Pulsations of Ethnicity and Epitome of Globalization

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Abstract
The international scenario is caught up in the quandaries of 'Globalization' versus the spatiotemporal pulses of 'Ethnicity'. It has marred the strives for evolving a 'world-order' that is envisaged by many idealists as the 'redeemer' for the developing world. However, the skepticism of the stake holders about compromising their characteristic identities in the strides of such maneuverings has not been without underpinning if we analyze the exigencies in geopolitical and historical perspective. This paper attempts to build up a conceptual framework and insight into the dynamics of this cross-cultural traversing.

The dawn of new millennium has in its fold the escalating technological and industrial sophistication. The resultant swift information transfers have led to retransformation of the international transactions and interactions. The expansive global traverse is squeezing and intra-cultural and intercultural relationships are redefined. The oft reiterated "global village" envisages smooth and viable political integration but it is closely linked with pluralistic or multicultural dynamism in the political, economic and social settings. However, the process of political integration in itself is intricate and obviated by ethnic diversities. The resultant conflicts that at times eclipse the process may drag it to tenuous planks.

The diversities based on ethnicity are multivariate and arise out of "the awareness on the part of a particular community of having a separate identity on the basis of common history, race, language, religion, culture and territory" (*Pamir 1997)*. In most of the instances, the ethnic communities are polarized towards recognition and reflection of their linguistic, religious and other cultural identities due to some suffering(s) at the hands of the community (or communities) in power and vie to protect their group rights for extracting maximum share of the economic, social and political benefits from the state casket. The continued deprivation of the suffering group and state repression transcend this struggle to grant of political autonomy that may escalate to demand for complete sovereign status. Irrespective of the governance involved, the complaints appear to be the same, that is "each group feels it is being denied some of the economic, political and cultural rights and opportunities available to other populations in a given state" (*Boulding 1990)*.

The *state* is commonly an incorporation of many ethnicities tied together on certain popular feeling(s) of national pride or goals. It is sustained on such notion(s) through the commonly accepted modulations. Such arrangement looks very impressive and effective in the short term but, in due course of time, the popular appeal of the rhetoric dissipates and other ground realities and passions crop up. Throughout the history, a distinctive feature of such arrangement has been that systems and state elites did not try to force ethnic uniformity. Rather, they tolerated difference as long as their desired goals were met (*McNeill 1986)*. It does not imply that there had been no forced changes in religious and social customs or the governance. The groups intending or vying to segregate were contained in one way or the other and, under certain compulsions, necessary adjustments were affected (for the time being) in order to maintain the *status quo*. The classic example had been the Indian grant of "special status" to the state of Jammu and Kashmir (within the Indian Union) through constitutional provisions that was later on

withdrawn after ensuring firm grip over the territory under control. This is how most of the multi-ethnic states perpetuated.

McNeill asserts that world history demonstrates "polyethnicity as normal in civilized societies, whereas the ideal of an ethnically unitary state was exceptional in theory and rarely approached in practice" (*McNeill 1986*). By '*polyethnicity*' McNeill implies the sociologists' conventional notion of '*pluralist*' or the multicultural societies (*Farley 1995*). The recent resurrection of states, made up of multiple ethnic groups, is the historical continuity of the natural condition of these states. Thus, McNeill's argument is that 'polyethnicity' exists due to "the political, commercial and epidemiological consequences of civilized social articulation" (*McNeill 1986*)

At times the brawl of ethnicity takes a posture of "nationality" when it assumes a political or territorial rhetoric challenging the *status quo* and even legitimacy & stability of a state thus providing a catalyst for some intra-state or inter-state conflict; at times both, in case the intra-state conflict is supported by outside forces. Lawson (*1992*) calls it the "ethno-nationalism". The resurrection of ethno-nationalism can be ascribed to inability or failure of a state to provide equitable distribution of resources and opportunities to the constituent communities. The feeling of serious deprivation arising out of economic disparity, denial of social justice and political rights to minority groups, in relation to fellow citizens in a state, crystallize the sense of ethnic identities and often acted as powerful catalysts for ethnic resurgences. Moreover, the repressive actions by the state to subdue a rebellious ethnic minority only refuel the ethno-nationalist fervor and intensify the hostilities. Hence, such actions invariably result in a movement for a separate ethno-national territorial identity, as has been the case with Turkish-Kurdish confrontation (*Breuilly 1982*) and Tamils in Sri Lanka.

