CHAPTER - I
MINORITY ETHNIC PARTY: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

INTRODUCTION

Ethnicity has always been a major element in both state building and state dissolution, more so in the contemporary world. Managing different ethnic communities is a problem common to most nations. The problem is compounded when the ethnic groups in a nation are keen to be part of government.

Ethnic conflict mainly occurs due to conflicting socio-economic, political and cultural interests. A group that perceives another group as hindering its interests initiates conflict. Conflict also occurs when the socially or politically dominant group perceives that other groups are progressing better economically and are likely to alter the power equation in the future, and takes steps to safeguard its interests. This conflict may take various forms, such as ethnic cleansing (Bosnia, Rwanda), unfavourable immigration laws, dominance and exploitation in various forms. In this case, the majority (dominant) groups fail to recognize the positive contribution the minority ethnic groups make to the progress of the country.¹

How conflicting interests are managed by different ethnic political parties is of considerable academic interest. In general, an ethnic political party entails a political organization based on common ethnic identity, language, culture and common history and territory. A minority ethnic party represents the aspirations of cultural and ethnic groups and becomes an instrument of consolidating the ethnic identity. The consolidation of ethnic identity plays an important role in determining the status of an

ethnic group in the country, more so in the case of minority groups. The key demands of such parties are the formation of more provinces or smaller, relatively autonomous administrative units. In an ethnic political movement an ethnic community gets converted into a political competitor that seeks to combat ethnic antagonists or to impress ethnically defined interests on the agenda of the state. An ethnic political movement purports to reflect the collective consciousness and aspirations of the entire community. In the political process, the entire community gets split into several organizations, each competing for the allegiance of the community and for the right to be its exclusive representative.

Why do ethnic parties succeed in obtaining the support of members of their target ethnic groups? Ethnic political parties currently flourish across the democratic world, Canada, Spain, India, the United Kingdom, Sri Lanka, Macedonia and South Africa being some examples of the established or emerging democracies in which they have taken root. Some scholars maintain that political recognition of ethnic pluralism can create ethnic conflict. Others, such as John Boy Ejobowah, argue that the constitutional recognition of ethnic groups does a long way in deepening democracy, challenging the political domination of majority groups and being a threat to minority culture. This kind of democratic structure, in Ejobowah’s view, expresses ethnic pluralism and avoids the divisiveness that goes with social particularism. In Nigeria, he explains, group expressive arrangements have the prospect of generating social and institutional instability, but non-expressive arrangements promise intense conflict and

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are a more serious threat to the polity. Therefore, there is no fundamental tension between the quest for democratic inclusion and political stability.\(^3\)

In the present thesis, the focus is on the origin of minority ethnic parties and their main protagonists and how they help as a gateway for minority ethnic groups to enter into active political movement.

**Definition of Political Parties**

Social scientists differ among themselves over the definition of political parties or ethnic parties, the differences ranging from the meanings assigned to definitional terms, the research design and the importance attached to different elements of their research. Laski, for instance, defined a political party as "a body of men united for the purpose of promoting by their joint endeavours the public interest, upon some principle on which they are all agreed."\(^4\) He viewed a political party as "an organization which seeks to determine the economic constitution of the State."\(^5\) According to Max Weber the term ‘party’ should be employed to designate an associative type of social relationship, membership of which rests on free recruitment. The end to which its activity is devoted is to secure power within a corporate group for its active members.\(^6\) In the view of Mckean "a party may be defined as an organized group of the electorate that seeks to direct some policies and furnish the personnel of the government."\(^7\) This succinct definition brings out the principal

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\(^3\) Dov Ronen, *Ethnicity, Politics, and Development* (USA: Lynne Rienner, 1996), pp. 5-8.


\(^5\) Ibid.


characteristics of a political party in terms of organization, policy-making and policy-executor.

Sigmund Neumann defines a political party as

The articulate organization of society's active political agents, those who are concerned with the control of government power and who compete for popular support with another group or groups holding divergent views. As such, it is the great intermediary, which links social forces and ideologies to official government institutions and relates them to political action within the larger political community.  

In Neumann's view, a political party is an organization—like any large-scale commercial or governmental organization—founded and maintained for getting candidates elected to public office. In Murice Duverger's view,

In modern parties, organization assumes great importance: It constitutes the general setting for the activity of members, the form imposed on their solidarity; it determines the machinery for the selection of leaders and decides their powers. It often explains the strength and efficiency of certain parties, the weakness and inefficiency of others.  

