

Constructing Ethnicity and Autonomy: An Understanding of Relationship

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ABSTRACT

Ethnicity and Autonomy both are much contested in today's context. Earlier it was not difficult to contextualize these terms as in that period people were not so much conscious about their ethnic identity to establishing autonomy. As time passes people has become very conscious about their identity and establishing autonomy. Both terms have become interrelated. Ethnic concern has arisen for their autonomy and autonomy has arisen in the context of ethnicity. Eventually, autonomy has been interpreted with different dimensions but the most prominent one is ethnicity. Most of the countries have facing the problem of ethnic assertion to establish autonomy of the particular communities. Hence, this paper wants to analyse how this both term has given impetus to grow each other for achieving the goal of ethnicity to autonomy and autonomy for ethnicity.

KEYWORDS: *ethnicity, autonomy, relationship, understandings*

INTRODUCTION

According to John Hutchinson and Anthony Smith, the term "ethnicity" is relatively new, first appearing in the *Oxford English Dictionary* in 1953, but its English origins are connected to the term "ethnic," which has been in use since the Middle Ages. The true origins of "ethnic" have been traced back to Greece and the term *ethnos*, used in reference to band, tribe, race, a people, or a swarm (Baumann, 2004). To make sense of our world, we need words that can be applied to roughly comparable phenomena in diverse settings. Ethnicity is one of these. Ethnic Identity is

itself a variable rather than a fixed or given disposition (Manor, 1996). The rise of Ethnicity or ethnic identity and its transformation into nationalism among the diverse peoples of the contemporary world are not givens but are social and political constructions arise out of specific types of interaction between the leadership of centralizing state and elites from non dominant ethnic groups, especially in the peripheries of those, of the modern centralizing state (Brass, 1991).

CONSTRUCTING ETHNICITY

Consequently, there has been an ethnic revival since the 1960s in the sense both of an increased incidence of ethnic conflict, and an increased awareness of the phenomenon by social scientists. As long as political change was depicted as a process of transition to modernization, however erratic and problematical that process was, then ethnicity seemed to be both marginal and a temporary feature of politics. The literature on ethnic politics has also been moving in ways that make it more immediately relevant to the issue of development; indeed by a different route. As well as, Culture undoubtedly plays an important role in shaping ethnicity, the widespread assumptions that language carries with it cultural connotations; that religious values carry over into the values and attitudes underlying wider social and political behavior; and that the sharing of common genes engenders feeling of communal identity. The affinities of language, religion, life-style or physiognomy can each be utilized as rallying points around which to articulate and mobilise the sense of ethnic identity. Educated elites also often constitute an influential group within the middle class and very frequently take the lead in ethnic movements demanding recognition for particular languages. Therefore, that an ethnic group may shift the focus of its symbolism from one cultural attribute to another over time, with the perceptions of their relative utility in changing political circumstances. The manipulation of ethnicity by state elites is even easier to observe in those states which have strong mono-ethnic tendencies. In such states, dominant cultural groups in the society (usually majorities) have been able to enhance or preserve their dominance through the instrument of state power; to varying extents, the process of the formation of the state has encouraged the close link between the ethnic nationalism of this dominant group and state nationalism: the cultural symbolism of the dominant group thus forming the basis for the articulation of state-national identity. The intermediate situation is that

where the response to state interventions on ethnicity is a manipulative one. Target communities cannot escape the interventions of the state (Baruah, *Ethnonationalism in India A Reader*, 2010).

