

Majority’s Authority? Ethnicity and Democracy in South Asia

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ABSTRACT

In most political science literature, democracy is usually equated with majority rule. It is often regarded as the best practice for protecting and promoting human rights in a society. This paper evaluates this approach critically with specific reference to majority rule in plural societies to contend that majority rule can prove to be undemocratic and destabilizing. Majoritarian democracy in such societies provides an institutional context for conflict between ethnic groups through processes of exclusion and discrimination, which ultimately lead to exacerbated claims and reclaims of nationalism and nationalist tendencies. The practice of privileging one ethnic identity and regarding others as subservient leads to ethnic majoritarianism, which, specifically in case of plural societies, results in dissimilatory and exclusionary state policies that create dissent and dissatisfaction among the minority ethnic groups. The paper examines three case studies, the case of Tamils in Sri Lanka, Sindhis in Pakistan and Tamils in India to substantiate these claims and question the practice of ethnic majoritarianism in these states. The role of the state in creating and maintaining strong ethnic identities is examined and it is concluded that although ethnic majoritarianism has hindered the progress of democracy in plural societies, the possibility does exist and is achievable by means of more inclusionary and assimilationist policies.

Keywords: *Nuclear deterrence, triangular deterrence, war, South Asia, Pakistan, India, China, Arms Race*

Introduction

Ethnicity refers to “the self-consciousness of a group of people united by shared experiences such as language, religious belief, common heritage, economic and political interests etc.” (Phukon, 2002, p.1). This phenomenon, as well as its use as a social force, has been a central component in the history and politics of most South Asian countries. Over time, these societies have faced a multitude of ethnic problems and conflicts, resulting in violence, loss of lives and instability. This paper attempts to locate the primary cause of ethnic conflict and instability in plural, developing and democratic states to the practice of majority rule, particularly its failure to incorporate and accommodate minority rights therein. It is the contention of this paper to argue that while democracy involves majority rule *and* minority rights, in its common practice however, the former undermines the latter, thus making ethnic majoritarianism undemocratic as well as destabilizing. The paper will begin by presenting the debate between advocates of majority rule in democratic societies and those who caution against it with reference to developing countries. This is followed by some theoretical considerations and insights into the practices that have resulted in the undermining of minority rights.

Short case studies of Tamils in Sri Lanka, Sindhis in Pakistan and Tamils in India are presented to illustrate these practices. The paper concludes with some insights for the future.

Democracy and Majority Rule

Democracy refers to the right of majorities to rule over the government (Macedo, 2010, p. 1030). Scholars like Jeremy Waldron (1999) have argued that in such political systems, “final decisions about political questions, including individual rights and political processes, should be made by majoritarian procedures” (p. 299). These ideas are grounded in the commonly held belief that since it is very hard to reach an agreement on certain practices, it is best to follow what most number of people agree on. In this way, everyone gets an equal vote and the person or group that gets the most number of votes is declared the winner. As Andras Miklos (2013) puts it, politics is always “characterized by pervasive disagreement” (p. 110). As a result, one part should decide for the whole. This has led thinkers like Spencer Zifcak to conclude that “democracy by definition is rule by majority will.” (Janda, 1993, pp. 130-31) The idea that ‘numbers rule’ is the central component of this theory.

On the other hand, there are others who contend that majority rule is undemocratic because it undermines political equality and stability in the system. As Kohli (1997) puts it, the rise of new conflicts instead of the decline of old ones as a result of democratic ideals such as majority rule arise because “democracy to most developing countries comes as imported ideas” (p.327). This primarily results in weak institutions which in turn lead to the centralization of power amongst individuals who then “impose their preferred vision of the political order on the societies they govern” (p.329). Devolution of power becomes difficult because the status quo and the prevalent norms of the society are strengthened in such systems. This is in line with Ayesha Jalal’s (1995) argument that the “democratic difference between the states of South Asia conceal a latent authoritarianism.”