To perform functions like political socialization, interest aggregation, goal attainment or pattern maintenance a party requires a stable organization with an authority structure. Duverger argues that a party is a collection of communities, a union of small groups dispersed throughout the country and linked by coordinating institutions. This implies that a party can be centred on individuals. 

In the view of S.J. Eldersveld, a political party is a social group, a system of meaningful and patterned activity within the larger society. It consists of a set of individuals performing specific roles and behaving as member actors of a boundaried

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and identifiable social unit.\textsuperscript{12} A party functions as a medium to unite various units of a society to know and serve their interests.

Palombara and Weiner maintain that a party requires continuity of ethnic organization, that is, its expected life span should be independent of the life span of its current leaders. There should be permanent organization at the local level, with regular interaction between local and national-level units. There should be self-conscious determination of leaders at both national and local level to capture and to hold the decision-making power alone or in coalition with others, not simply to influence the exercise of power. There must be a concern in the organization for seeking followers at the polls or in some manner striving for popular support. Palombara and Weiner also argue that the people’s aspiration in a society can be fulfilled only when the parties coordinate their basic units like organization, leadership, communications and decision-making in order to achieve their political end of gaining power.\textsuperscript{13}

\textbf{Ethnic Party}

According to the \textit{Encyclopedia of Nationalism}\textsuperscript{14} an ‘ethnic party’ is a party that represents a particular ethnic group as a whole or an ethnic group of a region. An minority ethnic refers to “an ethnic group situated in a culturally and numerically inferior position within its State”. An ethnic political party is a party that explicitly

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declares itself to be a defender of the cause of one particular ethnic community or set of communities to the exclusion of others and makes such representation central to its strategy of mobilizing voters. Exclusion of ethnic outsiders is essential to an ethnic party.\textsuperscript{15} Multi-ethnic political parties, while also invoking ethnic identities, do not exclude any group on the basis of identity. Kanchan Chandra points out that there is a very thin dividing line between ethnic and multi-ethnic parties. Sometimes a party that focuses on a single ethnic identity as a mobilizing strategy may shift its focus to multi-ethnic identity in order to win an electoral battle.\textsuperscript{16}

A political party needs to mobilize the support of as broad a section of the people as possible not only to further their cause but also to survive competition from other groups that woo the same people's support. Minority ethnic parties derive their support predominantly from areas where the ethnic community is concentrated. Naturally, such regions become the focus of these parties. The national parties also adopt ethnic postures in order to derive support from ethnic groups since, ideologically speaking, they do not confine themselves to any particular region.

An ethnic party may be a minority ethnic party or majority ethnic party.

\textit{Minority Ethnic Party}

In the politics of some nations, a minority is an ethnic group that is recognized as a minority by the laws of its country of habitation and therefore has some rights that others lack. For example, its members might have the right to education and/or communication with the government in their mother tongue.


\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
Not every numerical minority ethnic is a political minority: some are too small or indistinct to validate the costs of providing minority rights, and some are so large, or historically or otherwise important, that they are one of constitutive nations. Bosnia and Herzegovina are examples. Declaring minorities and the extent of their rights often become controversial. Some hold that minorities are not given enough rights while some others hold that minorities demand special rights amounting to discrimination, perhaps even on a path to separatism or supremacism. Particularly controversial is positive discrimination, the idea that (either social or legal) minorities should be given more privileges than the majority. There is also the concept of reverse discrimination, where the minority gains a favourable status seen as superior to that of the majority, such as when their minority status is used to give them preference for acceptance to a university or to gain employment before an equally qualified member of the non-minority community.

**Majority Ethnic Party**

As mentioned in the earlier section that the political party is classified in different ways. The party formed by the majority groups and which also represents the interests of all the groups is called as majority party. On the other hand the party, in most of the cases the minority parties is unable to acquire the support of the majority group. In Maurice Duverger’s view, a “minority party is formed by minority mindset in which linguistic, religious, ethnic and cultural interest become important. This is called minor party. The minor party is both temporary and permanent in its nature”.  

A minor party is one “which is minority minded”.  

