away. Rather, there are identifiable historical conditions which are related to the emergence, erosion or maintenance of ethnicity. The impact of ethnic identity is especially relevant in societies that are heterogeneous in nature where one or more minority group exist alongside a dominant social group.

In the third chapter, we discussed the whole question of how objective boundary markers of an ethnic group shapes the subjective consciousness of the members of the group. In order to tackle this, we raised few questions like: what are the ethnic symbols? what is it that goes into the making of their distinctiveness?, how do people use various symbols in the formation and definition of ethnic group boundary and ethnic identity?

The choice of a particular symbol (language, religion, caste, region etc.) plays an extremely important role in the establishment of social networks and social activities. These together constitute the process of ethnic boundary definition and maintenance.

In the fourth chapter, we talk about ethnic interaction. Relationship exists among the groups involved, which in turn are determined by societal conditions. If the conditions in the wider society promote cooperative and collaborative relationships between different groups, the relationship between groups would be of one kind. If on the other hand, the conditions promote conflict between the groups, stereotypes will engage the relationship further reinforcing conflict. We notice that it is difficult to study inter-group relationships without studying the wider conditions prevailing in the society. Collaborative relationships prevail when the groups concerned see resources as shareable, as against conflict relationships when such resources or goals are seen as unsharable.

In a political situation, ethnicity is a malleable principle of association. It can be mobilized for conflicting purposes and be connected with many different ideological principles by many different sorts of leaders. Ethnicity is a very potent political resource and a very difficult one to control.

In the last chapter, we extended our argument that objective markers influence and shape subjective consciousness.

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