An important component of democracy that ideally should complement majority rule is “the concept of political development such as institutionalization of organization and behaviors which provide value and stability in the society” (Poudyal, 2002, p. 118). This means that a democracy should protect the interests of individuals and allow them equal voice and opportunities in political and social participation. While majority rule emphasizes the importance of numbers, it is imperative to keep in mind that democracy is not *just* about numbers; it is about *rights* just as much as it is about *responsibilities*. Put another way, if the first component of democracy is majority rule, the second is minority rights, and if one exists without the other, this leads to *non*-democracy and *instability* instead of democracy and stability. In the case of South Asia, we see the former outcomes because of ethnic majoritarianism where dominant ethnic groups rule, and the rights of the ruled groups are suppressed. As Anand (2014) puts it, the threat of majoritarianism “strikes at the very idea of democracy” because it tends to “replace political majority with identitarian majority (a majority defined by a demographic trait)” which “attacks minority rights and makes dissent illegal”. Majority rule hence results in the formation of “highly dissatisfied minorities” (Dahl, 1982, p. 88). Similarly, Lijphart (1977) has argued that “in plural societies with extremely deep cleavages, majority rule and democracy are incompatible” (p.

113). An elaboration of the importance of political systems and institutions, and how their domination by one ethnic group leads to problems of inequality and inadequate representation will help substantiate these arguments.

Structure of Societies and the Process of Exclusion

According to DeVotta (2005, p. 143), the most important factor which determines how ethnic groups are treated in a society is its political structure. A political structure that encourages ethnic coexistence is different from one that represses it. An extreme case of the latter is a majoritarian political structure in which *one* ethnic group creates and institutes all the policies. Further, institutions play an important role in establishing and perpetuating the values embodied in the political structure of a country. The legitimacy of a political structure is established when it is perceived as fair. With one dominant group in control of the political system, it becomes “natural to expect that the rules governing relations between state and polity would be designed to ensure that they benefit those who make the rules” (p. 146). Coomaraswamy has referred to this phenomenon as the “tyranny of the majority” resulting from the flawed belief that “majoritarianism is always democracy” (Scott, 1999, p. 162). In the case of ethnic relations, the dichotomy between majority interests and minority interests comes to the forefront as a result. Scott (1999, p. 173) has argued that this divide between majority and minority arises because of number.

Similarly, the lack of access to political resources denies social mobility to some groups in the society (Mitra, 1996, p. 14). This phenomenon gives rise to the formation of separate identities which are based on marginalization. The separate ethnic identity is the result of a “dynamic, interactive process shaped at differing levels of a given political system within which it operates” (Hewitt, 1996, p. 44). These identities are then not primordial or natural. It is the system which dictates its parameters and its outburst. In other words, it is what determines “why a particular dialect becomes a separate language, why a religious sect becomes a separate confessional group and how an otherwise disparate group of people come to share a common history, a shared myth of their origins and a promise of their future greatness” (p. 45). It is important to understand here that the mere presence of ethnic groups in a society does not always lead to strong ethnic identities, or cause divisions among the groups. In divided societies, tensions between these groups more often arise when political forces begin to politicize these identities to gain benefits. It is usually by recourse to a common history, ancestry, language or territory that these identities are brought to the forefront and an ‘us’ versus ‘them’ dichotomy is established and consequently maintained. Hence, the social and political context, i.e. the system, in which the various ethnic groups operate becomes the single most important determinant of ethnic relations among them.

In the light of the above discussion, a political system comprised of a majority ethnic group poses serious problems to the realization of democratic principles of equality and stability. This primarily occurs because the ‘dominant ethnicity’ dominates the realm of the state as ‘ethnic nationalism’, maintaining “little pretense of neutrality” (Kaufmann & Haklai, 2008, p. 754). Simply put, “an ethnic party with majority of votes and seats can dominate minority groups, seemingly in perpetuity” (Horowitz, 2014, p.6). This problem reaches undesirable proportions in “severely-divided societies with ethnically-based parties,” in which “ordinary

majority rule results in ethnic domination” (ibid). This domination is usually brought about by the “ethnicisation of state bureaucracy” (Wimmer, 1997, p. 637) in which not only the privileged positions in administration are controlled by the majority group but most of the advantages therein are allocated selectively to members of the group only. As a result, the minority ethnic groups start viewing themselves as “systematically disadvantaged in the struggle over access to state power” and “question the ethnic basis of the existing state or demand one of their own” (p. 638). This is especially true if these groups are territorialized geographically, making demands for secession more likely (DeVotta, 2005, p. 142).