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18 Ibid., p. 289.
actually or potentially command an absolute majority in parliament. Parties without a majority bent are often led into demagogy, knowing well that they are unlikely to be called to form government and fulfil their irresponsible and unrealistic promises. Such “minor parties” seemingly include regional, local and such other smaller parties formed on the basis of linguistic, religious, ethnic and cultural interests. “These parties will not accept complete fusion with the majority community. Some are separatist, others autonomist, others could be federalist and some simply regionalist. Minor parties usually are very strong locally and frequently occupying the position of dominant party or even of single party.”

Minority ethnic parties strive both through constitutional means and violence to achieve their interest of making regionalism acceptable. Poor organization building in the national parties blocks the entry of emerging leadership, which for its political survival gives birth to the minority ethnic parties.

The decline of the national parties and their organizational breakdown at the national level also suggests failure to assimilate diverse small groups. The resulting political vacuum helps the emergence of minority ethnic parties, which become platforms for voicing ethnic and local issues and to absorb particular groups, in turn leading to an era of coalition governments.

According to Durverger minor political parties may be (i) personality parties or (ii) permanent minority parties. “Personality parties” are not based on any real party

\[\text{\cite{Durverger}}\]

\[\text{\cite{Duverger1955}}\]
organization but are purely legislators' groups. They mostly originate as dissident groups centred on influential personalities lacking a true social sub-structure they are neither strong nor stable. Permanent minority parties, by their structure, are mass parties. They reflect a section of public opinion, are strongly minority-minded but are relatively stable. If a minority party is a majority in certain districts, its attitude becomes autonomist or even secessionist.\(^{21}\) A minority party may also acquire considerable influence, on either the electoral or the parliamentary plane if the gap between the majority and the minority is small.\(^{22}\)

On the other hand, the 'permanent minority' parties have organizations, which are either national or local. They represent a modern variety of minor parties and in this respect they stand in sharp contrast to the personality parties, which are more of an archaic type. These permanent minority parties represent either a ethnic group without accepting complete fusion with the national community they tend to strive to manifest their strong minority bent of mind. However, these parties are relatively stable, as they are very strong locally frequently occupying the position of dominant party or even of single party at the provincial level.\(^{23}\)

Thus, from the analysis of Duverger's concept of "minor party" conceptual meaning of Minority Ethnic Parties could be arrived at; minority ethnic parties are those which generally and exclusively operate within a limited geographical area within a state or which represent the interests of a particular linguistic, religious, ethnic or cultural groups whose population may be concentrated in an area as small as single assembly

\(^{21}\) Ibid., pp. 290-1.  
\(^{22}\) Ibid., pp. 294-5.  
\(^{23}\) Ibid., pp.290-2.
constituency or as large as an entire state/province or region. In respect of their narrowly defined interests minority ethnic parties stand in sharp contrast to the broad-ranging, diverse concerns of national parties.

Factors behind the formation of ethnic parties
The formation of minority ethnic parties depends on a combination of the following variables, some of which are mutually dependent. These are: (i) uneven economic development of the region, (ii) emergence of ethnic consciousness or identification, (iii) ethnic participation or legitimacy at the societal level, and (iv) territorial identity.

Uneven economic development of the region
Uneven economic development of different regions in a country fosters the multiplication of minority ethnic parties. These parties, being deeply rooted in regional issues and grievances, project the ethnic imbalance and protest against it. They demand the status of a separate state to the economically underdeveloped regions and more resources for their development. Certain castes or tribes may play a dominating role in campaign for greater autonomy of a region or for linguistic rights of a community in some particular area.24 “By appealing to the electorates in ethnic terms, by making ethnic demands on government, and bolstering the influence of ethnically chauvinist elements within each group, parties that begin by merely mirroring ethnic divisions help to deepen and extend them.”25

Emergence of ethnic consciousness or identification

The cultural and linguistic diversity of different groups is an important challenge for the majority party in consolidating different interests of groups. The politicization of identities like language and religion is the main factor in the emergence of regionalism. Their ethnic consciousness helps the minority groups bargain for participation in the development and political process of the country. A desire for the material benefits of modernity such as land, jobs and market motivates individuals to form groups for bargaining.\(^{26}\)

Ethnic Participation or Legitimacy at the societal level

In a composite culture all sections with their distinctive identity are to be afforded full opportunities for development. Based on a just recognition of their legitimate rights, the minorities should have constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards in the national government. One could argue that minority ethnic parties originate because of the establishment of a progressive society, free from exploitation and based on political equality, economic development and social justice securing more rights for their community. Adopting measures for developing all indigenous languages, art and culture also strengthens the understanding and good will among different ethnic groups and sections of people.

