CHAPTER I

MINORITIES IN PLURAL SOCIETIES:
A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE
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Minorities in Plural Societies: A Theoretical Perspective

Nation building continues to be one of the most challenging tasks for the states in plural societies. Irrespective of the differences in ideological framework or economic status, i.e. whether it is a liberal democracy based on Capitalism or a Socialist political system; or even a developing or a developed economy – the common dilemma faced by most of the states having pluralistic societies is – how to reconcile the common or shared interests of the society as a whole with the diverse interests of its heterogenous groups.

Most nation-states have in their territory a population drawn from different racial, religious and linguistic backgrounds, and broadly speaking the factors responsible for such phenomena as T.K. Oomen points out, are conquest, colonization and immigration. The term plural or pluralistic is the political connotation used for such socio-cultural, racial and religious heterogenity in society. Hence by plural societies we mean the existence of segmented sociological groups which can establish effective cultural and political cohesion within the society and also make cultural, economic or political claims on the society on the basis of their group identity.

The kind of pluralism that developed in political science or political sociology took a different form; an approach that stressed the dispersal rather than concentration of power. Contemporary political philosophy is still in the process of identifying the ideal

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mechanism to deal with the issues of diversity, plurality and difference.² Plural societies these days are better described as multi-ethnic states, and the resurgence of ethnic, cultural and religious demands in the world over in recent years, is mostly referred to as rise of 'ethnicity' or 'ethno-nationalism'. Race, language and religion largely responsible for rendering most societies socio-culturally heterogenous, also contribute in characterizing the nation-states as multi or polyethnic.

Group Consciousness of Ethnic and Other Forms

The historical resurgence of group identities all over the world, on racial, religious, linguistic or cultural lines has been described by the blanket term of 'ethnicity', or as an assertion of ethnic identities. But there is a definite need to delimit ethnic entities from other social collectivities such as nationality, caste, minority groups based on religion or other communal groupings.

'Ethnicity' a coinage popularised by American scholars has been derived from the French word 'Ethnie' which refers to people who share a common history, tradition, language and life-style, but are uprooted from and or unattached to a homeland.³ It is also pointed out that although the term 'ethnicity' is in wide currency and is used to describe a variety of collectivities, there is a near universal agreement that it connotes a combination of biological (racial) and cultural characteristics. Thus, terms like 'primordial collectivities' and 'communal groups' are preferred by some social scientists although for different reasons. While T.K. Oomen observes that "'primordial collectivities' refers to all

² Anne Phillips, Democracy & Difference (Cambridge, 1993), pp.139-140.
³ Oomen, n.1, p.11.
varieties of collectivities, and not essentially ‘minorities’, and are generally formed on the basis of race, caste, language, religion, territory. He further states that "while the biological and cultural characteristics may coexist in the case of primordial collectivity, this is not a necessary condition". Ted Robert Gurr while essentially studying the problems faced by minorities all over the world, subscribes to the view that expressions like ‘communal group’ are more appropriate to describe minority, ethnic group or national people - as people have many possible bases for communal identity: shared historical experiences or myths, religious beliefs, language, ethnicity, religion of residence, (and in caste like systems, customary occupations). The key to identifying such communal groupings is not the presence of a particular trait or combinations of traits, but rather the shared perception that the defining traits, whatever they are, set the group apart.

Religion forms a very distinct basis of group identity in a culturally plural society. Religion as the sole criterion for communal group identity is also associated with minority groups in a multi-religious and multi-ethnic social framework. However, while providing an all embracing social identity, religion, does not necessarily provide its community a common territorial history, language or lifestyle. Religious groups can be a heterogenous in terms of their demography, dispersal and language and lifestyle. Therefore religious groups while having distinct communal group identity which sets them apart from others in a plural society, cannot be essentially described as an ethnic group adhering to common biological (racial) and cultural (language, lifestyle, historical tradition) characteristics.

4 Ibid., p.31.

Often because of their dispersed character neither can they claim a specific part of territory as their homeland. Christians and muslims minorities of South Asia are such communities. Especially the Muslim minorities in India, Sri Lanka and Nepal fit into this category. However, there is a need to define the term minority since the terms ethnic and minorities are generally used interchangeably.