In the global panorama of states, only a few may be loosely designated as the homogeneous entities. Truly, the bulk comprises of multi-ethically or poly-ethnically diverse conglomerations. This diversity is far from egalitarian rather, typically, it is hierarchical (*Lawson 1992*). These heterogeneous ethnic groups have their own varied socio-economic interests and political considerations which, at times, make it extremely difficult for the state to achieve consensus or cohesion. Evolving political integration in such multiethnic states, or, for a group of such states, by removing or minimizing considerable ethnic disparities and promoting harmony amongst various ethnic groups through a reliable and continuous national process remains an intricate task. It is achievable only if all ethnic groups involve themselves in the shared developmental process and jointly share out the fruits of economic growth. However, the nature of development itself, both in terms of institution-building and economic progress, at times, sow the seeds of discontent and conflict thus giving rise to ethnic and class tensions, as has been the case with the post-colonial South Asia (*Kothari 1988*).

Since the state has been pivotal in the economic, social and political restructuring in a (particularly post-colonial) society, any inequality in the process may lead to cause violent conflicts amongst various ethnic groups with irreversible fissures in the political integration. The ethnolinguistic and ethnoreligious differences became the basis of collapse of the colonial South Asian state apparatus and culminated in the creation of India and Pakistan as two separate states (*Burki 1986*). The nationalist ruling elites of the emergent South Asian states, inducted into power at the time of independence, enjoyed mammoth prestige and were certainly committed to provide political stability to their respective states, and economic growth & social justice to the society by facilitating mass participation through institution-building. They thought that accelerated economic development, urbanization, social mobilization and democratization of political institutions, diffused through the entire stratification of the society, would inevitably reduce

the potential for any violent ethnic conflict. For Pakistan, Jinnah thought that "the diversities and particularisms of regions, castes, communities and sects would all be swept away in the future state of Pakistan if certain forms of state apparatus were built speedily and methodically" (*Phadnis 1990*). However, except for the first decade of the post-colonial history, this optimistic scenario could not suffice for long on account of multitude of blemishes committed by entangled groups in the ruling elite leading to the rhetoric of ethno-linguistic identity by the Bengalis inhabiting East Pakistan, which, coupled with economic and political disparities led to an armed revolt against the central authority. Aftermath was still horrifying. The internal ethnolinguistic strife paved way for foreign intervention and culminated in the creation of the state of Bangladesh.

The Indian leadership had been quite at ease to avert catastrophe by creating a secular and "non-ethnic" state structure and strengthening the democratic process. However, there too, the tendency towards centralization in running the state and management of power politics resulted in adoption of repressive policies at times and initiated assorted militancy in different territories (*Kaviraj 1995*). Though it has led to loosening grip on the national affairs by the founding party's political leadership yet the strength provided by the continuity of the political process and resultant readjustments helped in de-escalating ethnic tensions (*Kohli 1994*). The upsurges of the *Naga* and *Mezu* tribes and the *Sikhs* could not crystallize synonymous to the *Bengalis* movement in former East Pakistan that led to the creation of a separate state.

In Canada, the *Anglo-French divide* and the *Native-White divide* in addition to the ethnic groupings amongst the large number of immigrants clustered in urban areas have led to adoption of a *multicultural arrangement* to manage the affairs of the state, although much belatedly as compared to India. The experience has shown better results as compared to India because the communal cleavages are not so sharp. Secondly, secularization of the political process and decentralization of the federal structure through various innovative measures has provided required political space for the resolution of highly contentious issues (*Hiller 1991*).