Territorial identity

Territorial identity often gives birth to the insidious doctrine of “Sons of the Soil.” The theory has harmed the concept of national integration in an incalculable way. Minority ethnic parties, to make the concept of regionalism in an acceptable term,
make efforts through constitutional means and violence as a vehicle for achieve their interest. Thus, the lack of organization building in the national parties blocked the entry for the newly emerging leadership and hence this leadership for its political survival gave birth to the minority ethnic parties.

Moreover, at the national level, the decline of the national parties and their organizational break down suggest the failure of assimilating diverse small groups resulting in the creation of a political vacuum. This situation immensely helped the other minority ethnic parties as they became platform for voicing ethnic and local issues and could absorb particular groups. These minority ethnic parties’ growing political strength rushed till the political vacuum at national level by ushering in an era of coalition governments.

**Leadership of ethnic Party**

The leadership constitutes an important element in any political party and plays a significant role. The performance of the Party, apart from it organizational and structural strength, depends to a large degree upon to the efficient, dedicated and foresighted leadership. The party ought to evolve an efficient method and pattern for recruitment of leadership. This is more important in a democratic polity as ultimately the leadership has to evolve from society. The linkage patterns of leadership and establishing effective hierarchy are also important. It became more important in the case of ethnic party.

Every social movement offers four roles: leaders, activists, members, and sympathizers. Those who participate with the greatest investment in the movement are
likely to occupy leadership positions or to compete for movement is likely to occupy leadership positions or to compete for these roles.\textsuperscript{27} The composition of leadership broadly represents the existing stratification in society and programme of the party.

The problem of leadership in modern parties has been one of the new dimensions of the political systems. It constitutes as an important characteristic of modern political processes. The rapid social change has brought about transformation in the social structure with alterations in the old values and attitudes as well. Leadership and authority in political parties are complex phenomena.\textsuperscript{28} Different situations, different communities and different periods in time throw up different styles of leadership.\textsuperscript{29}

In a minority ethnic party, in the absence of a large middle-class professional group to offer leadership, the traditional leaders become predominant. Besides, the situational factor was no less significant which greatly helped the majority party rules to rise to the occasion and to voice the ethnic aspirations. Many ethnic political parties have merged localities or regions, but at the national level, their impact has been minimal. The growth of such parties in third world seems to have had significant impact upon its political and constitutional set-up. The formation of governments on their own some time that of coalition government with them as partners in some other states were developments of far reaching consequences. This development challenged the phenomenon of the party system and created the field for the flowering of political culture. These parties some time tended to create all types of obstacles for the national parties and to topple them by hook or by crooks in the face of such hostile stance of

\textsuperscript{27} Milton, n. 2, p. 31.
the national government, demanded more powers for themselves with a view to ensuring their survival, if not to challenge the dominance of the national government.

The primary functions of the leadership of a political party are: to broadly define the goal, policies and programmes of the party, to provide an effective direction for programme implementation, to create a cadre of followers; and establish a process of political socialization among the followers, thus resulting in the creating an effective political base for operation.

An ethnic party leader needs to be oriented towards ethnic issues. He speaks for his community and addresses its concerns and the issues that particularly matter to it. His political bargaining with the government depends upon the benefit he can gain for his people. An ethnic party leader generally tries to resolve ethnic tensions that affect his people but at times may work to keep the ethnic tension alive to ensure continuous support from his people.

Most minority ethnic party leaders build their support structure based on their ethnicity, caste, and religion and lineage alignments. They have a remarkable understanding of the changing political situation and display a capacity to give an effective leadership to the party and to evolve new goals, policies and programmes. Though the minority mindset plays a relatively major role in their mental make-up, those who have deeper ideological orientation and wider understanding of the national trends and who have developed deeper national contacts succeed as better leaders.
Ideologies and Programme of the Party

"Ideology constitutes the mirror of the core values of a political party and political parties are said to be the most important ideological carrier and interpreter."\(^{30}\) The ideology of an ethnic party is based on its objectives and the means available to it in a given environment. Since ideology is related to problem solving, it has to offer not merely a theoretical perspective or framework of analysis, but also a program of action. Ideology tends to significantly influence party structuring. "Ideology is the religion of the party. It equips the party with a meaningful end, and the motivations necessary for mobilizing its organization to achieve that end."\(^{31}\) An ideology seeks to give a rational justification for existing or emerging patterns of interests. The interests of a particular section, group or class in society would be reflected in the ideology subscribed to by that section or group or class. An minority ethnic party can have the ideology to achieve political, economic, social, cultural, and moral well-being and advancement of the people along with its certain immediate concerns like regional issues.