Who Are The Minorities?

The most simplistic description of minority is given by the Permanent Court of International Justice when it defines 'Minority' as "inhabitants who differ from the rest of population in race, religion or language." However, in contemporary political usage the definition of minority groups still remains a debatable issue. According to Francesco Capotori, special rapporteur of the U.N. Sub Commission of Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities -

A group numerically inferior to the rest of the population of a state, in a non-dominant position, whose members - being nationals of the State - possesses ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics differing from those of the rest of the population and show, if only implicitly, a sense of solidarity, directed towards preserving their culture, tradition, religion or language.

These definitions imply that minority is a group of citizens of a state, numerically a minority and not dominant in that state with ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics,

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different from those of the majority population, bound up with one another, animated if only implicitly by a collective will. Hence a minority may be any group - ethnic, religious or linguistic. Maintaining this line of definition a section of social scientists have even pointed out that the notion of minority is not essentially ethnological rather it is political-legal. While it would be incorrect to use ethnic and minority interchangeably, each one can be used as an adjective to the other.

The numerical status of Minority is again controversial as there is also a dominant belief among the Social Scientists that population size is not necessarily a feature of minority status. This view is substantiated by the Subcommission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities set up under the Human Rights Commission which drafted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and it defined minorities as "only those non-dominant groups in a population which possess or wish to preserve stable ethnic religious or linguistic traditions or characteristics markedly different from those of the rest of population".

Arnold Rose in the International Encyclopedia of the Social Science, has defined minority as:

...a group of people, differentiated from others in the same society by race, nationality, religion or language, who both think of themselves as a differentiated group with negative connotations. Further, they are relatively lacking in power

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8 Ibid.

and hence are subjected to certain exclusions, discriminations and other differential treatments.

Thus even from the sociological point of view the concept of minority does not have any quantitative connotations. Minority identification is mainly derived from the dominant-subordinate relationship - characterized by discrimination, prejudice and exclusion, practised by the former, and self segregation by the latter. However, such demarcation is possible only when in terms of specific relationship of social groups with other groups, and the nature of such relationships is largely determined by the prevailing pattern of economy and polity in that society and the kind of control exercised over such economic and political resources. Minority, thus as rightly observed by Jaganath Pathy in his study of the 'Ethnic Minorities in India (viz tribes in Orissa)', "...is not a static concept nor a mere object but dynamic subject striving for restructuration of the relation of domination and discrimination."\textsuperscript{10}

**Cultural Pluralism and the State Policies**

The primary task of nation building in a polyethnic social framework has been to strive and maintain the nationalist expectancy which highlights political integration, economic development and cultural pluralism. Although in order to pursue an integrationist policy cultural pluralism is mostly perceived as an obstacle to the realization of the first two objectives.

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid.
Such conflict began with the imposition of the universal model of 'nation-state' (practised by the western colonial powers) on the decolonised territories of Asia, Africa and Latin America. It is important to note here that this model was perfected by old nation-states of Europe through wars, bloody nationist revolutions and colonisation. After the breakdown of imperial state system in Europe and a series of internecine wars fought for centuries a new basis that was found for organising the states – ethno-linguistic and ethno-religious groups called nations. The superimposition of this model of nation-state on ethnically plural post colonial societies got some initial support as it offered them a state for their nascent nationalism and - a goal that they were striving for during their nationalist struggle against the imperial powers. Western 'nation-state' model also promised internal order as well as political coherence for a culturally diverse population, but as D.L. Seth rightly pointed out it was possible 'only if they could succeed in transcending traditional group loyalties in favour of an abstract sense of community, called nation. The idea of implementing the nation-state model on culturally plural third world societies was basically inspired by the Deutschian concept of nation building - i.e. a process of homogenisation would take over as a result of the modernisation drive which in turn diffuse the conflict of ethnic pluralities. Thus, this model, theoretically derived from a certain interpretation of the western experience of building a modern nation-state - generally sought to reconcile

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the centrifugal forces of ethnicity with the idea of nationhood and, in the process assigned a central role to the state for building a nation.\textsuperscript{12}

