

Politics of Ethnicity: A Theoretical Perspective

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Abstract

Ethnicity and ethnic politics are important phenomena of plural societies. In developing world, ethnic politics is one of the main reasons of internal instability. Ethnic conflict leads towards ethnic politics which is often conceived as a conflict among ethnic groups. This study has focused on the theoretical frame work of ethnic politics, and the main argument is that state has a central role in developing, escalating and diffusing ethnic conflict that is why ethnic conflict does not only mean conflict among ethnic groups but group's conflict with state is also the part of ethnic politics. The study highlights various steps towards the development of politics of ethnicity. A life cycle model of ethnic conflict is also drawn to analyze various stages of conflict, and how the intensity of ethnic conflict with state gradually gains momentum. The debate also focuses that ethnic conflict with state should be handled on priority basis. If state fails to resolve conflict, the reformation of nationality of a particular ethnic group creates serious unrest and threat to the process of nation building.

Keywords: ethnic politics, ethnic conflict, ethnic disagreements, identity movement, Assimilation Policies, internal colonialism, ethnic narrative.

Introduction

Ethnicity is an important feature of human identity that manifests differently in different societies. It reflects diversity in the society whose internal harmony and stability depends on how ethnic diversity is accommodated in a pluralistic frame work of the state and society. Pluralistic frame work includes those constitutional designs which guarantee the protection of ethnic identity. The state's failure in creating such institutions, leads towards conflicting situations in which one ethnic group feels insecure against the dominance of other. The feelings of antagonism ultimately force ethnic groups to pursue their demands. This study has its focus on the political dimension of ethnicity. Following questions will be evaluated to understand the politics of ethnicity.

South Asian Studies 30 (1)

- I. How ethnic groups are politicised?
- II. When these groups develop their ethnic organization?
- III. What are their main objectives?
- IV. Which factors are involved in the politicization of ethnicity?
- V. How ethnic movements start and some get success others do not?

Literature Review

Political dimension of ethnicity makes it powerful and potentially so destructive that ethnic passion has become the main reason of countless wars, revolts, and conflicts. As James G. Kellas has estimated that due to ethnic violence ten million lives were lost during 1945 to 1975. In 1990 to 94, approximately 800,000 people lost their lives in ethnic warfare between Hutus and Tutsi tribes in Rwanda and Burundi. From 1991 to 1995, Croatian government officially reported 13,583 deaths and approximately 40,000 injured in the homeland war. During the same period, after the fall of Soviet Union, Bosnia Herzegovina experienced the worst kind of ethnic violence, where 200,000 deaths were observed. Apart from Eastern Europe and Central Asian states, the states of South Asia like Sri Lanka, Burma, India, Kashmir and Pakistan are also the potential areas for ethnic conflict (Kellas, 1998, p.1). Smith (1995) claims that in United Nations more than ninety percent states are ethnically heterogeneous (p.10) and Cohen (1993) also analyzed in his study that there is no ethnic group in a country having fifty percent of the whole population (p. 235). Due to the fact, in all the regions ethnic conflict has been a major concern for governments and ethnicity does matter for politics.

In the context of politics of ethnicity most of the theorists of nationalism like Kohn (1939), Hechter (1975), Breuilly (1993) and Ernest Gellner (2006) are agreed that nationalism is a political principle in which state performs a central role in its evolution. While arguing the political principle, they explain that politics is about power. In this way the political perspective of nationalism leads to the mobilization of ethnic groups where persuasion of political power becomes the main objective. Under this approach ethnic groups also perform as political actors having desire to get political rights. These political rights might be described as increased representation in political and administrative institutions, share and control over local resources and use of specific language (an identity marker) as medium of instruction and communication. In case of denial of these demands from state authorities, conflict develops and ultimately the ethnic groups politicized.