Brown (1997) has concluded that “democracies have weaknesses when it comes to addressing ethnic problems” because elections let the various groups to “play the ethnic card” which in turn leads to polarization. This is especially true for plural, ethnically divided societies. The differences between proclaiming majoritarian or secular identities towards public goods and access to political opportunities become especially important in this regard (Esteban & Ray, 2008, p. 2190). When it is up to the dominant ethnic group to establish the political order, problems are apparent from the onset as “the nature of the nation and the territorial boundaries of a state are contested” (Adeney & Wyatt, 2004, p. 9). Precluding some groups from participation aggravates this process further.

It might appear as a puzzle how these processes of ethnic discrimination perpetuate in various societies over time. To better understand why such abnormalities exist, it would be useful to briefly examine the role of the state, the government, in forming or maintaining such divisions. According to Segura (2015), as new states came into existence, they “developed nationalism” within the domain of a “national identity”. This idea of national identity by necessity entailed the “majority party playing an important role in shaping the nation-state”. In actual practice, however, the ethnic majority employs the central government “to prevent the practice of religion, language and traditions that define the ethnic minority in order to suppress them”. David Brown (2008) has called this phenomenon “aggressive ethnic nationalism” which refers to the “rational or natural reaction of a threatened community against the community or state which threatens it” (p. 768). This process traces its roots to “disillusionment with shallow democracy of the type frequently found in post-authoritarian states” which “engenders the malign element in the political consciousness of ethnic majorities from which intolerance and violence flows” (p. 769). When, and as it has usually taken shape in most developing countries with plural ethnic societies, the state identifies with the ethnic majority group, it almost inevitably leads to discriminatory policies towards the ethnic minority (ies). This can happen both when the ethnic majority group has representatives in the government, and when the group expects the government to make concessions to the majority because of its dominant position in the society. When re-elections are taken into consideration, it is not surprising that governments will seek the majority’s support and build patronage networks to secure its next term. As a result, “the elected governments function, in effect, as the agent of the ethnic majority, prioritizing their interests and values over those of the ethnic minorities” (p. 776).

An important role of the government in all societies is to inculcate a vision of “how their countries should be constituted ethnically in the long term” (Brown, 1997, p. 534). This vision can either be a “unicultural vision, in which the policy goal is the assimilation and creation of an ethnically grounded national identity” or a “multicultural vision” in which “the policy goal is the maintenance of political unity while preserving ethnic and cultural diversity”. While the goal of forming and maintaining a national identity remains common to almost all societies, especially the postcolonial ones, as we shall see in the case of South Asia, the concise process of *how* it is maintained varies from state to state according to variants of these visions. Ethnicity can be subsumed within the context of building national identity, but “assimilationist efforts aimed at creating a single contrived national identity” (Ahmed, 1997) often prove fruitless because they end up undermining the stability of societies by giving rise to dissent and dissatisfaction.

Various means can be employed by the majority to carry out the above-mentioned practices. DeVotta (2005) employs the concept of ‘ethnic outbidding’ to refer to the “auction like processes wherein politicians create platforms and programs to ‘outbid’ their opponents on the anti-minority stance adopted” (p. 141). The government engages in the favoring of majority groups while ignoring the legitimate demands of representation of the minority groups. This results in the marginalization of ethnic groups, promoting “reactive nationalism” and a “milieu conducive to ethnic rivalry and conflict”(p. 142). Czarnecka (2010) has described this process as building an ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ by both the majority groups and the minority groups where rigid boundaries are formed which inherently lead to conflict. A useful concept developed by Wright (1991) to understand ethnic relations under this majority-minority dichotomy is what he has termed as ‘peripherality’, the “subordination of a group to the authority of a geographical center or core upon which the periphery is dependent with little control over its fate” (p. 299). This dependence occurs in the fields of “political decision making, cultural standardization and economic life” (ibid.)

These dynamics of exclusion have over time manifested themselves in abundant cases. The case of Tamils in Sri Lanka, Sindhis in Pakistan and the rise of Tamil ethnicity in India in the 1960s is especially enlightening in this regard.