Multi-cultural and multi-national societies of third world countries while adopting such state policy for nation building - tried to harmonise the social relations. They ensured that various ethnic minorities existed as social categories with the freedom to preserve their distinct lifestyles, their customs and traditions. However, they were not allowed to function as groups and communities which devised and lived by their own ideas and tradition of political rule and cultural organisation. Thus, the integrationist policy of the state operated at two levels. At the visible level, the state sought to homogenise the ethnic pluralities into a civil society, through expansion of the market and extension of citizenship to them. At the second level, which was not so visible but is now coming out in open, the state tried to integrate the ethnic minorities into a national society dominated by the ethos and interest of the ethnic majority.\textsuperscript{13} But as none of the efforts succeeded in resolving the contradiction of civil society and national society, grievances and aspirations of the subordinate groups have, of late, started challenging the existing state structure.

Faced with such formidable problems in achieving the goal of creating a 'national' society, states in many third world countries often align themselves with the dominant cultural religious identity of that particular society. In doing so, as rightly observed by D.L. Sheth,

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{13} For the modernisation view of nation building see Ernest Gellner Nations \& Nationalism (Oxford 1983) Also refer Karl Deutsch, Nationalism \& Social Communication (MIT Press, Massachusset, 1962), 1Ind ed.
... the state acquires either a theocratic or a majoritarian-cultural character, the latter if the epitome of national identity chosen by it - is a dominant language (e.g. Sinhala in Sri Lanka) or the culture of a dominant region (e.g. Punjab in Pakistan) or the religion of the majority community (i.e. Islam in Bangladesh). The former tendency asserts itself when the political authority of the state is not allowed to differentiate itself from the priestly authority of the dominant religion.14

(The Hindu Kingdom of Nepal for instance even after the establishment of democratic political set up, can fall in this category of dominant culture identity). Sheth further observes that a state aligned to either can be sustained only by subjugating the cultural minorities however they may be defined in religious linguistic or ethnic terms.15

Thus there remains a contradiction between the political entity called the modern nation-state, whose primary role is of a major agent of change seeking to bring about a homogeneous national society and technologically induced economic growth, and the existing cultural diversities in the society, which tend to oppose such homogenisation drive of the state. It is to tackle this conflict that the state and the predominant social elites in these societies engage themselves in the project of creating and sustaining a supra-cultural entity called the nation, often by activating the principle of majority ethnicism as a basis for nationhood.16 The cultural pluralities then begin to be viewed in numerical terms and

14 Sheth, n.11, pp.425-29.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
are perceived as minorities. They are increasingly sought to be pacified, contained, subjugated or transformed, through the symbolism of the majoritarian culture.

The persistence of the above mentioned contradiction thus underscores the setback of the political modernisation school represented by Leonard Bernd, Samuel P. Huntington etc. which assumed that industrialisation and urbanisation would reduce the ethnic and primordial consciousness. And assimilation of minorities into a large integrated whole was viewed as the inevitable future. According to Huntington political modernisation means national integration and that it involves "the replacement of a large number of traditional religious, familial, and ethnic political authorities by a single, secular, national political authority". However the growing polarisation on ethnic and religious lines and marginalisation of the peripheral or the subordinate groups have stressed the fact that assimilation assumptions of modernisation theory have proved to be inoperative.

Especially in many third world societies the modern state has not emerged out of social process of aiming for a national civil society, but has been a superficially imposed political phenomenon engaged in creating a national society solely for its survival and legitimacy. It regulates the economy, determines the contents and modes of imparting education it also seeks to expand the identity of its citizens from cultural one to that of consumer and producer - and all these are mediated through the cultural symbolism of the

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ethnic majority.\textsuperscript{18} Derived by the need to create territorial solidarity among its people, these activities of the state are thus intended to create and maintain the 'nation' with which persisting pluralities have to come to terms. Explaining the construction of state sponsored nation building, Sudipta Kaviraj writes that most nationalist politicians (of the third world nation-states) were in love with the narrative of western modernity, especially its dominant hegenomic form.\textsuperscript{19} Discussing the case of India, he observes that one of the central division within the nationalist ideology was between the homogenising and pluralist trend; but defining the post colonial Indian nation-state according to the discourse of western modern nation-state (i.e. being culturally homogeneous), did not factually fit the cultural reality of the subcontinent.\textsuperscript{20}

