

ABSTRACT

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Title	The National Identity Formation in India: A Study of Resistance and Recognition

Key words: ethnicity, nationalism, conflicts, national identity, recognition, peace, India.

One of the disturbing trends in modern world politics has been breaking out of ethnic conflicts and civil strife within nation states. These conflicts threaten the political survival and integrity of these countries. Ethnic conflicts, civil strife and communal clashes seem inevitable, no matter how homogenous a society claim to be. In particular, the end of the Cold War brought the occurrence of ethnic conflicts to an unprecedented limelight. Conflicts in Eurasia, Eastern Europe, the Balkans, ethnic conflicts in many African countries and in Asia were indeed and continue to remain a matter of great concern.

Apart from the politics involved, one of the causes for ethnic conflicts is rise in the struggles for recognition by separate cultural groups within nation states and at the inter-state level as well. Tension lies in the threat to or misrecognition of cultural identity of these groups. In a multicultural society, like India, a person's sense of self-worth is intimately and unavoidably bound up with their cultural identity. *Recognition* of one's cultural identity becomes vital in such socio-political contexts.

This research tries to identify causes for rise in identity consciousness and failure of majority of nation states to accommodate ethnic groups in their political systems. For explaining that, I discuss prevalent theories of nations and nationalism. These theories, though helpful for the general and grand understanding of the nationalism, do not help much when it comes to explain cases of national identity formation that are ethnic as well as plural or inclusive. I call this type of national identity 'ethno-plural' or 'ethno-liberal' national

identity: In this type of collective national identity an ethnic or cultural and group identity is respected because of being different. The thesis tries to explain this argument by discussing the nature and evolution of the Indian national identity.

A precondition for constructing a sense of collectiveness, like national identity, is that there should be a feeling in the subjects as being *rational actors* that by abiding the norms and laws of a political system, they will be better off as compared to a situation where they choose to stay away. This, however, must not compromise their endogenously given cultural/group identity. Second, the acceptance of the cultural identities has become important because globalisation has made people conscious about their cultural and political rights. To explain this, this research argues how recognition of cultural identity leads to formation of a collective identity. This argument propounded by some political theorist is mainly based on the *Mead-ian* political psychology. Second, after constructing a theoretical explanation, the thesis tries to explain the formation of national identity in India. It argues that the comparatively less number of ethnic conflicts in India are because of the 'thick recognition' of the cultural group identities.

By taking India as my case study, which is a microcosm of world diversities, this research explores that causal relationship between the recognition of ethnic/cultural identities and collectiveness, like national identity. It appears that it is the recognition of the cultural identities of its subjects, both by social practices and in the constitutional laws of the country that has been acting as a centripetal force for its political survival. In modern Indian politics, three recognitions have been instrumental for constructing a sense of national identity. First was concerned with recognition of language and religion. From the late nineteenth century, it was the evolution of the Indian National Congress that rendered the mediation of different linguist and religious narratives possible. Second, after the independence, was the recognition of religious group identities and state's policy of secularism i.e. its institutions would act neutrally towards all religious communities. And third was the acknowledgement and recognition of the traditional caste order and its reformation. It was this unprecedented model of the Indian political association that assured the numerous cultural communities in the country to extend their support for forming the Indian union and identifying themselves with the *Indian-ness*.