Ethnic support

The regional identification of some of ethnic parties can be accounted for, by one simple reason that like many ethnic parties, they primarily depend on a united regional support structure and having been unable to extend this support structure they have to cater to the demands of this support structure. These parties naturally cannot hope to come to power at the centre. This is simple because they do not get the general support of the people at the national level but just come to power in a particular region where their electoral support base is concentrated.

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Needless to say that so for the ethnic feelings have made people politically more aware of their environment and the minority ethnic parties have educated them by strengthening the grass root institutions. Thus, the ethnic feeling has remained successful in mobilizing the people, but for the narrow out look of the centre, it seems to have failed in cultivating national feeling among the masses.

**Approaches to study ethnic parties**

*Rational Choice Model of Ethnicity*

Hechter adopts the rational choice theory to explain ethnic and racial relations. He rejects the earlier normative and structural theories, because both ignore individual preferences. He explains how individuals within their environmental constraints would choose the most rational and effective way to achieve their political preferences.

 [...] individuals will perform public functions only when they receive a net benefit by doing so. As a result, both collective action and social order depend on the belief of most people that free-riding and crime do not pay. The rational actor will commit crime to attain his or her goals, unless deterred by the fear of imprisonment (or some other punishment). Similarly, in large groups, where informal social controls lose their efficacy because individual networks rarely overlap, collective action is problematic because free riding is hard to detect.\(^\text{32}\)

Hechter maintains that ethnic organization can play a crucial role in two ways—as a major source of private reward or punishment that motivate the individual’s decisions to participate in collective actions and because of individual benefit/cost calculation depends on his estimate of the probability of success of any collective action. Organizations can play a vital role by controlling the information available to their members. When members have few alternative sources of information, organizations

can easily convince them in the success of collective action. On this basis the likelihood of ethnic collective action varies positively with organizational resources, monitoring capacity, solidarity, control over information, history of equitable distribution of collective benefits and adoption of non-violent tactics, while it varies negatively with the organizational size and capacity of the antagonist, including the state, to punish prospective participants.\(^{33}\)

Provision of selective incentives and disincentives may not, however, be sufficient to induce collective action. This has led Hechter to look for causes other than the environmental constraints exercised by ethnic organizations to explain collective actions. He emphasizes the role of individual preferences and argues that under certain conditions individuals can be induced to maximize some collective rather than individual utility schedule. In such a case people would want to act in the interest of their ethnic or racial group and would not even be tempted to take a free ride.

Then he describes the process of preference formation in such a situation. Further he argues that preferences are formed through both selection and learning mechanisms. While the selective mechanism obviously pushes the individual to choose the adaptive preferences, learning mechanism individually form preferences through differentiated association. This is because, differentiated association limits the feasible set of models or persons whose behaviour is available for observation. Especially, because the privileged status that childhood experiences play during the rest of an individual’s life, family plays a crucial role in the individual’s preference formation.

\(^{33}\) Ibid., p.272.
Ethnic Group Entitlement Approach

The entitlement approach asserts that nations and ethnic communities are the natural unit of history and integral elements of human experience. Donald L. Horowitz in his book *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, discussing the theory of entitlement, maintains that especially in developing countries, where the sphere of politics is unusually broad and its impact is powerful, collective social recognition is conferred by political affirmation. Hence, struggles over relative group worth are transferred to the political system. Political affirmation also confers ethnic identification with the polity, which ethnic groups seek. A group may claim that a particular region is theirs and that the political system should reflect this fact by being constituted along essentially homogeneous lines. Others groups merely claim the right to be included on equal terms.34

According to this view, the claim of inclusion does not spring from the contest for group worth but from the urge to be in harmony with one’s surroundings, to belong in a territory. This inclusion and exclusion keeps changing with priorities in politics. If the presence of ethnic strangers provides an unflattering contrast with one’s own group, that would be a good enough reason to demand the exclusion of the strangers. Homogeneity would remove the offending comparison. Claims to group legitimacy provide alternative ways of measuring worth. If a group suffers by invidious comparison on achievement motivation, but has a special connection with the land, it may emphasize this alternative basis for relative group evaluation. Groups that suffer from such comparison tend, therefore, to make stronger claims to priority by virtue of

34 Donald L. Horowitz, n, 26, p. 185.
legitimacy. Relative group worth and relative group legitimacy merge into a politics of ethnic entitlement.

