CHAPTER-I

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:
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Concept of Ethnicity:

Ethnicity is allied to the concept of race. Racial descendence of a group of people determines one's ethnicity. For that, an ethnic group must have come down a certain racial stock. Thus ethnic groups form elementary component parts of a race.

The term 'ethnic' usually means belonging to a particular ethnic or racial group. But it is generally accepted now that the concept of a race—a pure race is a myth. Since time immemorial different races have intermixed in different proportions in different areas and at present all humanity is a mixture of races. Even Hitler's claims that the Germans are pure Nordics is a myth. ¹

So in this sense ethnicity has no meaning at all, but the term ethnic is also used in a broader sense as stated by E. Hunter & Phillip Whitten, "This term refers to any group of people within a larger cultural unit who identify themselves as a distinct entity, separate from the rest of that culture. Along with this element of self-indentification, this group usually as a number of other characteristic which show its distinctiveness and put social distance between itself and others. These characteristics may include a separate language (or dialect), distinctive traditions and social customs, distinctive dress, foods and mode of life, and a circumscribed land base. In some stratified societies ethnic groups may be identical to Social classes or castes. In the modern world, ethnic groups are present in many societies for two major reasons: migration of peoples from their
original homelands to other countries; and incorporation of several small, separate cultural units into one large nation-state”.

Ethnicity is a term far away from a clear definition. No one still could give a definition of ethnicity in precise term. Many an attempts to define it in clear terms have eluded success. For this reason, confusion still persists with regard to a precise definition of the term ‘ethnicity’.

The term “ethnicity” is not free from being misunderstood. So far the term “tribe” was used to denote a group of people with common tradition and culture. But of late, the term seems to be value-loaded. Besides, even within the same tribe, we encounter with many uncommon traits which may form the basis of an ethnic social organism with its accompanying characteristic ethnicity. The term “ethnicity” is of recent development to create an impression that they are value-free as compared to the term “tribe”. But in course of time, it tends to create new connotations quite different from the term “tribe”.

In the seminar paper “Some characteristics of ethno-cultural identity in north-east India” D. N. Majumdar has contended that the term “Ethnic” based on pure race is a myth. In its broader sense it refers to any group of people within a cultural unit who identify themselves as a distinct identity. Smaller communities tend to merge and form bigger identities making it convenient to raise political demands. Birendra Kumar Dutta has accepted the term “ethnic” as ‘relating to large group of people together according to common traits or custom’ or “a social group which consciously shares some aspects of common culture and is primarily defined by descent”.

**Ethnicity vs Nationally:**

Looked from above, ethnicity is elementary composition of a race. Ethnic group form people having own district culture and identity. Their
way of living can be differentiated from one another in the sense that every groups has peculiar way of behaviours and mode of living deeply related to the culture distinctive in nature and particular to it.

One the other hand, Nationality is a concept related to the idea of a nation. A group of people is called a nationality when they are bound by certain ties, such as race, language, culture, religion, tradition etc. These groups possess such characteristics in a way to constitute themselves into a coherent unity distinct from other populations. Thus a nationality is defined as a group of people bound together by identity of race, language, religion, culture or community of interests, history and tradition.

The term “Nationality” was sometime misunderstood while referring to a nation. A nation may consist a number of nationalities. It is the capacity of a State to absorb and integrate the various nationalities within its boundary onto a nation that success in nation-building could be achieved. Non-academics therefore tend to view the term “Nationality” with suspicion and some of than national, religious or linguistic minorities which terms are no better than the term nationality.

P. K. Das Gupta argues that an individual may belong to an ethnic group in one boundary but to another in another boundary. The process of maintaining such ethnic boundary is because of the differences between the mono-ethnic groups. Sometimes ethnic groups maintain their boundaries through introspective categories and outward-looking categories. While maintaining an individual ethnic boundary they also give shape to a viable society in a poly-ethnic situation. In the case of bridge and buffer communities in international border they take a different dimension. Some ethnic group acts as link between different ethnic groups
or a shield to lessen the shock of confusion between aggressive groups.

**Nationality and Nation:**

The terms ‘Nation’ and ‘Nationality’ are very often used interchangeably in common parlance. But in modern times a distinction is made between the two terms.

A nationality may be defined as a group of people united together by certain ties, such as language, religion, culture, ideas, custom and tradition etc. They possess characteristics in such a way as to constitute themselves into coherent unity distinct from other populations. A nationality is, therefore, a group of people bound together by identity of race, language, religion, tradition and history.