While discussing politics of ethnicity, Kaufmans (2009) has highlighted the importance of group members. According to his views, the involvement of ethnic groups in a conflicting situation is based on group membership rather than economic interests (p.204) but Varshne (2005) emphasized on the importance of cultural and economic issues. In his point of view, in pluralistic societies, ethnic conflict is a usual phenomenon and the conflicting situation is also the cause of

different cultural and economic issues. Culture includes religion and language, the most dividing forces while the economy is concerned with the allocation and distribution of resources (p.185).

Many theorists who describe politicization of ethnicity or development of ethnic conflict have accentuated the significance of various factors. Brass (1991) argues that these factors could be unequal distribution of resources, social gains, and opportunities to rise and survive (p.41). In spite of the fact that the mentioned concerns are very important but the realists' perception as described earlier is very important, who believe that internal structure of the state and the government is also important in the development of ethnic politics. The domestic political environment of divided states characterizes the development of ethnic politics.

Development of Politics of Ethnicity

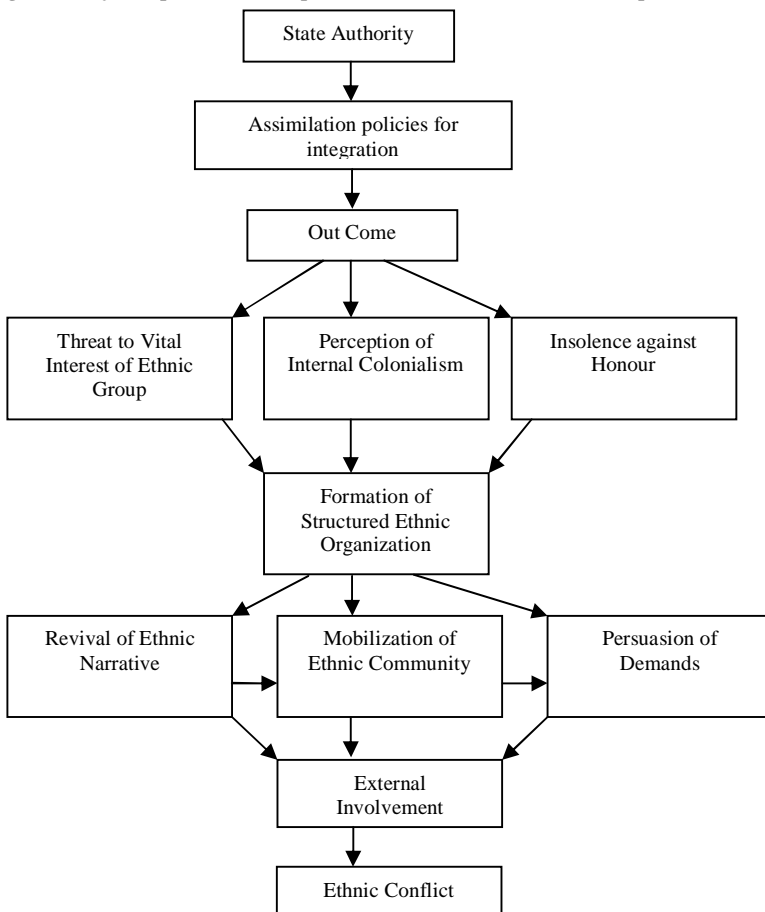
The presence of two or more than two groups with different attributes within the same political system is a necessary condition for the development of ethnic conflict. Ethnic disagreements are either among various groups or with state authority. This study has its focus on ethnic conflict with state. Brass's contribution is very important in this regard because he discussed in length the complexities of a political system, responsible for the rise of ethnic group as a challenger to state authority (Brass, 1991, p. 13-17). In his debate about politics of ethnicity and ethnic groups as a challenge to state authority, he develops his arguments with the support of instrumentalists, who believe that the promotion of socio-economic status is the main cause behind individual's act of developing associations. They also believe that ethnicity is a mean to achieve some specific ends. Brass (1991) argues that political and economic conditions ascertain the salience of ethnicity. Ethnic elites perform instrumental role in ethnic mobilization and raise their demands. Ethnic conflict is function of different political factors and it becomes important when state responds.