The fear of ethnic domination and suppression is a motivating force for the acquisition of power as an end. Fundamental issues such as citizenship, electoral system, designation of official languages and religions, the rights of groups to a 'special position' in the polity, become the recurring subjects of politics.

In Horowitz' view, in most developing countries the timing of ethnic conflict usually depended on the approach of independence. The transfer of power raised the cardinal question of who would rule. The greatest group anxiety was to avoid trading of old colonialism for a new one. Many backward ethnic groups opposed independence fearing that they would be again colonized by the advanced group. But when these backward ethnic groups were in the majority they felt that independence would improve their position. There also remained a strong current of fear that an unranked system might be transformed into a ranked system, with clear super ordinates and subordinates. The mutual insecurity resulted in incessant competition for power, which led to political tension.

The imminence of independence aroused "fear of ill treatment" along ethnic lines in Mauritius: the then dominant Franco Mauritian population feared being overshadowed by the more populous Hindus. New emergent groups tried to occupy important positions in the civil service in order to gain power. The backward or

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36 Ibid, p. 188.
37 Ibid, p. 189.
advanced groups that were not in favour of early independence either collaborated with the colonialists or demanded formal guarantees.

Marvin L. Rogers argues that if the ethnic groups have been mobilized into politics without being socialized to support a genuinely democratic, multi-ethnic political system, it would lead to frequent suspension of government. The attitudinal behaviour of the dominant group determines the interethnic relation. He argues that in a multi-ethnic society, group claims are not necessarily equal. Some groups seek domination, not the mere avoidance of it. Some seek to exclude others from the polity altogether, and some seek merely to be included on equal terms. If all groups merely want inclusion, distrust and anxiety would still make ethnic conflict serious but more tractable. Claims to political inclusion and exclusion always create incompatibility between groups. If all the groups are ready to share political power, generally the scope of ethnic conflict is little. Political claims can therefore be scaled, from equality to priority to exclusivity. Equal political opportunities and function limit the scope of ethnic conflict. Ethnic claims respond to the political market, which in democratic countries is heavily structured by the electoral process and elsewhere by the balance of force.

The group entitlement theory also deals with group legitimacy. Ethnic group claims to priority or exclusion are supported by appeals to moral principles. The moral basis of ethnic claims lies in group legitimacy within a territory. Legitimacy is distributed unevenly among ethnic groups. There are several bases of group legitimacy. Some of

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38 Ibid, p.192.
them are: prior occupation, special mission, traditional rule, the right to succeed
colonial power and colonial recognition of group legitimacy.\textsuperscript{40}

R. Gusfield has articulated the objectives of symbolic conflict in terms of status
politics. In his view, politics holds a commanding position for determining group
status in post-colonial societies, for two reasons. First, non-political institutions have
been relatively weak in such societies and cannot compete effectively with the state in
the allocation of prestige. Second, under colonial rule, attributes and emoluments of
ethnic status become matters of state policy. According to this view the objective of
symbolic demands is a public affirmation of legitimacy where legitimacy is contested.
The issues chosen for symbolic emphasis depend on the issues that demarcate the
contestants. Symbolism is effective in ethnic conflict, because it provides space to
ethnic claims in ideas and associations that have acknowledged moral force beyond
the particular conflict.\textsuperscript{41}

The pursuit of conflict through symbols thus obscures their segmental character by
linking them with universals and simultaneously avoids false prevailing local
ideology. In the context of symbolic politics, language, economic demand and civil
service became crucial indicator. In the multi-ethnic society, under the colonial
regime the language of administration was the language of the ruler, and the status of
language denotes the status of the group that speaks the language. All the groups
claim priority. Demanding that their language be given what they invariably call ‘its
rightful place’ by which they mean exclusive official status. The status of the