When a nationality organizes itself into a political body, it becomes a nation. The organisation into a political body may either be an independent state or has a desire to be independent. Thus when a nationality forms an independent political organisation it becomes a nation. Through such political organisation a nationality organize statehood and turns into nation.

Seen from above, difference between nation and nationality rests on attainment of independent statehood. When a people is devoid of political consciousness it remains a nationality and when a people acquires a state it turns into a nation. This sense of nation has great significance in modern Political Science as it has immensely contributed to the modern concept ‘Nation-State’.

**Ethnic Movements-national and international**

The modern world has witnessed a spurt in ethnic movements. These movements have been witnessed in both national and international levels. Many a nation states of recent Europe, America and Afro-Asian countries
have been facing the wrath of such ethnic movements.

At national level, ethnic movements can be traced back to the times immediately following independence from the yoke of British rule, in 1947. The Naga insurgency which manifested in 1953 can be cited as the first example of ethnic movement in independent India. The Mizos and Tripuri Kok-Bodo followed suit demanding independence from Indian rule. Since 1960s, the Bodo Tribes in Assam plains joined hands by demanding regional autonomy on the northern Bank of the Brahmaputra river. By late, since 1980s, the Bodo ethnic movement has manifested in the form of a vigorous mass-movement for a separate State under the Indian Union. The Gorkha people living in the Darjeeling Hills district of West Bengal also have resorted to a violent mass-movement and now enjoying autonomous power within that State.

Mr. S. K. Chaube has introduced the element of "Class" as the objective basis of articulation of little communities. After commenting on the political heritage of the North-East India, in his paper "Tribal Societies and the Problem of Nation-Building" he pointed out the salient features of the politics of integration as a confrontation between tradition and modernity. At the same time, he was aware of the fact that the tradition elite has a strong populist base, and the class of professional politicians as functionaries of the modern State has to reckon with them. While the creation of the district councils and hill States synthesized much of the traditional aspiration of "political freedom", the political demand of secession is circumscribed by the power of the modern State.

In the case of North-East, it is not easy to determine the ethnic affinities of its populations. However, the ethnic movements in the region started first with the identity around certain social problems and the next
step is to concretize the identity by forming an ethnic association. The purpose of such association is to claim a separate administrative unit. But when such an administrative unit was created, there are still differences among different ethnic groups. Another phenomenon is that smaller nationalities tend to merge and form bigger identity making it convenient to raise political demands.\(^3\)

Coming to nationalism, B. K. Dutta opines that it is a political concept connected with the ideal of self-determination for each nationality, which is sometimes confused with ethnicity. Sub-Nationalism, on the other hand, got mixed up with regionalism. Discussing about the Tribal people of the region, he found that they had contacts with the people of Assam who naturally represent for them the people of India beyond their own habitat. And Indian nationalism, or Indianness in the hill areas in the result of such contacts.

At international level, ethnic movements have manifested themselves in the form of violent ethnic conflicts. Bosnia-Herzegovina of Modern Europe had witnessing ethnic conflicts between Bosnian Muslims and Slavs of Russian origin. The different ethnic groups living in former Yogoslovia had resorted to ethnic movements by resorting to violent ethnic conflicts, which have resulted into fragmentation of the old European State on ethnic lines. The African Rawanda has witnessed ethnic movements of the Hootoo and tribes which culminated into violent ethnic clashes. The population of Indian origin in Fiji have seen the upsurge of indigenous Fijian people when their democratically elected government was overthrown through military coup. In Indonesia, the ethnic Muslims of East Timur have resorted to ethnic rising and now
have attained political independence.

**Ethnicity and Integrity:**

Not quite few countries of modern Europe and elsewhere have witnessed spurt in ethnic movements. These movements, in the course of time, have turned into violent ethnic clashes. Ultimately, these ethnic movements culminated in the fragmentation of the Nation-States.

In these way, there had been dangers to the national integrity from the ethnic movements taking place elsewhere. This is mainly because the ethnic movements manifests in the form of ethnic upsurge which in turn give rise to conflicts among various ethnic groups living within a nation-State. Vigorous ethnic movements and resultant ethnic conflicts tend to destruct the national integrity of a nation State.

Modern nations are constituted on the principle of "one nation, one State". Thus the modern States are recognized as nation-States as against the hitherto imperial states of 19th Century Europe. Here, the various ethnic group living within the State desires constitute into one people and turns it into a nation-State. Thus, integrity is the result of the desires of various ethnic populations living within a State, to be a united people. In this way, integrity is found to be a first principle of a modern nation-State where different people with different racial origin and interests live together for the sake of a united State.

