

Identity, Community, and Conflict

A Survey of Issues and Analyses

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Identity and its relation to ethnicity and community, on one side, and conflict, on the other, have emerged as salient topics for scholarly investigation in the social sciences. Both internationally and domestically, there has been a steady outpouring of writings on the subject. This paper surveys the trends in this engagement in India during the last three decades, exploring the aspects and dimensions of the relationship among identity, community and conflict seen in the literature in different social sciences.

A sense of identity can be a source not merely of pride and joy, but also of strength and confidence. ... And yet identity can also kill – and kill with abandon. A strong – and exclusive – sense of belonging to one group can in many cases carry with it the perception of distance and divergence from other groups. Within-group solidarity can help to feed between-group discord

– Amartya Sen (2006: 1-2).

“Our world, and our lives, are being shaped by the conflicting trends of globalisation and identity”, observes Manuel Castells in the second volume of his influential work *The Power of Identity* (1997: 1). It is through articulation and expression of their identity that people make sense of their collective existence and experience. The resulting distinction between “self” and “other”, “we” and “they” is, contrary to popular belief, not primordial, but socially constructed. The self-knowledge implied by identity, as Craig Calhoun aptly points out, “is never altogether separable from claims to be known in specific ways by others” (cited in Castells 1997: 10). This implies that not only do individuals identify themselves with, or define themselves as belonging to, communities, but are so identified by others. When identities are essentialised or aggrandised on one axis, people belonging to communities – be they caste-, clan-, religion-, language-, region-, or nation-based – develop antagonisms and tend to come into conflict with one another. While such conflicts between communities could, no doubt, be spontaneous outbursts for protecting a community’s identity or protesting against its violation, most often they are engineered by powerful sections of the communities. Instances of violence and the destruction of life and property in such intercommunity conflicts are legion in human history.

Contrary to expectations, the forces of globalisation, including the demise of statism, the information technology revolution, and the transformation of capitalism, do not seem to have weakened communitarian identities. If anything, evidence to go by only confirms that, during the last three decades or so, there has been a “widespread surge of powerful expressions of collective identity that challenge globalisation and cosmopolitanism on behalf of cultural singularity and people’s control over their lives and environment” (Castells 1997: 2). The manifestations of these expressions are expectedly many and diversified, depending on the socio-historical situation. Of particular concern are “a whole array of reactive movements that build trenches of resistance on behalf of God, nation, ethnicity, family, locality, that is, the fundamental categories of millennial existence now threatened under the combined,

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contradictory assault of techno-economic forces and transformative social movements” (Castells 1997).¹

Not surprisingly, the concern with and discussion on identity has become pervasive among different communities in different parts of the world. In India, languages that did not originally have a term to designate the concept of identity have now evolved terms, often based on Sanskrit roots, or adapted an existing word for the purpose (Jayaram 2004). The fact that “identity” did not have a semantic location in many Indian languages is a significant factor that should be taken into consideration in understanding people’s concern with their collective identities today.

Identity and its relation to ethnicity and community, on the one hand, and conflict, on the other, have emerged as salient topics for scholarly investigation in the social sciences. Internationally, there has been a steady outpouring of literature on the subject, as evidenced by the publication of several readers on it (Calhoun 1994; Hall and du Gay 1997; du Gay et al 2000; Tazi 2004). In India, too, social scientists have been increasingly engaged in understanding identity and the related issues. This essay is intended to survey the trends in this engagement during the last three decades.

As an analytical category, identity has been integral to psychology; especially in discussions on personality, “identity crisis” is viewed as a manifestation of personality disorder. However, even in psychology in India, intensive research on the themes of self and identity is of recent origin. In their review of psychological research (for the Indian Council of Social Science Research; ICSSR) on the subject during 1993-2003, Arvind K Mishra et al observe that in the earlier ICSSR surveys of research in psychology “there was no specific chapter on the theme of self and identity as such”; the reviews on the theme “had only peripheral presence” (2009: 54). Although in surveying the literature on the subject they chart out “a route to traverse through...from the *individual* to the *collective/social affairs*” (55), their emphasis on the theoretical and empirical aspects of the self and identity is basically psychological in orientation.

Identity, however, has an important sociological connotation in that it gets expressed, mediated, and contested in collectivist or group terms. It is in this collectivist sense that the concept of “identity” gets linked to the concepts of “community” and “conflict”. Thus, the focus of this essay is primarily sociological; it explores the aspects and dimensions of the relationship among the triumvirate of identity, community and conflict as revealed in the literature on the subject in different social sciences.