This brings us to the subject of cultural plurality itself, especially when it assumes political connotations. Plurality with its relationship to an authoritative arena, the sovereign territorial state (political system) which provides sharply demarcated boundaries within which groups define themselves and interacts. The interaction competition, conflict of these groups constitute important ingredients in the overall pattern of political transaction of the policy.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{18} Sheth, n 11. An interesting discussion on the state in a plural society has been presented by Rajni Kothari in the Ethnicity chapter of his book \textit{Rethinking Development} (Delhi, 1988), pp.191-224.


\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{21} Crawford Young, \textit{The Politics of Cultural Pluralism} (Wisconsin, 1976), p.12. Young in his study draws the basis for these solidarity groupings as commonalities of ethnicity, language, race, religion, territory; and therefore uses the term 'communal' as the functional equivalent of the cultural groupings.
To deal with the range of cultural diversity the modern states in the developing world have adopted different cultural policies derived from the plurality of societies defined by the state boundaries. However, these policies can be broadly categorised as 'assimilationist' and 'pluralist'. As mentioned earlier, the assimilationist theory is essentially linked with the modern nation building process. Modernising theorists assert that 'nationalism' is a phenomenon of the transition from tradition to modernity and fulfils a particular function in societies undergoing this change.\(^\text{22}\) In traditional societies, people lived in a variety of groups, mainly ascriptive, having no necessary connection with any political organization, and above all no body supposed that boundaries of cultural group should be coterminous with those of the state. In the course of the transition to modernity certain groups, notably those based upon religion and language became politicized and claimed that the boundaries of their group should correspond to those of the political unit in which they live, in other words, they demanded a nation-state.\(^\text{23}\)

In line with this theory, thinkers like Ernest Gellner, Karl Deutsch and Anthony D. Smith have come with their own interpretations of the assimilationist thrust witnessed by the plural societies in the course of nation building. In the view of Ernest Gellner, in traditional states, power was decentralised as the traditional society was highly structured with each member having a known position in the society usually acquired by birth; whereas in a modern state, the single government is all important - its diffusion erodes the structural framework of traditional societies, Gellner further points out that

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\(^{22}\) See David Taylor and Malcom Yapp (eds) *Political Identity in South Asia* (London, 1979), They discuss this phenomenon of nationalism in their General Framework chapter, pp.1-33.

\(^{23}\) Ibid.
since modern societies are less structured, a man's position depends upon his achievements, and in order to communicate with others, he is obliged to fall back upon his culture, in which form political loyalties come to be expressed. Thus the diffusion of structural framework is replaced with the culture of the dominant group. Other groups are forced to assimilate themselves to the dominant culture. In case they cannot, they (the other groups) tend to break away and form a separate political unit in which they may reserve their own culture. And one feels that the relevance of this model to the South Asian reality cannot be ignored.

Like Gellner, Anthony Smith too highlights in his modernising theory, the role of the modern state in giving a assimilatist thrust to the nation building in plural society. He emphasised that political power, which was diffused among many groups in traditional societies became concentrated in the hands of the state in modern society, and thus pointed out the dynamic role of 'scientific' (modern) state in fostering changes in political identification by centralism and interventionism.

While studying the assimilationist cultural policies of the state in the process of modern nation building in plural societies it must be noted that within the assimilationist approach, there are three, varying models to reduce, if not eliminate cultural splits. Pathy, in his study of the process of assimilation of ethnic minorities observes that the most

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24 Ibid., p.11. The argument about the state finding a cultural basis in the society is also most explicitly put forward by Ernest Gellner in his works (n.13).