P. Nayak has raised the fundamental question at the theoretical level: Whether the State is a logical outgrowth of a Nation or it is a Nation which is supra-State? In his paper "Identity Crises of National Groups-An Enquiry into Marxist Theorisations" he pointed out that crises of national integration in Third World countries torn by internal nationality rivalries, threw the problematic relation between State and Nation into
sharper relief. Associated problems of regional imbalances, official policies of compensation discrimination further provoked the people to debate in Third World countries. The classical debate among the founding Marxists have been neither systematic nor coherent on the identity crises of national groups.

Not only the questions of nationality and of ethnic identity which have been engaging the attention of scholars working in the North-East region of India, but also the current problem of cultural identity of the people of the region is of greater significance in the context of nation-building. Regarding the cultural identity movements in the north-east India, the ethnic groups concerned would usually assert its identity around certain social problems which will ultimately lead to some demands from the State so that the group can preserve its cultural heritage, language etc. As a matter of fact, most of the problems of North-East India emanate from linguistic considerations. But at the same time, while cultural identity may separate smaller ethnic groups, there are also instances where it brings different ethnic groups to consolidate themselves against any out-groups.

While presenting his paper "Ethnic Processes in North-Eastern India" S.K. Acharya was guided by analytical models developed in Soviet ethnography. He has given a theoretical orientation to the stages of ethnosocial organism – from tribe to nationality, bourgeois nation, and socialist nation. He referred to ethnic properties like cultural attributes, psychological traits and ethnic consciousness of the members of ethnic groups. Any change in one or other ethnic components would constitute an ethnic process. He enumerated the six types of ethnic processes which he has attempted to apply in the study of ethnic processes in the North-East India.
B. Pakem presents the process of ethnic formations taking place in the North-Eastern States. In his "The Question of Ethnic Formation among the Hill People of North-East India" he has pointed out that from the older terms like tribe, aborigines, adivasis, jatis, or indigenous people, we are now coming to newer terms like nationality group and ethnic group with its accompanying characteristic 'ethnicity'. He went on to discuss about these newer terms particularly on the question of ethnic formation among the hill people of North-East India. The stages of ethnic processes may be dormant as in the case of Arunachal Pradesh, calmed or suppressed as in Meghalaya, and active as in the case of Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura. It is only when formation reaches a final stage that nationality formation begins.

**Is the Nation-State under threat?**

The present world system is based on the "one Nation, one State" principle. Thus every State in modern times in considered to be a single nation. But in reality, no State at present is composed of a single nation. On the other hand, in every State, besides the dominant national group, one or more near equal or smaller nationalities use to live together. For this reason, no State can claim to be comprised of a single group of people.

Thus, every modern State, for all practical purposes, has become poly-ethnic in the true sense of the term. As numerous group of people use to live together in modern States, there are every chances of clashes among these groups, owing to differences in their identity and interests. These differences in times may get expressed in the form of outburst against the dominant group by the smaller groups of people.

In conformity with the above fears and apprehensions, almost all
of the modern States have been found confronting with problem of group clashes. These groups in question, in most of time, are found to be ethnic groups. Ethnic consciousness and assertion for their rights and privileges have resulted in the ongoing ethnic strife's and turbulence.

The above phenomenon of ethnic strife and assertion has given rise to the helpless condition of the modern nation-States with regard to maintenance of their territorial integrity. It has become well nigh impossible for the modern States to contain the ethnic uprisings and the consequent disturbances. The States are thus beset with the problem of reconciliation of ethnic aspirations in their respective boundary.

The ultimate problem of the modern nation-States, therefore, lies in the reconciliation of rising ethnic aspiration. As the States at present are not quite capable of tasks to the rising tide of disturbances, they very often tend to adopt ruthless suppression of the ethnic groups agitating for their legitimate demands. Even the most genuine causes of ethnic movements fail to see appropriate measures from the part of the governments.

As the governments of modern nation-States have to address the grievances of the rising ethnic groups, at present most of the modern nation-States are threatened with the fear for territorial disintegration. The rising demands for independence and consequent secessionist movements have added vigour to this threat. The ethnic movements has given rise to modern phenomenon of regionalism. This new phenomenon has encouraged sectarian outlook of the agitating groups. This in turn has resulted in the psychological alienation of different groups living within a nation-State. As various ethnic groups living within a nation-State fails to live together, there has always been disturbances elsewhere
in the States. This situation of utter chaos and confusion is posing a real threat of disintegration to almost all nation-States of the world.