The Tamils in Sri Lanka

In Sri Lanka, the Sinhalese comprise 74.9% of the population, Sri Lankan Tamils 12.6%, Indian Tamils 7.6% and Muslims 9.7% (DeVotta, 2016, p. 76). The vast majority of these Sinhalese are Buddhists, and they have historically employed this link to claim that Sri Lanka is *sinhadipa* – the island of the Sinhalese, because Lord Buddha professed his teachings from here (p. 77). According to Tambiah (1997), the Buddhist movements that followed proved to be “the most complex, weighty, powerful and fateful for the history of the country” (p. 39). This is because these imposed strict divisions between the Sinhalese and Tamils in the Sri Lankan society that were to persist for the years to come. As Rasaratnam (2012) puts it, it signaled the “emergence of a powerful Sinhalese Buddhist national ideology that fused language, race and religion with a powerful claim to the entire territory of the island” (p. 177). This ideology is based on an “explicitly stated identification of the island with one ethnic group and one religious identity: Sinhalese and Buddhist” (Dharmadasa, 1992, p. 19). In turn, it has given Sinhalese

a “consciousness of nationalist identity, destiny and majoritarian privilege” based on notions of superiority and supremacy (Tambiah, 1997, p. 43). The Sinhalese dominate the political system with the largest number of voters, and the “rise of Sinhalese nationalism and exclusion of Tamils from the national ruling elite” can be traced directly to this majoritarian political structure (Oberst, 1996, p. 143). Tamil identity, on the other hand, grew reactively as a result of “seeking safeguards for Tamils... against the threat of Sinhalese domination” (Rasaratnam, 2012, p. 171). They also claimed their indigenous right to the island as the ‘founding race’ of Sri Lanka along with the Sinhalese (Wilson, 2000, p. 54). In 1923, at the inauguration of Ceylon Tamil League, Arunachalem declared that the Tamils will continue to defend themselves against Sinhalese and would not tolerate being “bullied or terrorized” by them (Rasaratnam, 2012, p. 196).

According to De Silva (1998), the conflict is one between “a Sinhalese majority with a minority complex and a Tamil minority with a majority complex”. The Tamil majority complex traces its roots to the British colonial period when Tamils enjoyed predominant positions of power¹, while the Sinhalese minority complex is attributed to the perception of Sinhalese Buddhists that they are overwhelmingly surrounded by non-Buddhists and they need to protect and preserve their heritage in their own lands. As the Sinhalese leaders denounced “Tamil over-representation in the public services”, Tamil leaders “complained of administrative measures that discriminated against Tamil candidates” (Rasaratnam, 2012, p. 207). The Soulbury Commission of 1944 traced the reasons of this discrimination back to the “Sinhalese majority correcting for previous deficiencies” and concluded that “ethnic categories continued to dominate the island’s politics”. Thus, the Sinhalese “frame majoritarianism as an entitlement” (Devotta, 2016, p. 78). The Sinhalese contend the Tamils “can live in the country but they must not try to, under the pretext of being a minority, demand undue things” (p. 79).

These fears of the Sinhalese have been represented at the national level by two main political parties in Sri Lanka from as early as 1950s. The Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and United National Party (UNP) have each claimed to be the voice of the Sinhalese nation, and in the process, have engaged in battle over these years, decided in favor of one who can come up with most repressive policies for the minority Tamils. The political system in Sri Lanka has hence become characterized by “discriminatory distributive strategies and dynamics of competitive electoral politics that ensures the dominance of Sinhalese over the ethnic Tamils” (Mishra, 2014, p. 80). These discriminatory policies have included making the Sinhalese language the official language, the Sinhalese religion the primary religion, occupying Tamil dominated areas and subjecting them under the military for Tamil oppression and denying them state sector employment. Over 95% of the bureaucracy and 98% of the military is currently Sinhalese in composition (Devotta, 2016, p. 80). In implementing all these policies, the Sinhalese have used their “superior numbers” (ibid.) Electoral candidates have regularly “invoked their Buddhist credentials, sought support from the Buddhist

¹ Tamils learnt the English language more readily than the Sinhalese under British rule, and hence were awarded dominant positions in civil services, judiciary and education. For more detail, see De Silva, *Reaping the Whirlwind, Ethnic Conflict, Ethnic Politics in Sri Lanka*, 1998

clergy... whilst making shrill statements about [their] commitment to defending the Sinhala race" (Rasaratnam, 2012, p. 260). The practice of ethnic outbidding has become "embedded in the Island's political culture" and competition has ensued among parties on who can be the most anti-Tamil and pro-Sinhalese (Devotta, 2005, p. 143).