To assert that ethnicity is socially constructed is not to deny the historical basis of ethnic conflict and mobilization. However, a constructionist view of ethnicity poses questions where an historical view begs them. Ethnic identity is most closely associated with the issue of boundaries. Debates over the placement of ethnic boundaries and the social worth of ethnic groups are central mechanisms in ethnic construction. Recent research has pointed to an interesting ethnic paradox in the United States. Despite many indications of weakening ethnic boundaries in the white American population (due to intermarriage, language loss, religious conversion or declining participation), a number of studies have shown maintenance or increase in ethnic identification among whites. This contradictory dualism is partly due to what Gans terms "symbolic ethnicity," which is "characterized by a nostalgic allegiance to the culture of the immigrant generation, or that of the old country; a love for and pride in a tradition that can be felt without having to be incorporated in everyday behavior" (Nagel, 1994). Ethnic identity, then, is the result of a dialectical process involving internal and external opinions and processes, as well as the individual's self-identification and outsiders' ethnic designations that is what you think your ethnicity is, versus what they think your ethnicity is. Since ethnicity changes situationally, the individual carries a portfolio of ethnic identities that are more or less salient in various situations and vis-a-vis various audiences. As audiences change, the socially-defined arrays of ethnic choices open to the individual changes produces a "layering" of ethnic identities. Thus identities are constructed by both the individual and group as well as by outside agents and organizations. Even, ethnicity is an alternative form of social organization.

In the context of Immigration and the production of ethnic diversity, Governments routinely reshape their internal ethnic maps by their immigration policies. Immigration is a major engine of new ethnic group production as today's immigrant groups become tomorrow's ethnic group's formation. Immigration is not the only area in which politics and ethnicity are interwoven. Official ethnic categories are routinely used by governments worldwide in census-taking and acknowledgment of the ethnic composition of populations is a regular feature of national

constitutions. Such designations can serve to reinforce or reconstruct ethnic boundaries by providing incentives for ethnic group formation and mobilization or by designating particular ethnic subpopulations as targets for special treatment. The political recognition of a particular ethnic group can not only reshape the designated group's self-awareness and organization, but can also increase identification and mobilization among ethnic groups not officially recognized, and thus promote new ethnic group formation. For instance, in India, the provision of constitutionally guaranteed parliamentary representation and civil service posts for members of the "Scheduled Castes" or "Untouchables" contributed to the emergence of collective identity and the political mobilization of Untouchables from different language and regional backgrounds. Thus, different cultural-linguistic communities want to retain their traditions and relative prestige while desiring to improve their social economic and political status. All these issues involve competition, conflict and power struggle. In a true sense of the term, ethnicity is only a construct, resulting from the interaction of the state, political and economic process creates ethno-nationalism politicizes certain ideological goals that give birth to the ethnic community (Singha, 2017). The closely related terms like ethnic identity and autonomy, identity politics and the politics of identity are widely used to refer to a number of transformations in group behavior and political argument (Kenny, 2004). Therefore, ethnicity or ethnic identity is in part a political construction on the question of equal rights and the demand for autonomy or independence.

ETHNICITY TO AUTONOMY

Ethnicity is even more obvious basis to assert political power under the guise of the "nation-state," ethnicity (or linguistic affinity or religion) became the foundation of political organization in the late nineteenth century. However, nation and state are two different connotations. Primarily the state is a politico-legal concept, with the organization of dominance in the name of the common interest. Ralph Miliband argues that the ruling class uses the state as its instrument to dominant society by virtue of the interpersonal ties between, and social composition of, state officials and economic elites. But regarding nations, whereas the statist view refers, nation is a psycho-cultural one and ethnicist view argues that nation as a large, politicized ethnic group, defined by a common culture and alleged descent, but in the world of today the approximation of

a national group with a state is rather rare. And therefore the synonymisation of nation with state is questionable. As such, it is not the phenomena of nation-state but the preponderance of multinational states that needs to be emphasized (Phadnis, 1990). Therefore, the nation has been defined as imagined community by Benedict Anderson in his book *Imagined Communities* (Anderson, 1983). However, Nation-state itself a sovereign entity dominated by a single nation, a mythical and intellectual construct with a highly persuasive and powerful political force. When the two concepts nation and state are combined, this creates an enormously compelling mixture of legitimacy and efficiency for governing elites. It was used most effectively in the nation-building of the nineteenth century, and has been the target more recently of many third world governments hoping to build nations in support of their states as part of their socio-economic development. But the latter part of twentieth century witnessed a decline in the power of the nation-states, as other bodies gained power in international relations, such as large multinational corporations, international organizations and other collectivities. J. Milton Yinger writes, a substantial literature nearly equates nation and ethnic group; or perhaps more precisely, nations are seen as a variety of ethnic group defined by a history or a mythology of statehood, or by powerful aspirations for statehood. Reinforced by such myths and histories, nationalism becomes the rallying cry for ethnic movements seeking higher economic and social status and independence, autonomy, or devolution (Yinger, 1997). Even that the legitimacy of nation-states has been eroded primarily as a result of the state's unrealizable claim to be the engine of development and social justice, and that ethnic assertions are the consequence, rather than the cause, of the weakening of nation-states and not apparently a cause, but rather a consequence, of change in the social, economic and political arenas (Brown, 1989).