To understand the role of the state in enhancing ethnic conflict or managing it, the scholars have differentiated it on the basis of developed states and third world's states. Among these theorists, John Migdal (1994) and Robert Jackson's (1990) works are very important for present study. According to Migdal, state and society has a close relationship. State cannot function separately so their relationship is very dynamic, both struggle to preserve authority. In this context Migdal (1994) argues that the struggle between state and ethnic groups which found within society not only generate conflict but sometimes create alliances. These alliances are useful for the state in transforming the nature of ethnic conflict in favor of the domination and hegemony of the state (pp. 9-12). The other important work presented by Jackson (1990) highlighted the role of third world states as far as the ethnic conflict is concerned. He presented third world states as quasi states (p.1). These states are formed after decolonization process. These states are granted independence by developed states who at first, believe in the provision of collective goods for their citizens. Secondly, these states work with

the collaboration of society in distributing benefits. Unfortunately these norms are not transferred to the post colonial states. Resultantly, independence became beneficial for a dominant group and most of the ethno-national groups continued to suffer (pp. 40-41). Under this theoretical construction of Jakson, the third world states have weak institutions and less capacity to address relative deprivation among various groups, that is why ethno nationalist sentiments gain momentum. Resultantly, identity movements highlight the differences between the contending parties over incompatible goals.

To conclude the debate about the development of politics of ethnicity, following figure can be helpful to understand the development of contest between state and ethnic bands.

Figure1: Major steps in the development of ethnic conflict with state in plural societies



Source: Developed by the researcher

Though ethnic conflict arises and very often is managed by societal and state level, by all means, it is necessary to highlight those factors, helpful to transform ethnicity into ethnic politics.

State Authority

Keeping in mind the debate about politics of ethnicity and development of ethnic conflict this figure is drawn. According to the debate the developed states have strong state institutions and democratic norms, which help them to solve the problems of pluralism. USA, UK, Canada and Switzerland have various ethnic groups but they developed a strong constitutional mechanism to solve the problem. The post colonial states lack these values. Power gain and despotic rule are their basic aims that are why these states are unable to solve the ethnic problems peacefully. In most of the cases like Sikhs in India, Tamils in Sri Lanka, Moros in Philippine and Bloch in Pakistan have strong conflicts with the state.

Assimilation Policies for Integration

National unity and ideology are the major political concerns in post colonial societies that are why they used to apply assimilation strategy. This strategy is applied by the dominant groups. These groups might not hesitate to use state force in their own favor. So the state's policies favor the powerful and dominant group. Pakistan is also one of the examples of plural societies. Here the state used to adopt assimilation policies to create national unity. Resultantly, the state has lost its Eastern Part. Still, various ethnic groups off and on show their resentment and different ethno nationalist movements are in the struggle to preserve identity. Following table is also helpful to show how the state of Pakistan tries to create unity among its two wings.

Table 01 : State Policies to create unity between East and West Pakistan

Policy	Description	Outcome
national language policy	Ruling elite tried to impose Urdu as national language for promoting unity.	not accepted. three language movements were started created Bengali nationalism
One unit plan	Policy of centralization hope to unite the two wings	Alienated Bengalis due to little share in the power circle.
federal capital in west wing	extensive economic development in west wing at the export surplus of East wing	Originated a sense of deprivation among East Pakistanis.
Creation of a power circle of civil military bureaucracy	the alliance ruled the country and Bengali had little representation	Created disaffection among Bengali.
Political migration	posting of non Bengali civil military personnel in Bengal	Perceived as ruled by aliens. Later on it was converted into a separatist movement.
Elections	Both the political parties refused to accept the results	dismemberment

Compiled by the researchers

The policy of centralization had a main purpose to unite the two wings but it became the cause of further alienation of the Eastern Wing (Bengalis) in the main stream politics. All the resources become exclusive property of the dominant ruling group. In plural societies if the policies are made with consensus then

South Asian Studies 30 (1)

national unity develops otherwise minority ethnic groups show resentment and the conflict escalates.