The Sinhala-Only Act of 1956, which replaced English with Sinhalese as the official language led to protest by Tamils which led to anti-Tamil riots killing more than 150 Tamils. In 1961, the protests led by the Federal Party (FP) against government policies "ended with repressive use of the military, the declaration of a state of emergency in the North-east and the imprisonment of FP leaders" (Rasaratnam, 2012, p. 268). In fact, almost all Tamil protests have been subject to suppression and violence by the government as a result of which the army has increasingly been seen as a "Sinhalese occupation force bent on subjugating the Tamils" (DeVotta, 2005, p. 152). Under Bandaranaike's rule, development projects were abolished in Tamil dominated areas and quota schemes were established in educational institutions which "enabled under-qualified Sinhalese students to replace the hitherto over-represented Tamils" (ibid.) In 1949, Indian Tamil labor workers were denied rights to citizenship. The aftermath of the riots that followed led to hundreds of Tamils fleeing Sri Lanka, forming the Tamil diaspora or becoming rebels. The demands of secession by Tamils, as presented by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) were met with an amendment to the Constitution which simply outlawed all such demands (Oberst, 1996, p. 147). After a failed attempted coup in 1962, the army was made "ethnically pure" by removing Tamils and "the proportion of Tamils employed in the Police and Armed Services dropped from 40% to 4% in 1980" (Rasaratnam, 2012, p. 270). In 1983, more than 2000 Tamils were killed in anti-Tamil riots. This ultimately paved the way for a rise in Tamil rebels and the wars between LTTE and Sinhalese government took on more radical forms. Under President Mahinda Rajapaksa's rule, "Buddhist supremacy [was] flaunted" in media, Buddhist temples and monuments were built in "Muslim and Tamil areas in the northeast where hardly any Buddhists lived" and Tamil lands were seized by the government, given Sinhalese names and set aside for Buddhist use (DeVotta, 2016, p. 77). The land colonization policies implemented by the government made possible the settlement of "Sinhalese peasants in Tamil and Muslim areas" (Rasaratnam, 2012, p. 261). In sum, the violence against the Tamils "represent(ed) efforts to put them back in their place on grounds that they needed to be taught a lesson, according to an oft-used phrase... and have all occurred immediately after or during efforts to open a dialogue on redressing minority grievances" (Krishna, 2000, p. 54). In turn, the LTTE, as a large organized army, attacked Sinhalese holy sites, infrastructure and government buildings, as well as Sinhalese politicians and officials. They have been responsible for introducing suicide jackets in the war which have led to over 80000 fatalities in more than 200 suicide attacks (Bhattacharji, 2009).

As a result, DeVotta has called majoritarianism the "bane of Sri Lanka" which has been the basis of all ethnic conflicts between Sinhalese and Tamils and the "three decade long civil war between the Sinhalese government and the LTTE that resulted in the deaths of over 100,000 people by 2009" (DeVotta, 2016, p. 77). In short, it has led to both the undermining of democratic principle of political

equality and participation and the destabilizing of the country as a result of violence and demands of a separate Tamil homeland.

The Sindhis in Pakistan

The politics of Pakistan is overwhelmingly characterized by the domination of one province over all others. Punjab comprises 55% of the population, while Sindhis, Pathans and Balochis account for 21%, 13% and 4% respectively (Wright, 1991, p. 299). Punjabis have consistently maintained an absolute majority in the “federal bureaucracy, Secretariat group and public corporations” (Kennedy, 1991, p. 246). Further, this domination is “almost inevitable during democratic periods since more than half of the constituencies of the National Assembly (115 out of 207) are located in Punjab (against 46 in Sindh, 26 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and 11 in Balochistan) and the army that rules the country (often) is Punjabi-dominated” (Jaffrelot, 2004, p. 31). In Nawaz Sharif’s last cabinet structure, 70% were either elected from Punjab or belonged to Punjab (Adeney, 2015, p.8).