25 For Anthony Smith's contribution in the modernising theories of the state see his *Theories of Nationalism*, (London, 1971), see Deutsch, n.11, and as also cited by Taylor & Yapp, n.20, p.11.
dominant model is that of the consensus model of integration based on modernisation propagated by Deutsch and others; Arend Lijphart's 'Consociationalism' can be considered as the second assimilationist model which implies a basic agreement among ethnic division on parliamentary procedures, intergroup accommodation and strong elites who are engaged in "negotiation politics" and capable of imposing the compromise on their constituent groups. And the third perspective is the control model, which holds that due to structural pluralism tensions cannot be easily dissipated, hence active domination of one group over another would be the most effective solution. It is needless to say that cultural policies based on assimilation theory, have been commonly followed by post colonial states. For attaining national integration it was felt that the primordial ethnic or religious ties must be replaced by loyalty to the state.

The other approach i.e. the pluralist one, is widely known as cultural pluralist or the group pluralist perspective of the state. Associated mostly with J.S. Furnivall & M.G. Smith this approach calls for a willingness on the part of the dominant group to permit cultural differences. As according to the theorists, this alone can recognise the aspirations of various groups in multi-ethnic societies through decentralisation. This approach also sees the state both as a responder to the demand of organised groups in the society and as

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26 As noted by Jagannath Pathy, n.9, p.33.

27 Ibid., For a comprehensive study of the concept of 'Consociationalism' see Arend Lijphart Democracies in Plural Societies (New Haven, 1977), viz Chap. II 'Consociational Democracy' (pp.25-52).

28 J.S. Furnivall, Colonial Policy & Practice (London, 1948); The most important statements of M.G. Smith's theory of cultural pluralism are in "Social & Cultural Pluralism" in Vera Rubin (ed.) Social & Cultural Pluralism in the Carribean - as cited by Crawford Young, n.21, p.17.
a precipitator in the formation of new groups, including ethnic ones. 29 According to Cliford Geertz, another proponent of cultural pluralist school, the array of ethnic groups that exist in any society are 'givens', but political mobilization of these groups bring them in conflict with each other and also creates a tension between primordial or civil politics that can be resolved ultimately only through an 'integrative revolution', although how such integrative revolution was to be brought was never explained by Geertz. 30 This approach also ignores the specific character of national society and the unequal relations between parts and the whole. At times it even legitimizes the colonial policy of indirect rule and even isolation of backward ethnic minorities. In the words of M.G. Smith, the plural society is composed of socially or culturally defined collectivities - which are closed corporations, and are bound within a state framework through the domination of one group, for whom the State becomes the agency of subjugation. 31 Another serious drawback of the group pluralist perspective, according to Paul Brass is that even in the liberal democratic states, access of groups to policy making is often selectively controlled. 32 In many cases particular interest organization succeed, with the help of the

29 See Urmila Phadnis Ethnicity & Nation Building in South Asia (N. Delhi, 1990), pp.17-18.


31 Crawford Young, n.21, p.17.

32 Paul Brass, Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison (N. Delhi, 1990), p.250. In this study Brass has offered a very candid interpretation of the phenomena of 'ethnicity' and 'nationalism', in the context of Indian subcontinent. He has based his study on the basis of two central arguments, first, ethnicity and nationalism are not 'givens' but are social and political constructions, and secondly both of them are modern phenomena inseparably connected with the activities of the modern centralising state.
state, in capturing virtually monopolistic control over some policy areas for long periods of time.

The Marxist, especially the neo-Marxist views on the state and its policies are, that state's interaction with ethnic plurality largely reflects upon the economic reality of country's resource distribution. While the classical Marxist view, holds the state as an instrument of one class, or essentially an organ of class domination of one class by another, i.e. of the bourgeoisie over proletariat. Neo-Marxist thinkers like Althusser, Habermas, Poulantzas, however have reconciled to the fact that modern industrial state in relatively an autonomous institution. Where a distinct 'Managerial class' (i.e. the managers of state apparatus) have emerged, and they have a separate interest to protect. Particularly an interest in maintaining their power and control, which may lead them to act independently, of, or even against the wishes of the dominant bourgeois groups.33

For this reason, the modern industrial state, according to some of the neo-Marxists, adopts the group pluralist approach in order to provide the society a platform for conflict resolution and power balance,34 on a superficial level, and in essence not fully disturbing the inherent bias for the privileged class. However, all the neo-Marxists do not wholly subscribe to aforesaid view. The proponents of internal colonialism theory (viz. ImmanuSel Wallersten & Michael Hechter) do not feel that modern state is relatively autonomous as it is embedded externally in a world economic system in relation to which it cannot act independently; while internally, it is dominated by minority or plurality ethnic