Threat to vital interest of Ethnic Group

Due to state policies, ethnicity becomes political and violent. Ethnic groups perceive their vital cardinal concerns in danger. The protest could be launched against government or another ethnic group, dominant in the power circle. Identity moves also crop up when weak governments fail to design ethnic contacts with formal guarantees provided by the constitution. As in 1960's and 70's, in Yugoslavia ethnic tension increased because of new constitutional arrangements of the state. They decentralized the federal structure, giving more autonomy to six republics and two provinces. The concerned ethnics were not satisfied at the allocation of resources especially economic policy did not serve the desired objectives. The weakening of the central government ignited the feelings of insecurity among various ethnic groups, (the Serbs, Croats, Bosnian Muslims and Slovenes) and fosters the emergence of ethnic security dilemmas. The domestic factors directly led towards an environment of competition in which each band was involved in the struggle to gain power. The hostility spread from Slovenia to Croatia and from Serbia to Bosnia. The Yugoslavia case has indicated that abated political institutions often persuade a crisis of legitimacy. The crunch amongst groups further enhance if they are not satisfied with the economic and political policies. Ethnic groups then challenged the government's right to rule. In South Africa, the apartheid policy of the white compelled the congress Youth league to mobilize resistance. Their heinous resistance was due to the threat of permanent disfranchisement, dispossession and powerlessness. The Palestinian resistance against Jewish settlers in the West Bank and Gaza are regarded as their legal right against the illegal act of Jewish settlers. Sometimes, immigrants are also resisted by the native people, because of a threat to their jobs, wages and because they share all the benefits, the native enjoying (Esman, 2004, p.72).

Internal Colonialism

Internal colonialism is a term described by Hechter (1975) that it is a situation in which the core (central government) tries to overpower the periphery, (the weak provincial territory or ethnic group) politically and to exploit it materially. Hechter's substantive study reflects the process of nationality for nation in Great Britain. He presented Britain as powerful and culturally distinct core having dominant positions over economy, finance, and political system. The people in peripheral areas started a nationalist movement at the time when inequalities between core and periphery increased.

In all multinational states where one ethnic group or a coalition is empowered, the term internal colonial is also appropriate. The most glaring examples of internal colonialism are the north west territories of Canada, the problem of

Quebec in Canada, Xinjiang (Eastern Turkestan) of China, the Palestinians in Israel, and the Tamil Sinhala conflict in Sri Lanka. In these states, the dominant ethnic group is getting economic and political benefits at the cost of other groups and territory. The State of Louisiana in USA is another example. Here the port of New Orleans has a pivotal role in the US economy. Yet the Louisiana State was not included in the economically stable states of USA for a long time. Now gradually the economic condition is getting better because the government is focusing on its important economic issues. Rounaq Jahan (1974) also borrowed this expression and used it while describing the situation of East and West wings of United Pakistan. The Saraiki ethnic in Pakistan also claims that despite having largest share in agriculture, they are not getting their due right. Due to the economic deprivation a clear distrust has been seen between the state and the Saraikis. (p. 299-300)

Insolence against Honor

Another outcome of assimilation policy is the perceived affront to the honor of a community. Self-esteem is much important for collective identities. Horowitz (1985) has important contribution in finding out ethnic conflict in divided societies. He combines the instrumentalists and primordial lists thoughts that role of self-esteem is utmost important in the life of ethnic groups. His analysis is based on the fact that this self esteem is derived from the success of the members of the ethnic groups in different fields, especially in economic and political. Ethnic groups often respond emotionally when they notice that their dignity is impugned. They look for ways to vengeance. A violent resistance has been observed in Sudan, where the state tried to impose the Arabic language and Islamic penal code to those groups of society also, which were non Muslims and non Arabic (Kasfir, 1991, p 365-366). They responded violently against the state authorities by discerning it an insult to their culture. In Sri Lanka, the Tamil and Sinhala conflict on the language issue (singer, 1991, p.270) and in united Pakistan (prior to 1971), the issue of language between East and West wings gained importance and the ethnic identity politicized.