Within the limited scope of this essay, it is neither possible nor necessary to review all writings on the subject of identity, community and conflict. What is done here is to delineate the thematic of the subject as revealed by empirically and analytically significant studies with reference to India. For the benefit of scholars, however, the bibliography provides a more comprehensive, if not exhaustive, documentation of research on the subject. Besides the important research works published on the subject during the last quarter century or so, the essay

covers research-based and/or exegetical articles published in the following journals during 2000-12 – *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, *Economic and Political Weekly*, *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, *Sociological Bulletin* and *The Indian Journal of Social Work*.²

1 The Concepts

Perhaps the most cogent definition of identity and its conceptual analysis is provided by Castells (1997). According to him, identity, as it refers to human beings in society, is “the process of construction of meaning on the basis of a cultural attribute, or related set of cultural attributes that is/are given priority over other sources of meaning” (1997: 6). He recognises that a given individual or a collective actor may have plurality of identities. Such a plurality, he points out, is “a source of stress and contradiction in both self-representation and social action” (ibid: 6). Accordingly, he distinguishes “identity” from what sociologists like Robert K Merton have called “roles, and role-sets” (ibid: 6).

It is well known that identities can originate from the dominant institutions of a society. However, they become identities, Castells argues, “only when and if social actors internalise them, and construct their meaning around this internalisation” (ibid: 7). Since social relations are also relations of power, “the social construction of identity always takes place in a context marked by power relationships” (ibid: 7). Accordingly, Castells delineates three forms and origins of identity building.

- *Legitimising identity*: introduced by the dominant institutions of society to extend and rationalise their domination vis-à-vis social actors...
- *Resistance identity*: generated by those actors that are in positions/conditions devalued and/or stigmatised by the logic of domination, thus building trenches of resistance and survival on the basis of principles different from, or opposed to, those permeating the institutions of society...
- *Project identity*: when social actors, on the basis of whichever cultural materials are available to them, build a new identity that redefines their position in society and, by so doing, seek the transformation of overall social structure (ibid: 8).

These three forms, to be sure, are only analytically distinct. In reality, “identities that start as resistance may induce projects, and may also, along the course of history, become dominant in the institutions of society, thus becoming legitimising identities to rationalise their domination” (ibid: 8).

One point needs clarification here. Although an individual may have plurality of identities, s/he will invoke a specific identity depending on the situation and context. However, the context-specificity of identity is not always neat. Often an individual make invoke an identity outside the context in which the interaction takes place or others may relate to or interact with an individual in terms of an identity that is not relevant to that context. For instance, an individual may invoke the identity of the caste or religion to which s/he belongs when the context is secular (say, in a public place). Similarly, in the media, the identity of an individual is expressed in terms of his religion or caste even when it is incidental to the incident reported.

Identity has immense import for collectivities, just as the identity of a collectivity has immense import for the individuals belonging to it. Sociologically speaking, this firmly relates the concept of identity to the concepts of community and also ethnicity. The concept underlying the term community, which has been in the English language since the 14th century (Williams 1976: 65-66), has metamorphosed over time, especially during the last century or so, and is devoid of any accepted definition today. The definitional criterion of the concept “now revolves around ‘identity’, which has to do more with imagined commonalities even among people who may not be personally acquainted...than with face-to-face interactions among people living in physical contiguity. Of course, face-to-face interaction can solidify and reinforce community identity” (Jayaram 2009: 395).

Similarly, the concept of ethnicity is also fuzzy; in the large body of literature on the subject, there appears to be no consensus on what ethnicity is. The terms “ethnicity” and “ethnic group” are “among the most complicated, volatile and emotionally charged words and ideas in the lexicon of social science”, writes Manning Nash (1989: 1), a theorist of ethnicity. Because of their roots in history, ethnic identities are often regarded as intransigent. However, as Arjun Appadurai (1997: 139-57) has argued, identities are not immutable; they are fluid and amorphous and constantly being reinvented.

While the literature on ethnic identity presumes that ethnicity shapes the behaviour of individuals and groups, it is not clear how it does that. Prema A Kurien finds the power of ethnicity, the strong sense of subjective identification, to lie “in the latent way in which it produces and reproduces individuals and groups” (2004: 2). It is the production and reproduction of groups that is of particular interest to this essay.

