

Concept of Ethnicity: A Social Study on Kolkata

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Abstract: Ethnicity is a very vital element of any society. But the concept of ethnicity is very multifaceted. The concept raised so many contradictory views among the social scholars. Thus the idea of ethnicity needs to be well defined and need to be focused. This paper deals with the various aspects of defining ethnicity. In the course of discussion Kolkata is being used as a field of example to define ethnicity.

Keywords: Community, Culture, Ethnicity, Identity

1. Introduction

Ethnicity, ethnic identity, ethnic nationalism, ethnic conflict and ethno-consciousness are not new phenomena. It has been rightly suggested from the dawn of history communities organized on putative common descent, culture, and destiny have coexisted, competed, and clashed. Ethnicity seems a common term relevant in the contemporary world, and ethnicity in Afghanistan can be studied reasonably by exploring the different elements connected with it. Since the nation is discussed in the international politics, much remains unresolved for various political reasons. The work is an attempt to embark on a journey of a land that still remains a 'land of terror'. It calls for attention to address the ethnicity nuances that have been emerging not because of civilization's progress but because of destructive purposes that seems alarming. The work also attempts to entail a level of sensitivity amongst the readers, while seeking their perspectives, attitudes and rationality for guidance and comprehension. The novels chosen give much scope to allow ample subjectivity on the issue of ethnicity in this nation, and also refrain from being nepotistic and have biased discussions. It brings writers and characters of different ideologies and nations on a single platform allowing our rhetoric to soar high, while the human tendencies of love, relationship, friendship, hatred and animosity run parallel.

2. Meaning of ethnicity

Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan point to the fact that although the term's earliest dictionary appearance in the Oxford English Dictionary is in 1972, its first usage is attributed to the American sociologist David Riesman in 1953. It is said that the word 'ethnic' is much older and is derived from the Greek ethnos (which in turn derived from the word ethnikos), which originally meant heathen or pagan according to R. Williams. The term ethnic and the related forms were used in English from the 14th century through the middle of the 19th century.

Later, it emerged to express the notion of folk by a few authors and subsequently the concept of community came to light. An important reason for the current academic interest in ethnicity is the fact that it has become so ostensible in societies across nations, that it becomes impossible to ignore. In the early twentieth century, it was believed by many social theorists that ethnicity and nationalism would decrease in importance, and eventually vanish as a result of modernization and industrialization. On the contrary, ethnicity and nationalism have grown in political importance in every part of the world and it became a discourse to be studied in particular. It has emerged and is made relevant through ongoing social situations and encounters, and through people's ways of coping with the demands and challenges of life. Anthropological studies also give us much scope to study how ethnic relations have been defined and perceived by people across nations. There is no acceptable single word for the phrase 'Ethnic Group'. French anthropologists have suggested the word 'ethne' for technical usage. The modern usage of 'ethnic group' came further to reflect the different kinds of encounters industrialized states have had with external groups, such as immigrants and indigenous peoples. Ethnic thus came to stand in opposition to national and to refer to people with distinct cultural identities, who through migration or conquest, have become subject to a state or nation with a different cultural mainstream. Examples are multiple trying to get at the essence of an ethnic group; many writers have allowed their rhetoric to soar and to evoke responses from all directions.

To study further of ethnicity and ethnic groups, it becomes mandatory to study the societal framework and the consequences that led to such a stratification. The cultural bases for societal stratification are varied. Some groupings are based on lineage systems defined reciprocally and horizontally; whereas, other groupings such as class and caste are stratified vertically. Kinship networks operate horizontally as form of reciprocal marital exchange. Another form of separation is found in composite societies resulting from inclusion of groups of supposed different cultural or ethnic origin. Ethnically plural societies have emerged throughout, sometimes as a result of ethnic conquest. Today, it has become an important issue in modern states because of ethnic interpretation resulting from increasing social mobility due to human achievement and from increasing geographic mobility. There is a revolution seen in the recording of social and cultural history.