34 Ibid.
groups engaged in differential distribution of privileges. Under such conditions ethnic struggles are more pervasive and salient than class struggles. According to Wallerstein, the essence of the modern state is in its role as a distributor of privileges and a differentiator among ethnic groups or in other words it distributes economic development and valued jobs unevenly, and in such a way that the core region of the country controls the best job while the peripheral are dependent upon the core and automatically the ethnic groups that inhabit those regions are confined to the least skilled and prestigious jobs.

Minorities' Response to Homogenisation

The growing assertion of the ethnic identity or the persistent commitment to tradition among the backward minorities in almost all multi-ethnic societies, is the logical corollary to the existing models of nation building, and the cultural policies adopted by the state in plural societies, and especially in post colonial third world countries. As Rajni Kothari points out - Ethnicity is a response including reaction to the excesses of the modern project of shaping the whole humanity around the modern state system and 'world culture' based on modern technology, a pervasive communications and a universalising

35 Brass, Ibid., pp.251-252.

36 Immanuel Wallerstein is known for his defining the role of the modern centralising state as a distributor of privileges and differentiator among ethnic groups. See 'The Capitalist World Economy', by the same author (Cambridge, UK, 1979), p.187. Another thinker belonging to the same school, Michael Hechter, who holds the view that modern state is a upholder of 'cultural labour' that distributes valued job and economic development unevenly.
education system. In other words it is a natural response to the homogenisation process aimed at strait-jacketing the whole world.

Thus in the given scenario, minorities perceive and in effect use ethnic or religious identity mostly as a defence mechanism, and hence they make a concerted effort to follow their own values, tradition and culture. Significantly, religion as a basis of social identity, and cultural conflict has gained ground over the years in the third world countries (viz. in Asia) which were initially marked by heavy pre capitalist survivals or weak or dependent capitalism. The weak and conflicting ruling classes in order to further their narrow political interests maintain a hold over the centralised leadership, and often indulge in ethnic prejudices and religious divide mostly to distract people from urgent social problems. The communal situation (Hindu-Muslim conflict) in India can be mentioned in this context. In fact the communal situation which is marked by culturally distinct but geographically inter-mingled communities are essentially nurtured by modern political process and state system. Like 'nationalism', 'communalism' is also a modern phenomenon. However, it tends to incorporate some elements of the past, such as memories of the past conflict, along with recent developments like economic competition, religious and cultural antipathies, thus presenting a rather complex ideological and political discourse. While discussing the case of communalism in India, Pathy in his study observes that it cannot be equated with cultural renaissance, nor with aggressive revivalism, as it is a response to the urges and interests of some contemporary social

37 Rajni Kothari, ibid, n.18, p.192.
classes and strata. Hence, it represents a distorted reflection of reality and serves only certain social classes and interests.  

Nevertheless, movements based on religious identity, with social and economic content, assume legitimacy when they demand equal rights and opportunities as equal citizens of a state, which is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society, but has adopted a homogenising and assimilatist nation building approach. Such movements do not assume a communalist character but can be seen as the peripheral dissent against the thrust of the dominant culture. As observed by Rajni Kothari while studying ethnicity, that communalism in the positive sense, means consciousness of the common identity of a group of people based on their cultural heritage (religion, language, caste, region etc).  

However, Kothari clarifies that communalism which is based on an exclusive identity that denies respect for other identities and thinks of unity which can be achieved not organically but subjugating the others, becomes 'negative ethnicity'.

The apprehension of minority groups about loss of their cultural identity is usually fuelled by the concept of hegemony of the dominant culture - which at times questions the so called privileges and rights of the minority and attempt to impose its own religious or cultural values on the whole society. This kind of cultural deprivation also manifests in

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39 Pathy, ibid., p.38.

40 Rajni Kothari, n.16, p.197, Kothari observes that the regenerative and holistic dimension of 'ethnicity' or 'community' while getting transformed into negative one has unfortunately assumed the term 'communalism' in the South Asian political discourse. Thus he attempts to explain the meaning of 'communalism' both in the positive and negative sense.