A multi-ethnic state is, viewed as a multinational state with certain nationalities having autonomy and independence of action even to the extent of having the legal right of secession if the people concerned so desired. Brown 1997, highlighted in the context of multicultural dilemma, the attempts by state elites to manage ethnic claims by strategies of multiculturalism, face problems as regards the credibility both of the state's claim to neutrality, and of the nation's claim to authenticity. The inability of state elites to sustain their earlier strategies of demonizing and marginalizing minority ethnic claims has left them with the choice of either confronting the

ethnic challenge head-on, culminating in the numerous and widespread violent ethnic conflicts; or searching for new strategies which seek to accommodate or manage such claims, either by granting regional autonomy, developing ethnic power sharing or resource allocation formulas, granting special citizenship rights to minorities, or introducing ethnic affirmative action programmes. The adoption of such management strategies involves, however, the dismantling of the earlier myths of assimilation, and replacing them by new symbols of multicultural nationalism, which is much more problematic (Brown, 1998).

DEFINING AUTONOMY

Again, autonomy is also like an institutional mechanism to resolve ethnic conflict, may be relevant for the management of public affairs which are important for minority or for the facilitation of participation of a minority. The model is often quickly referred, more specifically territorial autonomy, would have a defined meaning, in public international law but not a legal term (Suski, 2008). Territorial autonomy has been the classical means of settling self-determination disputes outside the colonial context. It denotes self governance of a demographically distinct territorial unit within the state normally be established by the constitution or an autonomy statute, entranced as a special or organic law, to ensure the permanence of this arrangement (Weller, 2009). Regarding the concept of “autonomy” writers have given different interpretations. According to Ruth Lapidoth, autonomy serves to secure the rights of minorities, of indigenous populations and of peoples seeking self-determination; it aims to ease ethnic tensions. In some of those cases in which ensuring equality and minority rights does not satisfy the aspirations of the group and in which full self-determination is not an option, autonomy is granted in order to settle the conflict or ease it (Lapidoth, 1997). On the other hand Hurst Hannum argues autonomy is not a term of art in international and constitutional law. Taking an instrumental view of ‘autonomy’, saying that autonomy is a means to an end, not an end in itself: at the end of the day, proper concern should be rights, not policy, and fixating on autonomy as a one size fits all compromise solution is unlikely to respond to the needs either of the concerned parties or the international community (Hannum, 1996). From these two

perspectives autonomy is not a real solution rather a vexed solution. More specifically, and as is often the case, prominent political leaders usually voice claims on their behalf in terms of either internal (personal and territorial autonomy, 'minority rights', power-sharing schemes) or external self-determination (secession and creation of an independent State). The growing recognition of the democratic aspect is about the internal aspect of self-determination rather than the external, in almost all situations. Thus autonomy is considered as a method of internal self-determination. Article I of the UN Covenants of 1966 says, "All peoples have the right of self-determination" (McCorquodale, 1994). Now who are 'people'? Is it a nation? An ethnic group? Or all people in a territorial unit? This question remains unresolved even fifty years after the incorporation of self-determination in UN instruments only some of the conditions have included but it was in fact absurd because people cannot decide until somebody decides who the people are. The peoples approach and the territorial approach as well as many claiming the right, seems to ignore. And after decolonization the external approach to self-determination or secession was not appreciated purpose to maintain international peace and security, which creates a limitation on the right of self-determination. This general interest is often expressed in two ways: territorial integrity of States and the maintenance of colonial boundaries. But it cannot be ignored as these boundaries were the result of disposition by colonial powers, which often give rise to conflicts rather than resolve disputes. Hence, in today's context with the limitations international community and states trying to shift people's interest from full self-determination to autonomy only to mean internal self-determination. Subsequently, the question of self-determination, and rights of minorities and those of the indigenous peoples are closely linked to the question of autonomy. The second half of the last century have helped the individual secure a status in international law, as human rights and the use of autonomy as a species of group right has contradicted the characteristics of international law even in the context of the neo-liberal state.