Identities expressed in collectivist terms of a community or ethnic group are often the outcome of consultation and confabulation, especially in situations where multiple communities or ethnic groups exist. Sometimes, communities are “imagined” (Anderson 1983) and identities are “invented” (Leslie and McGee 2000). That community identities are socially constructed implies the conscious mobilisation of people in defence of their community’s interests and the invoking and reinforcement of identities in the process. Associations (based on religion, sect, caste, language, ethnicity, and so on) are formed and the mass media (including the internet) are used for this. Gopa Sabharwal (2006) analyses the origins of the concept of ethnicity, and explores its relation to identity formation and social discourse on it through the exhaustive study of an Indian city. Her main intention is to suggest a departure from the definition of ethnic groups as caste or religion based and to widen the discussion to the actual constituents of an ethnic group both in rural and urban settings.

The “we and they” and “us and them” feelings integral to community and ethnic identities are often phrased in antagonistic/belligerent terms and bring communities so articulated into conflict with each other. As Amartya Sen has observed, “Many of the conflicts and barbarities in the world are sustained through the illusion of a unique and choiceless identity” (2006: xv) and “the cultivated violence associated with identity conflicts seems to

repeat itself around the world with increasing persistence” (2006: 3). India has been a theatre of conflict between communities – communal conflicts involving religion-/sect-based groups, caste conflicts, ethnic group conflicts, linguistic group conflicts, and the like (Jayaram and Saberwal 2011). Often, these conflicts have been violent, resulting in destruction of life and property and the hardening of community veins.

Thus, theoretically, the analysis of identity as a sociological phenomenon is intrinsically tied to the idea of ethnicity and community, on the one hand, and conflict and violence, on the other. In what follows, we shall try to understand the various levels, dimensions and aspects of the dynamics of identity as revealed by social science scholarship in the country.

2 Nation, Nationalism and Sub-nationalism

The broadest identity for human beings is naturally their species being *Homo sapiens*, an identity that distinguishes them from other animal species. While this identity may appear to be inconsequential in social terms, the way human beings relate to animals has been problematised by Krithika Srinivasan (2010). Insightful as her analysis is, it does not concern this essay, which focuses on “we” and “they” among human beings. Perhaps, the broadest categorisation of human beings in these terms is the distinction that is made in terms of race and civilisation. Given the predominantly biological connotation of the concept of race, and the debunking of the idea of “pure” races (Gould 1996) and the trenchant criticism of racism (Gilroy 2002; Rattansi 2007), we may exclude the discussion of race from the purview of this essay.³ Civilisational partitioning of the world population, as Samuel Huntington did in his controversial work *The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996), yields what Amartya Sen describes as “a ‘solitarist’ approach to human identity” which “can be a good way of misunderstanding nearly everyone in the world” (2006: xii).

In contrast to race and civilisation as identity markers, the ideas of “nation” and its derivative “nationalism” (through the derived adjective “national”)⁴ have animated the elite and the masses and generated considerable scholarly discussion. This discussion in contemporary times has been notably influenced by Ernest Gellner’s examination of the relation between modernity and nationalism (1997)⁵ and Thomas Eriksen’s analysis of the relation between ethnicity and nationalism (2002). That our concepts of nation and nation state have been derived mainly from the west is the thrust of the volume edited by S L Sharma and T K Oommen (2000). Making forays into an area hitherto dealt with mainly by political scientists, the sociological essays in this volume seek to conceptualise the experiences of “nation formation” and “de-formation” in south Asia.⁶

In a short but insightful essay on nationalism, Sudipta Kaviraj has drawn attention to a familiar problem in approaching the history of Indian nationalism, namely, “the partially helpful, partly obstructive presence of Western political theory” which

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has produced “as much confusion as help in understanding *our* nationalism” (2010: 317). Among other aspects, he discusses the “historical preconditions for Indian identity” (ibid: 319-20), “the nationalist history of nationalism” (ibid: 320-21), and the “internal complexities of Indian nationalism” (ibid: 325-27). His review suggests that “Indian nationalism is at the threshold of a new stage, rather than the end of its story” (ibid: 321).