Formation of a Structured Ethnic Organization

Ethnic groups try to develop their ethnic organization in the form of ethnic political party. An ethnic party is patent to represent itself for the promotions of the cause. The party mobilizes the in-group and excludes the ethnic outsiders (Chandra, 2004). The World's most acute and lengthy ethnic in counters involve the support of structured ethnic organizations. In Burundi, Tutsi and Hutu tribes, each organized their own ethnic party. This is not the only example in the world, different states in different regions have created their political parties and pressure groups on ethnic lines. Nigeria, Malaysia, Fiji, and Pakistan are the significant

South Asian Studies 30 (1)

examples, where each of the major ethnic regional group has formed their ethnic party organization. Important functions of these parties are as follows.

Revival of Ethnic Narrative

The structured ethnic organizations revive their ethnic narrative. The ethnic narrative is also vital to the study of ethnic politics. It often addresses the subtle and affective psychic identity needs of an ethnic group. For concerted realization or commemoration, ethnic narratives are sometimes constructed or invented by ethnic intellectuals. These narratives could be based on the ideology, language, symbols or historical myths. Their fervor towards specific narrative often acquits and legitimates their activities. In the Republic of Georgia, the conflict between Georgians and Abkhazians was basically lingual but latter turned into political. Serbian and Croatians also struggled for their linguistic identity. In India, Hindu cultural traditions persist the superiority. In these cases, the lingual, religious, and regional rhetoric was revived by the specific political parties.

Ethnic narratives, whether invented or ascribed, through generations are at the heart of ethnicity. Ethnic account succor to achieve specific objectives, constitute powerful tools to re-evaluate their historical basis. Through ethnic narratives the ethnically designed objectives attain justification.

Mobilization of Ethnic Community

Mobilization is the precondition for perpetual ethnic conflict. It produces sentimental approach and politically eloquent concordance among the members of a group. It is the second important task that ethnic groups perform. The mastic mobilization can differentiate among groups and create bonds on the basis of web in-group and out-group ideas (Williams, 2003, p.152). In various divided societies like Fiji, Canada, Ireland, former Yugoslavia, former Soviet Union, Belgium, India, Sri Lanka, Sudan etc, ethnic bands and their parties have politically mobilized the traditional communities to form another distinguish nationality. Prior to 1947, Muslim nation was created after strong mobilization of their ethnic narrative.

Persuasion of Demands

A well organized and structured assembling, whether it is a political party, armed militias, guerrilla groups, or a nationalist movement, can successfully articulate and perused the demands. These demands could be political, economic and cultural.

The issue of representation and autonomy or control of territory and establishing sovereignty are the fundamental and ultimate political demand of contending ethnic groups. The conflict between Palestinian and Jewish is exclusively political. Both are claiming their absolute right on the territory. The

Beijing's claim over Tibet for political and military control, Serbian and Albanian's claim over Kosovo and future of Kurdish minority in Iraq are vibrant example of political demand. A part from the importance of political demand and their persuasion most of the researchers and scholars of ethnicity are agreed that the root cause of ethnic conflict is economic (Williams, 2004, pp.75-76). Bates (1974) clearly pointed out that ethnic groups and other rational agents always has conflict over scarce resources (p.14). It becomes a logical base of conflict in many societies. Different ethnics confront with each other and faced off against government when they have clashes about different economic issues like, access to control over resources, unequal allocation and distribution of capital. The power holders always secure their economic interests. If economic grievances among contending parties have been cut out, their political discontent will become irrelevant (Stavenhagen, 1996. p.294).