CONSTRUCTING AUTONOMY

The next emerging question is how autonomy has been institutionalised. There are three types of autonomy regimes reflecting different levels of legal authorization that is the interplay of the

governmental and minority subsystem within the constitutional, statutory and customary laws of a given state. Within these regimes there are different societies which have been following one of these ethnic conflict regulations. Another issue like; autonomy in its various forms would seem to be relevant to some of the goals and aspirations. A distinction should be made among the groups of potential beneficiaries: Minorities and indigenous population. Surprisingly there is no generally accepted definition for the concept of either minority or a member of minority. Like the concept of minorities, the term indigenous population does not yet have a generally recognized definition. Both have shared some distinctive characteristics. Minority can be defined in numerical terms like Religious minorities, linguistic minorities, in terms of sharing geographical space. But indiginity cannot be defined in numerical terms. They have a distinct historical continuity in terms of land. No doubt Indigenous populations qualify as ethnic minorities and as such can enjoy the rights granted by international law to minorities. But minorities may not be indigenous. For example Muslims are minority in India but may not be indigenous. In recent decades the demands of indigenous populations have been growing. They claim for the rights that go beyond recognized for the minorities. In particular they emphasized their right to traditional economic systems, to land and its resources, and to their traditional way of life within the framework of self-government or autonomy, claims for a right of self-determination for indigenous populations have been raised enormously.

The first one is the outgrowth of the **Territorial** approach, refers to an autonomy regime with a specific territorial organization. Such organization presupposes the existence of a territorially concentrated minority population. Territorial autonomy for a minority is possible when the minority is concentrated in one region of the country and constitutes a majority within that region. It may apply to all the inhabitants of a certain region, thus including those who are not members of the group for whose benefit the regime is established and who may even resent it. The constitutional form of territorial autonomy can again vary, from being either part of a federal system or forming a regional government with powers devolved from the central government. It can take the form of federation such as Bosnia- Herzegovina, Canada, India, Switzerland or autonomy for one or two regions only as in Aland, Chittagong hill tracts, Greenland, Kashmir, Mindanao, New Caledonia, Scotland, Philippines, Spain etc. However, a particular advantage of

territorial autonomy, being based on spatial principle, it enables ethnic problems to be solved without entrenching ethnicity. In addition territorial autonomy is compare with other arrangements for the diffusion of authority. Arrangements for diffusion are based on a variety of political and constitutional methods or institutions. This may conveniently categorize into five main types: federal system, decentralization, self government, associate statehood and self administration (Lapidoth: 1997, p.49). Autonomy has much in common with some of the other arrangements however also certain differences. Michael Keating notes the territorial autonomy has been widely canvassed as the solution to national diversity. Yet the conflict ridden history of autonomy in India demonstrates the non-territorial forms of autonomy are as important as the territorial forms of autonomy.