Using the protean relationship between citizenship and national identity as the vantage point, the contributors to Oommen’s *Citizenship and National Identity: From Colonialism to Globalism* (1997a) review the conceptual framework of nation and nationalism vis-à-vis the emergent reality. In his editorial introduction, Oommen (1997b) articulates the problematic of the citizenship-nationality nexus in terms of the interface between identity and equality. He clarifies the concepts of citizenship, nationality and ethnicity, and shows their linkages. He explains why it is necessary to avoid their reciprocal connotations – state (citizenship) and nation (nationality), and nation (nationality) and ethnic (ethnicity) – and to specify the “critical minimum elements” by which one can distinguish them from other concepts. And he emphasises the need for “a conceptualisation which can account for equality based on groups” (1997b: 110).

“The age of globalisation”, paradoxically, “is also the age of nationalist resurgence” (Castells 1997: 27). On the one hand, there is “the widespread (re)construction of identity on the basis of nationality, always affirmed against the alien” and, on the other hand, there is “the challenge to established nation-states” from within (Castells 1997: 27), often expressed in the form of sub-nationalism. This is, indeed, surprising, as nationalism had been declared dead from “a triple death”.

The globalisation of economy and the internationalisation of political institutions; the universalism of a largely shared culture, diffused by electronic media, education, literacy, urbanisation, and modernisation; and the scholarly assault on the very concept of nations, declared to be ‘imagined communities’ [Anderson 1983] in the mild version of anti-nationalist theory, or even ‘arbitrary historical inventions’, in Gellner’s forceful formulation [Gellner 1983: 56], arising from elite-dominated nationalist movements in their way to build the modern nation-state (Castells 1997: 27-28).

Explaining the paradox, Michael Mann (2005) identifies four supposed “threats” to contemporary nation states – capitalist transformation, environmental limits, identity politics and post-militarism. He cautions,

We must beware the more enthusiastic of the globalists and transnationalists. With little sense of history, they exaggerate the former strength of nation-states; with little sense of global variety, they exaggerate their current decline; with little sense of their plurality, they downplay international relations. In all four spheres of ‘threat’ we must distinguish: (a) differential impacts on different types of state in different regions; (b) trends weakening *and* some trends strengthening nation states; (c) trends displacing national regulation to international as well as to transnational networks; and (d) trends simultaneously strengthening nation states *and* transnationalism (2005: 299).

One aspect of identity dynamics in relation to the idea of nation, and more so to that of the nation state, in India is what has been described as sub-nationalism (Nag 1993). This phenomenon derives from the fact that India is not a single nation, but a plurality of nations. The sociopolitical construction of

“India as a nation” is a colonial phenomenon and it is well captured in the post-Independence concern with “nation-building” (Srinivas 2002; Masselos 1990). In India, sub-nationalism has manifested in two ways – (i) the demand for separate statehood or autonomy (called regionalism), which is articulated within the constitutional framework of the state and does not challenge the idea of India as a nation per se,⁷ and (ii) the demand for self-determination (dubbed as secessionism), which by definition challenges the idea of India as a nation state. The latter manifestation is often described as “regions within regions” (Ashutosh Kumar 2011). The agitation for a separate state of Telangana is an example of the former (Reddy and Sharma 1978) and what is euphemistically termed the “Kashmir problem” is illustrative of the latter (Engineer 1991; Kadian 1993; Ganguli 1997; Suri and Chandran 2008; Chandhoke 2011). That both these manifestations of sub-nationalism have adverse implications for development can hardly be exaggerated (Majeed 1984).

Shankar P Jha (2003; see also Thomas 1992) examines the origin of the Kashmir problem, and D N Panigrahi (2009) locates it within the international politics of the time, during the cold war, and in the context of India’s relationship with the UK. Robert Wirsing (1998, 2003) and Victoria Schofield (2003) view the “Kashmir dispute” as a manifestation of regional rivalry between India and Pakistan. Moving away from conventional analyses, Neera Chandhoke (2011) explains the “Kashmir Problem” as a case of “contested secession”. She reflects on what kind of right the right of secession is, what circumstances justify this right, and what moral considerations affect this right. By building additional factors that characterise contested secessions into liberal theories, she reworks existing understandings of secession. Ashok Kaul (2011) examines the “contested identity” of Kashmir.