The ethnic *détente* has been envisaged through evolving a 'world-system' (or 'globalization'). Wallerstein's "world-system as an intersocietal complex" (*Wallerstein 1974*) impressed many although this notion "world" became truly "global" near the culminating decades of the twentieth century. Bach thought that "a key insight and finding of a world-system perspective that the world-system is a fundamental unit of analysis within which all other social processes and relations must be studied" (*Bach 1980*). It does not imply that every phenomenon can be explained by means of this perspective alone. It should only be taken as a part of any broad elaboration. It must also be kept in mind that "all world-systems expand and pulsate" (*Chase-Dunn 1997a* & *1997b*), that is they expand and contract, or expand rapidly (at first) then more slowly. The expansion of world-systems involves gradual incorporation of new regions and new peoples in a system. The process initiates a type of gradual merger than tight incorporation. The *pulsation* is directly linked with the heightening resistance to incorporation by those being engulfed (*Chase-Dunn 1997a*). The inherent apprehensions about the process have been that, depending on a number of specific circumstances, incorporation can fragment groups or destroy fragile states or lead to a situation wherein incorporated groups may lose former autonomy and become ethnic minorities (*Barfield 1989; Hall 1991; Frank 1992; and, Chase-Dunn 1997a*), as had been the case with the (later on) break-away states that were incorporated into the (former) Soviet Union.

The midst of twentieth century was swayed by the social scientists' belief that ethnic homogeneity was inevitable consequence of modernization. However, protagonists of this theory were dismayed by the fact that modernization proliferated and precipitated ethnic

conflicts more than ever before. While the concept was still hovering upon popular imagination, Wallerstein (*1976*), McNeill (*1995 & also 1986*) and Riggs (*1997*) made strong reservations about accepting the modernization theory uncritically. In a world-system, the processes creating ethnic conflicts are infested within the modernization itself. This has been due to accelerated inter-regional and cross-border mobilization of people & goods and active flow of information offering people more opportunities to encounter others with cultural and ethnic backgrounds that are different from their own. Such opportunities encouraged people to analyze the true meaning behind activities and events in their surroundings and elsewhere in the world; and, above all, to realize similarities and dissimilarities between themselves and others. It is at this stage that the individual of a society gets away of the 'identity' that "helps to place that individual within a group or involves 'identification' with collectivity" (*Guibernau 1997*).

The opportunity of comparison between oneself and others leads to the conception of distinctiveness among people or among one group of people to another. This leads to ethnic self-affirmation or deprivation or minimalization in a certain way and a group finds itself in an appropriate position to be part of a certain world-system or evade it one way or the other. This is where evolving of a world-system or globalization gets complicated. It has been the predicament with most of the developing countries of the world being pushed to be enflocked in some regional or global assemblage under the umbrella of technologically advanced and all powerful communities.

The scholastic appraisal of the impacts of globalization is highly contentious. Some believe that it is an instrument for achieving neo-colonial motives by scratching the prowess of the welfare states under the garb of "neoliberal policies across the world" (*Amin 1997 and Cox 1997*). Others argue that the "national state power is adapting and transforming in response to the imperatives of globalization" (*Dicken 2003 and Ruigrok & van Tulder 1995*). While the former viewpoint seems mainly consistent with realities on ground, the latter postulation is open to critical review since it involves fair mechanism to determine the legitimacy and representative status of the state apparatus itself, who are arbiters in such an arrangement, particularly with respect to the developing nations where the will is usually imposed against the popular wishes.

The crux of the matter is that the process of evolving a world-system or globalization has its roots in the political integration that implies some centralization or collectivization of political power that is fraught with speculations or apprehensions about the sovereign rights of all the constituents. Thus, the process should be democratic and fair providing equal opportunities to all the integrating groups. Otherwise, feeling of deprivation amongst some group(s) of people may lead to intensification of ethnic conflict(s) of any magnitude that may end up in likely collective violence. Only a democratic fair-play can ensure a viable political integration that is so vital for a sustainable world order. One must remember that democratization or flourishing freedom (of religion, association, transaction, ideas and speech) has been instrumental in minimizing ethnic difference to mildest and smallest dimensions. It is because that free societies educate people to respect the humanity, tolerate differences by others, care for the well being of other social groups and explore the means to inculcate harmony with each other. Mere rhetoric or flamboyant arrangements can not suffice for long and will lead to catastrophic consequences. Thus, the conjectures for an equitable and fair structure of true globalization sound as idealists' extravaganza if not a myth.

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