Another important aspect which reflects the concern of ethnic groups is relevant to their social and cultural environment in which Language and religion are the dominant concerns. Both have the potential to generate ethnic conflict. As the language has symbolic and instrumental value, the religion reflects the collective identity and a belief system. In poly ethnic states, cultural issues often urge the need to create a viable workable policy that could be acceptable to each ethnic group. The success and failure of that policy is also determined on the degree of mobilization of ethnic demands. If ethnic bands are much specific in the persuasion of their requisitions the results would likely be as in Sri Lanka, Sudan and in Pakistan.

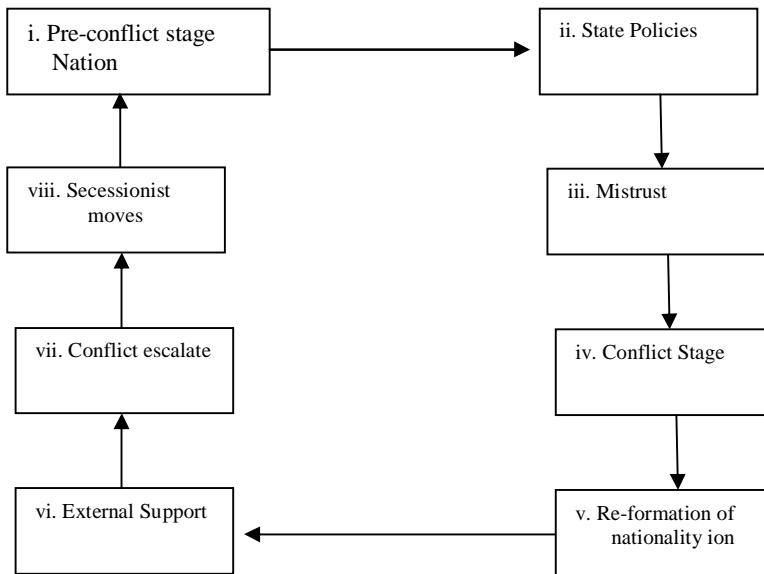
External Involvement

External involvement is an important development in ethnic conflict with state. Overt and covert involvements are the two forms of external factor. The former helps the government to make a legal agreement between the groups and reduce the ethnic tension while the later escalated the conflict because of hidden motives. The escalation of ethnic conflict is observed in those states where central state institutions are weak and invite external predation. Tamil Sinhala conflict in Sri Lanka and dismemberment of Pakistan in 1971 are the glaring instances of tacit foreign involvement in the issue which escalate and later converted into a secessionist move. The case of South Africa is one of the examples of overt international involvement, where native black community was protesting against the apartheid policy. The movement further encouraged by international actors to enforce economic sanctions on the state. Though the participation was indirect but it helped to diffuse ethnic conflict in South Africa. To conclude, it has become clear that ethnic conflict is a responsive act against state policies. It gains momentum when not dealt by the state authorities properly. So at the same time state is the oppressor and suppressor of ethnic conflict. The next part highlights the life cycle of ethnic conflict and its various stages.

Life Cycle of Ethnic Conflict

The development of ethnic antagonism expresses that it is an evolutionary phenomenon with complete life cycle. The followings are distinct but over lapping stages in the lifecycle of inter-ethnic engagement.

Figure2: life cycle of ethnic conflict in divided societies:



Source: Developed by the researcher, figure adopted from, Khalid, Iram (2013) crises decision making: A case study of Pakistan-India conflict (1950-1999) Lahore: Royal Books.

Pre Conflict Stage: Nation

In this stage, there is no distinction among different ethnic groups. They seem as one nation. The problem arises due to the grievances and improper strategies of ruling elite to overpower different groups.