Sindh is one of the most diverse province of Pakistan in terms of ethnic composition. With the influx of mohajirs after partition, the native Sindhis became a minority ethnic group in Karachi and Hyderabad, the biggest cities of Sindh (Kennedy, 1991, p. 950). Malik (1996) has described the ethnic conflict in Sindh as “a saga in majority-minority bickering” arising from the minority’s “political, economic and cultural alienation” (p. 70). Sindh developed “a distinctive written literature around which its provincial identity formed” and as a region, it was “was allowed to retain the use of its language for official purposes in accord with the Bombay Policy to rely on local dialects, whereas the Punjab used Urdu” (Wright, 1991, p. 301). After independence of Pakistan in 1947, most of the Urdu-speaking Muslim muhajirs settled in Sindh. The government of Sindh and the central government developed problems upon issues such the former’s insistence on Karachi as the state capital, central government’s increasing intervention in Sindh’s political affairs, the reallocation of Sindhi lands to retired bureaucrats and army officials who were predominantly Punjabis and the secondary position given to Sindhi language at the national level. President Ayub Khan shifted the national capital to Islamabad in the early 1960s. At the same time, Sindhi language was disallowed in schools. In 1961, “Sindhi had fallen behind Urdu as a mother tongue in West Pakistan”, and became a minor language even in Sindh (p. 303). According to Feroz Ahmed, during Ayub Khan’s rule, more than 40% of lands belonging to Sindhis were awarded to military and civil officers or sold to wealthy Punjabis (ibid.) The lands left behind by Hindu migrants were distributed mainly among the Mohajirs. Mohammad Ayub Khuhro, the first Chief Minister of Sindh, was dismissed by the Governor in 1948 even though he enjoyed massive support in the Assembly and the public. The central government supported this dismissal, and this was seen as “the first of a series of executive interferences in state politics in the course of which Khuhro was excluded from holding office by a retroactive law” (p. 302). According to Ziring (1980), “Sindhis were without an adequate voice to represent their aspirations and concerns” (p. 142). They were projected as backward and illiterate by other ethnic groups, especially Punjabis, and a very few of them were recruited in the Army and civil services. In 1970, “they constituted only 2.7% of gazetted employees, 4.3% of the Secretariat and 3.6% of the executives in public enterprises” (Kennedy, 1991, p. 948). These factors have led Wright (1991) to conclude that “democracy in the sense of majority rule militated

against minority, 'periphery' interests" leaving them "numerically, economically and culturally" disadvantaged within their own land by newcomers as well as the majority government at the center (p. 305).

Ghulam Mustafa Syed, considered by most as "the founder of Sindhi nationalism argued that Sindhis are the victim of Punjabi-Muhajir imperialism and the interests of Sindhis are ill-served by a strong central government" (Kennedy, 1991, p. 943). In 1967, Ghulam Mustafa Syed and Ali Mohammad Rushdi established the Sindhi Adabi Board to promote Sindhi language from the domination of Urdu language. Syed also founded the Sindh National Front whose foremost demand was the reenactment of Sindhi as the official language of a sovereign Sind. The One-Unit scheme for West Pakistan (1955-69), sponsored largely by Punjabi politicians, was seen as one of the first proofs that Sindhis "were second class citizens in their own country" (Sipe, 1984, p. 268). Street agitations against the centre became commonplace in Sindh after that. In 1967, several young Sindhi students were killed by the police while protesting against the ban on Sindhi language across institutions in Sindh. In 1978, more than 1700 Sindhi civil servants were suspended. In 1979, the hanging of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the first Sindhi Prime Minister, was seen by Sindhis as "judicial murder" and "usurpation of power by Punjabi military" (Kennedy, 1991, p. 947). This paved the way for a rise in Sindhi nationalism and led to the active participation of Sindhis in the Movement for Restoration of Democracy (MRD) in 1983. Even though this was a nationwide civil disobedience movement, "in practice, it was limited almost entirely to rural Sindh and deteriorated into a narrow provincial struggle" (Wright, 1991, p. 304). The central government employed the military to deal with the protests in the province and more than 300 protestors were killed (Jaffrelet, 2004, p. 24). The quota system in place which reserves seats in government jobs and educational institutions for different ethnic groups has done little to salvage the demands of the Sindhis. This is mainly because they are regional, based on domicile, and hence highly tilted towards Punjabis with the greatest number. The "implicit paternalism" in the quotas hence "reinforce the already formidable ethnic, cultural, racial and linguistic cleavages between regions" (Kennedy, 1984, p. 700). Demands for a separate land for Sindhis, a 'Sindhudesh', as a result, periodically makes its appearance in the political arena. The demands range from devolution of authority to the province to complete independence and establishment of a new country for the Sindhis. This movement on the whole is reactionary and is full of bitterness towards the majority ethnic groups and the center (Malik, 1996, p. 84).