Sub-Nationalism in the North-East

The expression of sub-nationalism in north-east India is different in that tribal ethnicity is an intractable issue there and insurgency has been a perennial problem for the Indian state (Kikhi 2009). Bibhu Prasad Routray (2008) describes the region as an “island of peace and ocean of conflict”. Nikhlesh Kumar (2005) discusses identity politics in the hill tribal communities in the region. Biswajit Ghosh (2003) examines the genesis, growth and continuance of ethnicity and insurgency in Tripura. Contributors to the volume put together by Bhattacharjee (2007) examine the roots of insurgency in the region (see also Nag 1990). The essays compiled by B Pakeem (1997) discuss the nature and implications of insurgency in the region. S Nag (2002) views ethnicity and insurgency in the region as a reaction of communities to the experience of marginality. B G Verghese (1996) analyses the implications of ethnicity and insurgency for governance and development. That breaking the impasse in the region requires a strategy beyond counter-insurgency is argued by essayists in Sanjib Baruah’s volume (2011).

Secessionism is seldom peaceful and insurgency invariably involves armed conflict between the group articulating the secessionist demand and the armed forces of the state resisting

it. D Suba Chandran and P R Chari (2009, 2010) have put together volumes sketching the emergence of armed conflict in south Asia, the factors sustaining violence, and the complicit management processes, while charting the direction these conflicts are likely to take. The consequences of such armed conflicts for vulnerable sections like women and children will be discussed later.

People are often uprooted and dislocated because of armed conflicts or in resistance to attacks on their identity. Internationally, this results in the refugee problem and what could be called “long-distance nationalism”. Pia Oberoi (2006) traces the history of refugee policymaking and its motivations in the Indian subcontinent since 1947, examining in detail the six major instances of forced displacement on the territory of states in the region. Honey Oberoi Vahali (2009) explores the psychological consequences of a historical event, the expulsion of Tibetans from their homeland by the Chinese government in 1959 to India. Taking a postcolonial approach to international relations, Dibyesh Anand (2009) looks at two crucial elements of the Tibet question – the framing of the debate over its political status and Tibetan identity discourses. Fiona McConnell (2009) examines the uniqueness and limitations of the Tibetan democracy-in-exile.

A key element in the social construction of India as a nation was the division of the subcontinent and the creation of Pakistan in 1947. Partition has had a profound impact on the history of both India and Pakistan, so much so that it has never ceased to be an area of scholarly interest, and a new genre called “Partition studies” has come into existence (Pandey 2001; Mushirul Hasan 1993; J Chatterjee 2008). Satish Saberwal (2010; see also Saberwal 2006) examines the social-psychological processes that led to Partition, and Kaushik Roy (2011) has put together an anthology of seminal studies by leading scholars on the timing and causes of Partition. From first-hand accounts of the process of division to the reconstruction of experiences of the subordinate and the marginal, this volume discusses the events leading to Partition. Sudhir Ghosh (2007) gives an individual’s informed account of the principal actors in the drama leading to Partition and the creation of parliamentary democracy in India.

Moving beyond conventional analyses, Nonica Datta (2009) provides a parallel account of events and non-events, memory and history, and testimony and experience surrounding Partition. Breaking the silence of oral testimony and presenting memory as history, her work widens historians’ territory. Papiya Ghosh (2007) further widens the scope of Partition studies by considering its residual impact on the lives of migrants and minorities in an increasingly transnational context. Ravinder Kaur (2007) summarises the nearly six-decade-long efforts at restoring homes and livelihoods lost in 1947. She tells the story of Hindus and Sikhs from the North West Frontier Province and West Punjab who made India’s capital their new home.

The changes in the social and political landscape of Bengal resulting from Partition and the creation of minorities – Muslims in West Bengal and Hindus in Bangladesh – is the theme of the essays in the volume put together by Abhijit Dasgupta

et al (2011). On the Indian side, the post-Partition Muslim minority and the riots of 1950 (Bandyopadhyay 2011b) and the assimilation of refugees in West Bengal (Nakatami 2011) are discussed. On the Bangladesh side, the deprivation suffered by the Hindu minority due to the Vested Property Act (Barkat 2011) and their marginalisation (Togawa 2011) are examined. In an interesting essay, Abu Doyen (2011) analyses the plight of the Hindu minority as depicted in contemporary fiction in Bangladesh. In a separate book, Tarun K Saint (2010) has looked at fictional representations of the violence that accompanied the Partition in 1947.