41 According to Leo Driedgere, there are basically two types of discriminations, (a) attitudinal and (b) behavioural that are practised by the majority against minorities -
the policies of modern states which equate the state with the nation. (Over here the nation is implying a single dominant ethnic group in a plural society) even in democratic political order; and in some cases, states even refuse to recognise the limited traditional rights of minorities to religion, language and culture. This not only affects the interethnic relationship but in fact polarises the religious or ethnic minority against the dominant group accusing them of practising cultural as well as economic and political deprivation. The growing cultural resurgence among the ethnic minority groups who fear a loss of identity, has become all the more apparent in the given situations. Neo-Marxist thinkers have also conceded the importance of culture in their political economic interpretation and core-periphery approach of understanding ethnic mobilizations, when they point out that the role of the state as a differentiator, or biased distributor of privileges among ethnic groups (as mentioned earlier in the chapter).

While the neo-Marxist cultural deprivation models provide a combination of economic and cultural factors and explain the politicized ethnic group behaviour, the role of the elites or the ethnic leadership, both in the 'dominant' (majority in some contexts) or 'subjugated' (minority) groups can by no means be overlooked. Even among the so called 'majority community' or the dominant group, it is the elite or the leadership (which is in minority within the group) who interpret the hegemonical culture as majoritarianism - and influence the state to accept it as the views of the majority and that it should also force the 'minorities' to accede to that formulation. Similarly the reaction, this kind of behaviour

42 in the form of differential treatment; prejudicial treatment; disadvantaging treatment and denial of desire. As cited by A.S. Narang, n.7, p.35.

42 The role and importance of elites or the privileged leadership as underlined by R. Kothari, n.18, p.206.
produces, in the minority communities, also plays into the hands of small privileged group within the minority. In other words, the elites (leadership) and interelite competition of specific types and alliance patterns with the state are critical precipitant of ethnic group conflict and political mobilization. Paul Brass who is accredited with this particular view of ethnic group mobilization asserted that

Without elite entry into such situations, injustices and inequalities may be accepted, cultural decline or assimilation may occur and grievances may be expressed in isolated, anomie or sporadic forms of conflict and disorder. ⁴³

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The foregoing argument is especially significant in the case of development of Muslim ethnicity in South Asia. Brass in his study of Muslim separatism in India has observed that although Islam in non-Muslim states (viz. India) has often provided a strong basis for Muslim separatism, yet the fact remains that, it is not the distinctiveness of Islam as such in relation to other religion that is decisive, for, the degree of self consciousness that varies in different context is important too. ⁴⁴ For instance the varying degree of mobilisation of Muslim minorities on the basis of unifying symbols of Islam by their respective elites in India, Sri Lanka and Nepal (the non-Muslim states in South Asia),

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⁴³ Crux of the argument that Paul Brass puts forward in his analyses of ethnicity and ethnic mobilization; n.32, p.293.

reiterates the fact that cultural groups differ in strength and richness of their cultural
traditions, and even more importantly in the strength of traditional institutions and social
structure. The persistence of religiously based communal institution among all the Muslim
societies in South Asia indicate that Muslims form a potential base for ethnic movements
(due to the effective mobilisation power of such religious institutions), at the same time it
is also true that the mere persistence of the core religious traditions offer no certain
prospect for predicting whether or when ethnic movements will arise among them, and
whether or not such movements will be equally effective in mobilising their members.\textsuperscript{45} In
other words, such cultural persistence suggests only that it is likely that groups can be
mobilised on the basis of specific appeals, and when ethnic appeals are made, the pre-
existing communal and educational institutions of the groups have the potentials to
provide an effective means of political mobilisation.