Today's ethnic minorities feel the need to voice out against prejudices, to be heard and with a view to write and rewrite history for constructive interpretation, and where facts fail, to create or deepen their own sustaining mythologies. It is also seen that social classes that relatively did not surface in earlier recorded histories are emerging figures in a larger history of conflict as new areas to be delved into, to deal more directly with stratification of society. Therefore, ethnic identity can be varied as a continually evolving process, sometimes occurring within a single generation and also, ethnic minorities have been present as long as sovereign political states have existed. Ethnic conflict has been a general tendency within the pluralistic societies and this can be viewed from the standpoint of political, social, economic and cultural struggles. For culture, it may occur when they are confronted with the compulsion of allegiance to a new leadership, adopting a new religion or acquiring a new language in order to participate in a dominant political society that is ethnically alien. The discussion of ethnicity and societal stratification relates also to internal conflict over the question of priority to be given to past, present or future oriented forms of identity in self-consciousness. However, one cannot fully understand the force of ethnicity without examining the intricate features of minority group members.

A. Ethnic identity

On the individual level, ethnicity is a social-psychological process which gives an individual a sense of belonging and identity. It is, of course, one of a number of social phenomena which produce a sense of identity. Ethnic identity can be defined as a manner in which persons, on account of their ethnic origin, locate themselves psychologically in relation to one or more social systems, and in which they perceive others as locating them in relation to those systems. By ethnic origin is meant either that a person has been socialized in an ethnic group or that his or her ancestors, real or symbolic, have been members of the group. The social systems may be one's ethnic community or society at large, or other ethnic communities and other societies or groups, or a combination of all these (Isajiw, 1990). Locating oneself in relation to a community and society is not only a psychological phenomenon, but also a social phenomenon in the sense that the internal psychological states express themselves objectively in external behavior patterns that come to be shared by others. Thus, individuals locate themselves in one or another community internally by states of mind and feelings, such as self-definitions or feelings of closeness, and externally by behavior appropriate to these states of mind and feelings. Behavior according to cultural patterns is thus an expression of identity and can be studied as an indication of its character. We can thus distinguish external and internal aspects of ethnic identity. External aspects refer to observable behavior, both cultural and social, such as (1) speaking an ethnic language, practicing ethnic traditions, (2) participation in ethnic personal networks, such as family and friendships, (3) participation in ethnic institutional

organizations, such as churches, schools, enterprises, media, (4) participation in ethnic voluntary associations, such as clubs, 'societies,' youth organizations and (5) participation in functions sponsored by ethnic organizations such as picnics, concerts, public lectures, rallies, dances. The internal aspects of ethnic identity refer to images, ideas, attitudes, and feelings. These, of course, are interconnected with the external behavior. But it should not be assumed that, empirically, the two types are always dependent upon each other. Rather, they may vary independently, as for example, a third-generation person may retain a higher degree of internal than of external aspects. We can distinguish at least three types of internal aspects of identity: (1) cognitive, (2) moral, and (3) affective. The cognitive dimension of identity includes, first, self-images and images of one's group. These may be stereotypes of self or of the group and perceived stereotypes by others of oneself and one's group. It also includes knowledge of one's group's heritage and its historical past. This knowledge may not necessarily be extensive or objective. It may rather focus on selected aspects or events, or historical personalities that are highly symbolic of the group's experiences and which thus have become a legacy. Finally, the cognitive dimension includes knowledge of one's group's values, since these are part of the group's heritage. The moral dimension of identity involves feelings of group obligations. In general, feelings of group obligations have to do with the importance a person attaches to his or her group and the implications the group has for the person's behavior. Specifically, it would include such feelings of obligation as the importance of teaching the ethnic language to one's children, or marrying within the group, or of helping members of the group with finding a job. Feelings of obligation account for the commitment a person has to his group and for the group solidarity that ensues. They can be said to constitute the central dimension of subjective identity. So far, no theory of ethnic identity has conceptualized group obligations as constituting its core dimension. A number of researchers, such as Geismar (1954), have asked questions of their respondents about such obligations, without, however, conceptualizing them as a central notion of subjective ethnic identity. The affective, or cathartic, dimension of identity refers to feelings of attachment to the group. Two types of such feelings can be distinguished: (1) feelings of security with, sympathy and associative preference for members of one's group as against members of other groups and (2) feelings of security and comfort with the cultural patterns of one's group as against the cultural patterns of other groups or societies.