3 Religion as Identity

Perhaps the most fundamental cleavage in modern India has been in terms of religious affiliations. That the demand for Partition was made on religious grounds and that Pakistan was founded on the principles of Islam explains, at least partly, aggrandisement in terms of religion in the post-Independence era. The religious groups in India are not just different in terms of doctrines and rituals. They are, for the most part, also different in terms of marriage, divorce and inheritance patterns, family and kinship, gender norms and behaviour, and occupational specialisations, economic positions, and educational attainments. These multidimensional differences among religious communities in India have led some scholars to describe them as “ethnic” groups (Schermerhorn 1978; Phadnis 1990; Brass 1991; Varshney 1998). The variations among religious groups (and castes, to be discussed later) are recognised not only by the people but also by the central and the state governments.

The religious groups in India are amorphous and they are characterised by regional differences internally. Overlooking intra-religious differences has frequently resulted in essentialising religious identities and communalism. In India, the term communalism essentially carries a negative connotation, implying the hardening of communal veins and intercommunity conflicts and violence. Such conflicts are often discussed under the rubric “communal conflicts”. Although such conflicts have taken place between different religious groups (and sects within a religious group), in academic parlance as well as popular imagination the terms “communal conflict” or “communal riot” conjure the image of Hindu-Muslim conflagration.

Communal conflicts and riots involving Hindus and Muslims have a long history in India (Chandra 2004). Gyanendra Pandey (1990) shows how communalism was sociopolitically constructed in colonial north India (see also Mushirul Hasan 2004; Copland 2008). Based on archival, institutional and individual record collections, Papiya Ghosh (2010) examines community-oriented formations and communal politics in pre-Partition north India, showing how community, religion and nation-making in Bihar in the 1940s were intimately related. Vasanthi Raman (2010) studies the impact of communal violence of the early 1990s on the lives of individual Muslim weavers in Banaras.

There is no gainsaying that religious identities became more rigid during the nationalist movement and in the aftermath of Partition (Pandey 2001). Repeated communal conflict has prompted scholars to look at the formation and change of

religious identities (Beckerlegge 2008). Research on Muslims has pointed to the existence of multiple identities among them (Mushirul Hasan 1998). Narratives from villages in Bihar led Peter Gottschalk (2005) to question the conventional depiction of India as a nation divided by religious communities. He shows that individuals living in rural India have multiple identities, some of which cut across religious boundaries, and that their everyday social interactions transcend the religious divide.

S A Zaidi (2010) shows how multiple and contested interpretations of the practices and scriptures of Islam emerged in north India in the second half of the 19th century as different groupings of faith became formalised. Even a question such as “Who is a Muslim?” was answered differently by each group, even to the exclusion of all other Muslims who did not subscribe to its school of thought. The British, in their efforts to count and classify, used very different criteria, which were quite alien to how Muslims appropriated their own sense of authenticity. Nilanjana Gupta (2010) traces the emergence and flourishing of madrasas and the myriad ways in which they affect local Muslim communities, especially in West Bengal. N Kirmani (2008) emphasises localised constructions of insecurity. The *Handbook of Muslims in India*, edited by Rakesh Basant and Abusaleh Shariff (2009), examines the status of Muslims in contemporary India by focusing on their socio-historical background, their demographics, and their educational and socio-economic conditions. It also looks at policy options to improve their condition.

Considerable research has been done on Hindu revivalism, described as “Hindutva”. Walter Anderson and Shridhar Damle (1987) have explored the role of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) in Hindu revivalism (see also Tapan Basu et al 1993; Amrita Basu 1996; Satish Deshpande 2000). The use of videos and the politics of representation vis-à-vis Hindutva have been discussed by Christiane Brosius (2002). In an interesting study, Susan Visvanathan (1999) explores the relationship between Christianity and Hinduism by using the categories of time, space, architecture and the body, and examines the rich cultural tapestry of Hindu and Roman and Syrian Christian life in Kerala.

Anshu Malhotra (2004) explores the construction of new class, caste, religious and gender identities in colonial Punjab. She examines how the notion of being high caste, as it developed and transformed during the colonial period, contributed to the formation of a middle class among Hindus and Sikhs. The essays put together by Doris R Jakobsh (2010) show how Sikh identity involves the intermeshing of several historical and present strands of consciousness. Paramjit S Judge and Manjit Kaur (2010) examine the basic paradox of Sikh identity by delineating “how ambivalence creates inclusion and exclusion within the Sikh community” (345). The issue of Sikh identity, they observe, “has been swinging like a pendulum from one extreme to another. Instead of recognising diversity in the Sikh tradition, there have been attempts to construct a singular identity” (ibid: 345). Considerations of political pragmatism and the extremist threat, they argue, have constrained the Akali Dal, which controls both political power in the

state and religious affairs through the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), to remain ambivalent.