Talbot (2004) has rightly concluded in this context that "Punjab can be seen as both the cornerstone of the country and a major hindrance to national integration" (p. 51). Alavi (1989) contends that the ethnic conflicts in Pakistan have their roots in a "national identity imposed from above by those at the heart of the power structure in the country" so that "the nation is made into a property of the privileged groups" (p. 1527). According to Ayers (2008), "ideas about Punjab's dominance are so commonplace that the word 'Punjabistan' serves as a shorthand for the national conundrum" (p. 920).

The Tamils in India

The roots of the Tamil separatist movement in Tamil Nadu can be traced back to 1916 when the 'Justice Party' was first formed to "break the monopoly of political power held by the small and rigidly exclusive caste of Brahmins" (Swami, 1996, p. 200). This Party was led by non-Brahmins who "sided with the British against both Brahmins and Congress in the hope of securing concessions in government jobs and in education" (Kohli, 1997, p. 333). Overtime, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) became the representative of Tamils as a distinctive ethnic group based on cultural traits which were different from North Indians (Fickett, 1971). They viewed their ancient Dravidian heritage as "indigenous to southern India prior to the historic arrival of and domination by Northern Aryans" (Kohli, 1997, p. 333). They spoke the language Tamil, unlike the Hindi speaking Brahmins who belonged to a higher caste in the caste system prevalent in the Indian society, and were viewed as unjust rulers by some of the lower castes. The young leaders of the Party, most notably N. Annadurai, "actively propagated visions of a new social and political order based on reinterpretations of the ancient Tamil past" (Price, 1996, p. 364). In the 1950s and 1960s, these leaders "mobilized considerable support for a "Tamil Nation" and demanded at minimum, greater power and control over their own affairs vis a vis New Delhi or at maximum, secession from India" (Kohli, 1997, p. 333). As an ethnic minority group, the Tamils viewed themselves at a disadvantage because the majoritarian central government was viewed as exploitative and discriminatory towards them. It was seen as a group-extension of the Hindi-speaking Brahmins that Tamils had always resented, mainly because Congress's earliest members were Brahmins, and this alliance continued after Partition. Kohli (1997) has argued that this early "development of a cleavage between the Brahman and non-Brahman forces opened up the political space for subsequent anti-Congress developments" (p. 334). The Congress party was blamed for prioritizing "the economic development of north India whilst neglecting the South" which made the common Tamil man excluded from the benefits of Congress' developmental strategy" (Rasaratnam, 2012, p. 228). It was argued hence, that a "Congress-dominated India" could not meet the demands of a Tamil nation.

The first major issue of contention of alienation with the center was the adoption of Hindi as the official language of the state which the Tamils viewed as a threat to their own language. The DMK "declared 26th of January 1965, the date on which this switch was adopted, as a day of mourning, and called its supporters to raise black flags and engage in protest" (Rasaratnam, 2012, p. 196). As Kohli (1997) has argued, almost all states unwelcomed the imposition of Hindi language in the country, but it was the Tamils "who reacted the most negatively... and the [whole] state erupted in language riots" (p. 334). The protests that ensued led to confrontations between the participants and the police and culminated in large scale "rioting and violence comparable in scale and intensity to the 1942 Quit India agitations" (Rasaratnam, 2012, p. 229). The protestors damaged public buildings and infrastructure and some of them set themselves on fire. More than 150 people were killed.