B. Population of kolkata

Being the capital of the Indian state of West Bengal, Kolkata is located in eastern India on the east bank of the River Hooghly and houses a population of almost 5 million, with an extended metropolitan population of over 14 million. Kolkata's population has made this fourth-largest city in India, the third-largest urban agglomeration. The population of Kolkata is 4,486,679 according to 2011 census. It ranks 5th among all the

other metropolitan cities of India. It has a density of 27,462 per sq.km. The population of the urban agglomeration is 15,644,040 (2010). As of 2011, Kolkata city had a population of 44,866,799, while the urban agglomeration had a population of 13,216,546 (2001). The sex ratio is 899 females per 1000 males (2011), which are lower than the national average, because many working males come from rural areas, where they leave behind their families. Kolkata's literacy rate of 81% exceeds the all-India average of 80%. Kolkata Municipal Corporation area has registered a growth rate of 4.1%, which is the lowest among the million-plus cities in India. Bengalis comprise the majority of Kolkata's population (55%), with other communities forming a large portion of the minorities (20%). Major languages spoken in Kolkata are Bengali, Hindi, Urdu, English, Oriya and Bhojपुरi. The 1951 Census first reported about Calcutta Conurbation. It encompasses industrial area on the Hooghly side, which is quite distinct in terms of demography, economic condition, industrial development and geographical unity. It covers an area of 425 sq.km. Out of this, the core cities of Kolkata and Howrah occupied 92 sq.km and 26 sq.km. Respectively. In 2011 Census per km² the density of population was 242,52 persons which was just 10,085 persons in 1941. Within the last seven decades (1951-1991), the Calcutta Conurbation has expanded tremendously in spatial, demographic and socio-economic dimensions. In 2011, Census the conurbation of Kolkata has a population of 44,866,799. Its position is second after Mumbai in India.

C. Ethnicity of Kolkata

Being a cosmopolitan city, Kolkata represents a blend of different religions. Majority of people inhabiting in Kolkata are Hindus. Muslims are in minority. Other minority communities include Christians, Buddhist, Sikhs and Jains. On the basis of religious sects, Hindus can be further classified into a number of categories ranging from monotheists to polytheists. The largest religious sect follows Vaisnavism. In the traditional caste hierarchy, the highest position is held by the Brahmins, the next caste in order of precedence is that of Vaidyas followed

by Kshatriyas and Sudras. Bengalis consist of the majority of Kolkata's population, with Marwari's and Bihari communities forming a large portion of the minorities. Besides, there are some of Kolkata's notable communities including Chinese, Tamils, Anglo-Indians, Armenians, Tibetans, Maharastrians and Parses. Major language spoken in Kolkata is Bengali, Hindi, Urdu, English, Maithili and Bhojपुरi. As, 2001 Census measures; 77.68% of the population in Kolkata is Hindu; 20.27% is Muslims; 0.88% is Christians. Other minorities such as Sikhs, Buddhists, Jews and Zoroastrians constitute the rest of the city's population (1.17%). in the Census year of 2001. From the above table it can be clearly stated that male population dominates in all the religion types with a high number of population except for Christianity, where the female population is more than the male population.

3. Conclusion

A city is more than its buildings and streets. A city is the people who live, work, and play in it and make it their own. This book brings together original essays and interviews which trace the history of the peoples in the city of Kolkata. Those who came and stayed; why they did so; and how they contributed in building the city. Once celebrated as the second city of the British Empire after London and more recently derided as the dying city, Kolkata is simultaneously associated with intellectual creativity, processions and palaces and a unique way of claiming the outsider as its own. This collection brings together the stories of the Armenians, Chinese, Sikhs, 'South Indians', Bohra Muslims and other communities who have come and created this wondrous mosaic, the city of Kolkata.

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