The phenomenon of ethnic movements taking shape in the modern States of the world elsewhere have posed a serious question- Is the Nation-State under threat?

Ethnic movements get shaped on the issues pertaining to a particular group of people. Thus the issues and interests of various ethnic movements acquire disintegrative tendencies. Such varying demands and interests pertaining to various ethnic movements tend to divide peoples hitherto living together.

There had been dangers to the national integrity from the ethnic movements taking place anywhere. This is mainly because ethnic movements manifests in the form of ethnic upsurge or rising which in turn given rise to conflicts among various ethnic groups living within a nation-State. Vigorous ethnic movements and the resultant ethnic conflicts tend to disturb the very fabric of unity in diversity.

Modern States are recognized as the Nation-States as against the hitherto existing Imperial States of the 19th and first half of the 20th Century. In a Nation-State, various ethnic groups living therein wants to constitute into one people and turns into one nation. Thus, integrity is the result of the various ethnic groups to remain as a united people. In this way, integrity is found to be the first principle of the modern State and national integrity therein where different people with different racial origin and interests live together for the sake of a united State.

Viewed as above, the concept of ethnicity has a serious implication on the very concept of national integrity. While integrity want to be convergent, ethnicity tend to be divergent in its direction. While integrity
is always adhesive, ethnicity tends to be repulsive. Integrity binds different people together under one single political arrangement while ethnicity encourages disintegration of existing political organisation into fragments based on ethnic considerations.

Looked from the above angles, the existing Nation-States are really under threat. They have always been threatened by disintegrative tendencies resulting from various ethnic movements taking place within. Disintegration of a few European States in recent times has substantiated this fear. The threat to the Nation-State has been consolidated by the recent happenings worldover as witnessed from the sequence of disintegrations as the consequence of ethnic movements.

Present ethnic movements have acquired separatist tendencies. This tendency arises from moral and material helps being tendered to the ethnic movements by the neighbouring States. On securing help from a foreign State, then ethnic movements get directed in the direction in which the interests of the helping States are put.

Thus, ethnic movements hold out serious threat to the modern Nation-State system itself. The recent disintegration of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Yugoslavia, Indonesia and the like have confirmed this threat held put to the nation-States. These all are virtually the result of the ethnic movements taking shape within those States. This threat of disintegration is looming large over all existing nation-States of the world. Hence the Nation-States are in constant fear of disintegration that may result from the ethnic movements that may arise therein.

**How to Preserve and Promote National unity Without Sacrificing Ethnic Aspirations?**

Seen as above, reconciliation of the ethnic aspirations of the peoples
within a nation-State has become a serious problem. The governments of the States facing this problem face with the herculean task of bringing about effective reconciliation as the aspiration in most of the times appears to be mutually exclusive due to clashes of interest.

Therefore, endeavour remains for preservation and promotion of national unity without sacrificing the ethnic aspiration. Though theoretically it is a simple job, in reality it is a tough job for the governments in modern Nation-States. The gravity of the problem is evident from how it may be difficult to reconcile the ever-clashing and mutually exclusive aspirations of numerous ethnic groups living in the modern Nation-States. One can simply imagine how difficult this task may be for the respective governments.

Again, the complicacies of the modern Statecraft have multiplied the problems of the modern States. The present world system invaded by newer phenomena of Globalisation, world terrorism and quest for a new international economic order has met with considerable shrinkage in resources, time and effective manpower. Besides, the perennial and occasional problems like flood, earthquake, famine, disease and other natural calamities consume major part of resources, time and energy of the States. For these reasons, governments fail to give due attention to the demands pertaining to the ethnic aspirations. They fail to invest required time, energy and resources for solution of these demands however legitimate they may be.

Over and above, the demands of ethnic aspirations, more than resources, require, political will on the part of the governments. But, very sorrowfully, the modern governments besetted with the burden of party politics and look for narrow political gains have very miserably
failed to pay due attention to the ethnic questions whatever would have been possible given a sincere political will on their part. More than seeking a right solution, the motive of the governments remains to derive narrow political gain thereof.

Keeping aside all above, the problems of ethnic aspirations need an urgent attention from the governments of the modern Nation-States. Lingering of the problems lead to complications in the course of time. "Sooner is the better" should be the attitude of the modern governments towards these problems. Apart from these all, only a sincere effort combined with a political will on the part of governments concerned can achieve a success in addressing the multiple demands of ethnic aspirations.

NOTES AND REFERENCES:

2. SIBNATH CHAKRAVARTY : An Introduction to Politics (Modern Book Agencies Private Ltd., Kolkata, 1948)