The Tamils also based their demands on their under-representation in the state structures, jobs and government employment which they regarded as monopolized by the majority party at the Center. Other causes of grievances were their lack of

decision-making in the Center and the Constitution of India which gave all the powers disproportionately to the Center at the expense of, as well as over, the states. Phadnis and Ganguly have captured the overall sentiment well when they argue that the Tamils saw themselves vis-a-vis the center in terms of relative deprivation and viewed Congress as an imperialist center oblivious to the interests of Tamil group (Phadnis & Ganguly, 2001). The demand for a separate Tamil province, Tamil Nadu, was first put forward by Periyar Ramasamy in 1938 and it gained considerable momentum among the Tamil population in a short period of time. Demonstrations and protests by the Tamils became regular and increasingly violent with time. They even burnt the Indian flag and copies of the country's constitution in these protests (Kohli, 1997, p. 334).

Though the case of Tamil Nadu shows clearly how majority rule resulted in the minority group's political alienation and the destabilizing of the society, the eventual integration of the Tamils as a group can be seen as an example to further support the argument in this paper. The continuing majoritarianism in Sri Lanka and Pakistan has meant that the problems of ethnic conflict and instability have continued to persist, but in the case of Tamil Nadu in India, by 1967, "Tamil nationalism had become progressively integrated into the Indian mainstream" (Chadda, 2006). While based on a majoritarian system, the central federal system in India is a key factor in explaining this occurrence (Adeney and Wyatt, 2004, p.8). The government accommodated some of the demands of the Tamil including "the privilege(ing) of Tamil language as a medium of instruction and an official language in Tamil Nadu" and overall "accepting an increasingly secondary role for the Congress in Tamil politics" (Price, 1993, p. 500). Minorities, women etc. were also awarded reserved seats in Assembly, administrative and government jobs and educational institutions and the name of the state was changed "from the imperial designation, Madras, to Tamil Nadu (Tamil country)" (ibid.) As Rasaratnam (2012) has argued, "Congress leaders and Congress linked activists played an active role in the move to create a Tamil speaking linguistic state" (p. 237). These two demands, i.e. the restoration of Tamil language and renaming of the region were the most important issues for the Tamils, and in meeting these demands, among others, the central government came to be seen as accommodative instead of majoritarian and discriminatory.

Conclusion

As is apparent from the above discussion, the rights of minorities to political participation have suffered heavily in the political system of majority rule. The suppression of their dissent had made the system undemocratic as well as unstable by leading to violence and conflict. In the case of Pakistan and Sri Lanka especially, as this paper has attempted to show, one ethnic group has come to dominate the system because it has been projected as the only way to keep order within the society. The failure to accommodate other ethnic groups within this system of dominant group rule has resulted in high levels of conflict and instability. It comes as no surprise that Kaufmann and Haklai (2008) view democracy and majority rule as the "midwives which give birth to newly empowered dominant majority and downwardly mobile elite minorities" (p. 754). Adeney (2015) similarly raises concerns about the "quality of democracy in diverse South Asian states" as a result of "majoritarianism and the demonization of certain groups within the political discourse of the state" (p. 8). Perhaps, the most

extreme claim in this context has been raised by Lipjhart (1977) who argues that majority rule in deeply divided societies is “totally immoral, inconsistent with the primary meaning of democracy and destructive of any prospect of building a nation in which different people might live together in harmony” (p. 115). By highlighting the problems that the ‘predicament of number’, to use Scott’s (1999) term, has brought about for democratic principles in a society in the first section and then applying this analysis to the three case studies of Tamils in Sri Lanka, Sindhis in Pakistan and Tamils in India in the second, this paper has attempted to put these claims in some perspective. Furthermore, the fact that accommodative and inclusive ethnic policies have led to a decrease in the disillusionment of minority groups and stability in the society, as the case of Tamils in India has shown, gives a further boost to the argument and establishes that chances of reconciliation do exist. Although the actual social political dimensions in place in a society are, without a doubt, more complex than the simple imposition of ethnic conflict on one source alone, the case in plural societies seems to be strongly suggestive of majoritarianism working as the antithesis of democracy, especially its principle of social and political equality. This realization gains momentum when one considers the implications of this phenomenon for the future, and becomes mindful of the state’s role in this process. Government policies always shape the course that ethnic dynamics and relations undertake in a country, but as Brown and Ganguly (1997, p. 11) remind us, they are also the ones which can be most readily manipulated. It is easy to succumb to the primordial idea that ethnic relations are immutable, but one *must* keep in mind that other factors do shape their trajectory and can influence their outcomes.

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