Gender Dimension

The gender dimension in identity politics has been examined with reference to the Hindu right by contributors to the volume edited by T Sarkar and U Butalia (1995). While recognising the validity of community identity and discourse, contributors to the volume edited by Zoya Hasan and Ritu Menon (2005) emphasise the force of material and social circumstances in shaping the lives of Muslim women. They reiterate that there exists no “fixed identity” for Muslim women – rather that it is contingent and contextually determined (see also Hasan and Menon 2004).

It is in Hindu revivalism that one finds the blending of nationalism with religious-cum-cultural assertion. While the roots of “Hindu nationalism” can be traced to pre-Independence times, the advancement of the idea of “cultural nationalism” for political purposes is essentially a post-Emergency development. Hindu nationalism has been explored and discussed at length by scholars (Graham 1990; Jurgensmeyer 1993; Malik and Singh 1994; van der Veer 1994; Chatterjee 1995; Ludden 1996; Jaffrelot 1996, 1998; Partha Ghosh 1999; Hansen 1998, 1999; Jyotirmaya Sharma 2003; Froerer 2007). Jayant Lele (1995) has examined the “saffronisation” of the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra.

Two studies move beyond the conventional analysis of religion in relation to nationalism. Based on the constructivist literature, Gitika Commuri (2010) has argued that identity conceptions influence state behaviour in terms of both end goals and strategies. She analyses the construction of the “secular” and “religious-cultural” self in India, and the discourses on national identity (1926-2003) and key events (1990-2003) – the Ram Janmabhoomi movement, the Godhra incident in Gujarat, the rewriting of history textbooks, and the assertion of Hindutva or Hinduness – “to understand if, and in what manner, conceptions of national self have influenced engagement with others” (xi). She examines India’s relations with Jammu and Kashmir, Pakistan and China.

Based on her findings, Commuri argues

that the relationship between internal and external others must be treated with caution as the treatment of internal and external others may vary; that different identity discourses may lead to similar perceptions of threat though not necessarily similar policies; that secular, inclusive, tolerant identities do not necessarily engage in more cooperative action as opposed to religious-cultural, exclusive identities; that under certain circumstances, identity conceptualisations (especially religious-cultural) may lead to more conflict-prone action; and finally, that while identity discourses help us understand broad goals of the state, they do not necessarily explain the strategies adopted in dealing with the national or international other (xi-xii).

These findings also caution us against making any facile assumptions about security and foreign policy practices in the context of national identity discourses (xii).

Based on an ethnographic study conducted during 2001-04, Farhana Ibrahim (2008) analyses how, within the context of contemporary religious nationalism, communal strife and border politics in Gujarat, a region (Kachchh) becomes a

meaningful place for its inhabitants and how different peoples relate to locality through time. She argues that the concept of *asmitā* (self-pride, identity) may be seen as a regional variation of the Hindutva ideology in contemporary Gujarat. Substantively, she discusses the narratives of people living along the Kachchh-Sindh border about state formation in the region. She interrogates the presumed impermeability of nationalist discourse and territorial boundaries. Her analysis reveals both “state-making” and “place-making” as emergent and unfinished processes, and she treats “the politics of *asmitā*” as well as “people’s responses to it” as continuing processes.

The thickening of communal arteries and the repeated occurrence of communal conflicts has significantly affected the social organisation of space, especially in urban areas (Chandhoke 1993). Jyoti Punwani (2003) describes how communal riots changed Mumbai (see also Srikrishna 1998), and M Kothari and N Contractor (1996) report on planned segregation resulting from riots, evictions and dispossession in Jogeshwari East, a suburb of Mumbai.