As in case of India, the Muslim ethnic identity formation showed that the same set
of Islamic symbols have been used by three different elite groups among the community,
by emphasising and combining these ethnic appeals in different ways, to arrive at varying
definitions of Muslim community in India. Thus we find that if the Muslim landed
aristocracy and government servants in 19th century north India were interested in
estabishing historical importance of the Muslims as a ruling community in India; the
Ulemas, or the religious elites' insistence on the inseparable symbols of religion and law
(i.e. Islam and Sharia), made them define the Muslims as a religiously and legally
autonomous community, solely guided by the Ulema. And for the secular political elites of

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid. Also refer Jamal Malik "Muslim Identities suspended between Tradition &
Modernity" in \textit{Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East},

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middle class professionals who dominated the Muslim League's separatist movements in 1930 & 40s, the Muslims were a self determining nation, distinctive in religion, history, philosophy of life, and language (Urdu) from the Hindu majority in India.46

Similarly the differing strength in the cultural traditions of the social groups among the Muslim minority community in Sri Lanka, have shown that their mobilisation along the ethnic lines gained momentum only after the religious elites of the more influential Tamil Muslims of the Eastern province (who constitute one-third of the island's total Muslim population) took over the leadership from the western coast Muslim elites (the other social group of the Sri Lankan Muslims, the descendents of first Arab traders in Sri Lanka, known as the Sri Lankan moors).47 Hence, the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress's (a political body of Federation of Mosque Associations in Eastern province) mobilisation of the community on the specific appeals of Islamic militancy or `Jihad' (Holy war to save Islam) could gain effectiveness only in the post 1980 period, when their championing for the cause of separate Muslim province gathered support of the religious, and communal institutions – as they feared a complete erosion of distinct Muslim identity in the view of sharp divide in the Sinhala and Tamil nationalist agenda.48

To analyse the state of Muslim minorities in Nepal (the topic of the present study) one has to necessarily see it in the realm of existing social and political structure in the

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48 Ibid.
Himalayan kingdom, and as well as in its approach towards nation building. Today, as we find that the state in Nepal is confronted with perplexing problems of reconciling its age-old ideals of cultural, linguistic, ethnic and religious homogenity with the realities of ethnic and cultural pluralism; there arises the need for understanding the assimilationist thrust, or the process of Hinduisation carried out by the authoritarian state structure under the aegis of the Hindu monarchs in the post unification history of Nepal. For more than two centuries in Nepal (since 1769) the state sponsored homogenisation process under an absolute monarchical system continued smoothly, despite the existence of heterogenous cultural traditions, as the issues of participation, distribution and integration were all cast in a patrimonial mould. Moreover the subject culture that prevailed in the society conformed to Gellner's interpretation that in highly structured traditional society each man had his known position acquired by birth, therefore man's own culture (language, religion, race etc) mattered little, this further contributed to the assimilationist thrust of traditional authority in Nepalese society.

The recent changes in Nepal in favour of a democratic policy have however, brought out in open the fluid and malleable character of the discourse underlying the construction of Nepali nation. The ethnic and religious groups are gradually getting mobilised on various platforms, asserting their racial cultural, linguistic, regional and religious identity as well as demanding equal opportunities as equal citizens of the state. Religious groups like the Muslims (subject of the present study) have newly discovered that their distinct religious identity could be used as a potential instrument to press for their demands. In a sense, the modernisation process in Nepal, which is still in its early

stages, is already providing a suitable ground to the leaders of various ethnic groups to
mobilise their deprived communities through the effective use of ethnic symbols of
identity, and in turn they (the leaders) demand a greater share of societal goods and
services for themselves.

As regards the Muslim minority community in Nepal, it can be said that the mere
persistence of core religious traditions wasn't enough for the Nepalese Muslims to assert
their separate religious identity, but for the role of the Muslim political elites, who getting
induced by the onset of pluralistic and participatory politics started mobilising the
members of the community on the basis of religious and ethnic appeals. As organisation on
the basis of the faith would not only help them claiming for the rightful share of cultural
and religious rights for the Muslim minority community, but also would also ensure elites
a good share of societal goods and benefits for themselves, or in other words an effective
means for achieving political power. How far the existing communal and educational
institutions of the Muslims in Nepal, play an effective role in furthering the cause of the
Muslims as a religious minority group, especially in view of the persisting monolithic
character of the Nepalese state, would be studied, juxtaposing against the propositions
developed here, with reference to Nepal in general and the case of its Muslim minority
community in particular.