State Policies

In plural societies numerous policies are designed to deal with different situations. State strategies are used either to incorporate different groups into national politics or to exclude them. In both the cases, power elites require unconditional support and it is carried out through strong nationalist ideology which often raise anti state sentiments among other community members. The partisan role of state and open representation to a single ethnic community is responsible factor to malign itself.

Mistrust

Although the element is intangible, but it could be measured through a vibrant gap between the ruling elites and ruled. Both become reluctant to communicate with each other that ultimately widen the breach.

Conflict Stage

The anti-state feelings lead to a conflicting situation in which various communities are distinguished by insiders and outsiders. Different socio political and economic conflicts are being raised to show the dispossession.

Re-formation of Nationality

With the passage of time, the weak ethnic groups started reforming their nationality, when their grievances and concerns are not addressed properly by the government. While asserting traditional narratives, they transform their ethnic identity. For the successful re-formation of their nationality a group of intellectuals and activists is mobilized to motivate and chart a meaningful strategy to unite diverse individuals under one ethnic association.

External support

This stage has very important position in the life cycle of conflict. At this point, the groups under re-formation seek external help for the recognition of their separate identity. Moreover, they call for support to those states having trans-border cultural relationship. The pattern of external involvement is not the same in all states but it depends on the nature of a conflict and relationship of that community. Various inter governmental organizations (IGOs) and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) also participate as foreign activists. Resultantly, heighten a nation's awareness of its division and lowered their ability to fend off military intervention.

Conflict Escalation

The above mentioned factors contribute to amplify the antagonism. In spite of the fact that occasionally, external involvement is helpful to manage the conflict, even then internationalization of the issue is an important cause of a violent conflict, and it often escalates the conflict.

Secessionist movement

This is the stage, when decisive measures are being taken. The set agenda of an ethnic group gets a new shape and raises their voice to break away and establish sovereignty over their homeland. They want to be the masters of their own destiny,

so that the state laws and policies will echo their traditions and cumulative interests.

Apart from the theoretical debate about politics of ethnicity it has been revealed by the study of plural societies that neither all the ethnic groups in a state able to successfully generate movement nor their intensity remain the same. Some movements succeed in creating a state and others do not. The success of creating an ethnic movement greatly relies on the mobilization of that group. Three factors are very important in this regard. First factor is the role of leadership. Brass (1991) has defined that it is an elite's group who draws and sometimes distort ethnicity. He also believes that identity mobilization is the creation of elites (p.8) leadership become prominent due to the strategies and tactics they adopt and then use, first to mobilize the ethnic community and second to gain advantages.

The second important factor for the success of an ethnic movement is the role of middle class. It is considered as the major work force. Carl Marx and Fredrich Engles presented middle class as central element of economic growth. Stephen P. Cohen (2005) considers it a necessary condition for a successful ethnic separatist movement (p.221) the effective mobilization of middle class from ethnic leadership enhances the intensity of the movement. The Bengali ethnic leadership in Eastern part of Pakistan is one of the examples, who trained and patronized the sentiments of middle class in favor of their demands and in 1971 successfully created their separate state. The third and very important factor is the support from external powers. It is a well known fact that all the ethnic groups try to develop external linkages for their particular cause. Millon J. Esman (2004) and James Rosenau (1990) have discussed the politics of external linkages of some ethnic groups. Esman (2004) presents that this support can be averted and converted. It sometimes diffuses and sometimes escalates the ethnic tension (pp. 108-110). External support provides material and moral backing. It includes finance, training weapons and a safe place for militants. The Srilankan case is the best example when Srilankan Government detached the foreign links of Tamil Tigers, successfully handled the situation

For the stability and development of a plural society it is required that ethnic conflict could be handled on a very early stage and on priority basis. State should consider ethnic factor while shaping up the national policy, otherwise ethnic groups will remain important contender to the state and it would have serious consequences on the process of national integration.

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