The second type of autonomy is a **Personal or Cultural** autonomy regime with the features of a personal law, existing parallel with the nationwide secular law, regulating such matters as marriage, inheritance, adoption etc. such a law may or may not be optional depending on the state. This type of autonomy applies to all the members of a certain group within the state, regardless of the place of their residence. Personal autonomy is normally granted to ethnic, cultural, religious or linguistic minorities. Under personal autonomy the state grants minorities the right to take the necessary steps through their own institutions in order to protect and implement their rights. They may act upon their own discretion, but within the limits of the laws of the state. Today personal autonomy is not widespread and usually when a minority demands autonomy, that minority is striving for territorial autonomy. Thus, Estonia permitted minority groups to be organized as entities of public law and to establish autonomous institution for preserving and protecting their cultural and charitable interests. The German and Jewish minorities used the opportunity opened to them and established their autonomous institutions. In 1991 after its secession from the Soviet Union, Latvia again enacted a law aimed at granting a certain degree of personal autonomy to its minorities. However the use of personal autonomy for easing ethnic tensions should not be discarded.

The third type is a **Power-sharing** autonomy regime, which provides of any power-sharing structure is that two or more ethno-national groups have to jointly rule the common polity and take decisions in consensus in plural societies. No single group can decide important matters

without the consent of the other. On the basis of informal or formal rules all groups have access to political power and other resources. This concept of conflict regulation was prominently shaped during the 1970's by the work of Arend Lijphart, Eric Nordlinger, Gerhard Lehmbrunch and others and often called consociational democracy, consensus democracy, corporatism or proportional democracy. On the one hand, minority rights, transborder regimes, territorial autonomy or federalism can be an integral part of power sharing regime, but on the other hand these models do not necessary include consociational procedures and instruments. In particular federalism and consociational democracy shares common features, but they are by no means identical concepts. Power sharing could also work without federal structures and the other way round. For example some territorial solution of Spanish system of autonomous communities are hardly characterized by shared rule at the central level, but rather by allowing regions or ethnic group a certain degree of self-rule. Power sharing systems contain typically the following institutional arrangements like power sharing executive, (includes representatives from all relevant groups in society), Proportional Representation (all groups or segments are adequately represented within executive, the parliament, the legal system and the public service, including the army or state owned companies), Veto Rights (each group has the opportunity to block political decisions by using its veto rights), Segmented Autonomy (each group enjoys some degree of self government, maintains its own elected bodies, institutions and competencies), Arbitration (in case of a dispute, it is necessary to develop mechanisms for conflict settlement). Two success stories of power sharing, Belgium since 1970 and South Tyrol since 1972, two historic failures Cyprus 1960-63 and Northern Ireland 1973-74 and two recent attempts were the outcomes are not yet clear Bosnia and Herzegovina 1995 and Northern Ireland 1998. Others such as Burundi, Kenya, Lebanon, Liberia, Madagascar, Nigeria, Austria, Switzerland, Malaysia, Colombia and Sierra Leone and in many countries beyond Africa and Middle East power sharing is a popular policy prescription for postcolonial societies (Schneckener, 2002). India has always had a power-sharing system of democracy, especially strongly and unmistakably during its first two decades of independence, from 1947 to 1967, but continuing, albeit in somewhat attenuated form, after about 1967. As Indian democracy has become less firmly consociational, intergroup tensions and violence have increased has become less firmly consociational, the big puzzle of

Indian democracy (Lijphart, 1996). However consociationalism, which has many critics, is not only method of power sharing.

The above structured regime stipulates its own essence but every regime has its own advantages and disadvantages. For example, the Constitution of India contains a number of Special provisions under the Territorial regime in the form of Fifth and Sixth Schedule for the self-governance of various tribal living in various parts of India. Non-Territorial measures of accommodation is like the right to language, forms part of fundamental 'cultural and educational rights of minorities', it entitles the linguistic community to demand to read, among others all official communication and documents in their language. India also favorably rates most of the condition for power-sharing among the other consociational democracies, such as favorable predisposition is matched only by Switzerland and the Netherlands. Perhaps it would have been more surprising if India had not adopted and maintained a power sharing system.

CONCLUSION

The vicious circle between ethnicity and autonomy, as long as autonomy arrangements are seen as a tool to manage the ethnic demands of people, there will always be problems with their implementation. For every instance where an ethnic group is promised autonomy, there will remain others who will claim to be aggrieved by the arrangement. But it is also undeniable that the provisions of the autonomy have provided a basis for ethnic autonomy that can only be improved upon but not abrogated.

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