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid, pp. 201-9.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid, p. 219.
language is a symbol of newfound group dignity. Claims for official status for a
language are typically demands for an authoritative indication. Some people have a
legitimate claim to greater respect, importance, or worth in the society than have
other.\textsuperscript{42} Language is therefore a potent symbolic issue because it accomplishes a
double linkage. It links political claims to ownership with psychological demands for
the affirmation of group worth, and it ties this aggregate matter of group status to
outright careerism, thereby binding elite material interests to mass concerns.\textsuperscript{43}

The entitlement theorists claim that the assertion of the dominant ethnic group in the
civil service is other important issue of symbolic ethnicism. During colonial times, the
civil service was an instrument for administration. Through the assertion in the civil
service, groups feel satisfaction for their enhanced status. Since the groups rarely
approach parity in both numbers and educational attainment, there is bound to be a
less satisfied group. In the last, the theory predicts that ethno symbolic politics lead to
ethnic conflicts if the different groups interest is not properly represented in the
political system.

\textit{Theory of Patronage-Democracies and formation of ethnic party}

Kanchan Chandra in \textit{Why Ethnic Parties Succeed} explains when and why voters and
elite in patronage-democracies are privileged ethnic identities in their vote giving and
vote seeking strategies. She argues that individual voters and elite in patronage-
democracies are motivated by a desire for either material, psychic goods or a
combination of these two.

\textsuperscript{42} Gusfield, \textit{Symbolic Crusade: Status Politics and the American Temperance Movement}
\textsuperscript{43} Donald, n.26, p. 219.
In a patronage democracy, the state is the principle means of obtaining both better livelihood and higher status. The individuals who control the state are in a position of enforcement of power over the lives of others. It also brings with its higher status. Individuals who do not have the means to launch a bid for political office, proximity to those who seek state office becomes the principal sources of both material and psychic benefits. Ties to a political patron increase a voter’s chance of obtaining valued state resources and services. Patronage-democracies therefore, produce an overwhelming preoccupation with politics on the part of both elites and voters seeking both material and psychic good.

She further argues that an ethnic party is likely to succeed in a patronage democracy when it provides elite from across the subdivisions included in its target ethnic category with greater opportunities for ascent within its party organization than the competition. When voters form its target ethnic category are numerous enough to take the party to a winning or influential position. She mentions that the pre-operational representation systems with multi-party system with coalition government allow small ethnic groups a greater degree of efficacy.44

The incorporation of new elites, however, is a deeply intractable problem for any political party- ethnic, non-ethnic and multi-ethnic party. The allotment of party posts to new elites usually means the displacement of their previous occupants. As a result, political parties seeking to induct new elites are faced with a collective action problem. Finally, she mentions that ethnic parties are most likely to succeed in

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44 Chandra, n. 15, pp. 111-15.
patronage democracies when they have competitive rules for intra-party advancement and the ethnic group they seek to mobilize is larger than the threshold of winning or leverage imposed by the electoral system.

**Conclusion**

Political parties play a vital role in addressing issues that concern their constituents. In the modern multi-ethnic society, multifarious factors influence the nature and growth of ethnic political parties, ultimately influencing the way the parties try to further the cause of the people they represent. Political activity in a society finds its expression in an articulate manner through political parties, which compete for the political power. Politics in a multi-ethnic society is reflected more in ethnic terms in which ethnic minorities are convinced that their ethnic identity would bring them benefits that are more political.

An ethnic conflict cannot be avoided between minority and majority community in a multi-ethnic society when their representative party through achieving political power addresses complex and conflicting interests of various ethnic groups. The failures of the government in its attempts to fulfil the aspirations of various cohabiting ethnic groups in a multi-ethnic society creates a gap between the demands of people and actual fulfilment by the government, which influences the majority-minority dichotomy. Ethnic consciousness that creates the dichotomy is caused when the minority community feels that the government formed by the majority parties neglects its aspirations and discriminates against it. This ethnic consciousness pushes the minority community to demand its rightful place in the mainstream national politics. In this process of creation of ethnic consciousness, ethnic-minority parties emerge to
address the issues of the minority communities. The minority ethnic parties give emphasize issues related to social transformation in terms of social equality, social and economic democracy and political transformation.

With the above-delineated conceptual sketch on minority ethnic party and its several shades and dimensions such as leadership and organization, one would be in a position to unfold the complexities involved in the study of Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC). Before we embark upon studying SLMC, it is imperative to throw some light on the Muslim community itself in Sri Lanka.