Considerable work has been done on violence associated with communal conflicts. Asgar Ali Engineer (2003) and Rafiq Zakaria (2002) provide comprehensive accounts of communal riots after independence. Robin Jeffery and Patricia Jeffery (1994) discuss the Bijnor riots of October 1990. Hindu-Muslim violence in contemporary India is the theme of Paul R Brass’ work (2003). Roma Chatterji and Deepak Mehta (2007) provide a detailed account of the riots that took place in Mumbai in 1992-93, following the demolition of the Babri Masjid, and engage with the riot and its aftermath, especially focused on the residents of the largest shanty town, Dharavi. A similar exploration has been done on riots in Jogeshwari, a suburb of Mumbai, by Meena Menon (2012). Based on the narratives collected from people in the respective areas, both these works recount the trauma suffered by the affected people, the loss of livelihoods and the experience of alienation. Broadening the scope of her study on the history of riots, Menon observes how riots have created a schism between Hindus and Muslims, and the manipulations that ordinary people are subjected to by political parties. The broad canvas that Menon has chosen suggests that while the cosmopolitan image of the city has suffered severely, the communities have negotiated reconciliation – though with no any real justice – and live together despite much brutality and strife.

Based on ethnographic narratives and interviews, Rowena Robinson (2005) has documented the life and coping strategies of Muslim survivors of communal conflict in Mumbai and two major cities of Gujarat. She weaves several stories of devastating loss, the painful and never-ending process of recovery, and battles for survival and redress from the state. S Varadarajan (2002) has put together a volume recounting the tragedy of communal riots in Gujarat. Analysing the narratives of people and the vernacular press on the 2002 riots in Gujarat, Lancy Lobo and Biswaroop Das (2010) show how “political power gets” a “religious cover”. Adopting a long-term view, Nikita Sud (2012) examines the puzzling coexistence of “economic liberalism” and “political illiberalism” (which

also implies pro-Hindu cultural nationalism and intolerance to minorities).

Methodologically as well as substantively, Ashutosh Varshney’s comparative study of communal conflict in three pairs of cities – Aligarh and Calicut, Hyderabad and Lucknow, and Ahmedabad and Surat – is unique (2002; see also Varshney 2001). The choice of these pairs is purposive – one city in each pair has a history of communal violence, the other has a history of relative communal harmony. The question then is why violence between Hindus and Muslims occurs in some situations but not in others? Varshney focuses on the “networks of civic engagement” – either associational (integrated business organisations, trade unions, political parties and professional associations) or everyday interactions – that bring the two communities together. He concludes that cities like Calicut, Lucknow and Surat, which are strong in civic engagement, are better able to control outbreaks of communal violence, compared to Aligarh, Hyderabad and Ahmedabad, which are weak in civic engagement. The study suggests that a vigorous and communally integrated associational life can serve as an agent of peace by restraining those, including politicians, who would polarise Hindus and Muslims along communal lines.

Conflict, and the associated violence, results in “social suffering” (Das et al 2001). Veena Das (2007) weaves together rich fieldwork with a compelling critical analysis to make a signal contribution to contemporary thinking about violence and how it affects everyday life (see also Mehta 2006). Violence, when based on ideological premises, often takes on an extreme form. Rabindra Ray (2011) analyses the contradictions faced by the Naxalite movement in trying to put an ideology based on Marxist-Leninist and Maoist thought into practice in an Indian context. He provides a profile of what it means to be a Naxalite and what Naxalism really means to its adherents. Taking the case of Sikh militancy in the 1980s, Birinder Pal Singh (2002) explains violence as political discourse. The growing political violence resulting from conflicts around religious, caste and regional identities and their relationship to changes in the character of the state are probed by essays in the volume put together by Amrita Basu and Atul Kohli (1998).

Diversity, Multiculturalism and Secularism

India is a country of diversities; there are many intersecting axes on which communities are formed and identities are expressed.⁸ To deal with these diversities as lived-in reality and to counter the hegemonic tendencies resulting from essentialising differences on any one axis – religion, region, language – the concepts of “multiculturalism” and “secularism” have been advanced. T N Madan (2009) reflects on contemporary concerns about the inadequacies of secularism in the context of religious assertiveness in recent decades. He examines the ideologies of secularism and fundamentalism in the setting of the Hindu, Muslim and Sikh religious traditions. The essayists in the volume edited by T N Srinivasan (2007) discuss trends in secularism in social, political, legal and administrative organs, including academic institutions and the media. The nature and critique of secularism in India is the theme

pursued by contributors to Rajeev Bhargava's *Secularism and Its Critics* (1998).

Multiculturalism

The concept of multiculturalism has been elucidated in detail by Bhargava (1999; see also other essays in Bhargava et al 1999). He discusses the relation between multiculturalism and identity formation and between identity and community, the politics of different collective goals, and levels and problems of multiculturalism. Since cultural conflicts do not always occur "within the parameters of civic peace" and are not "fairly controlled" (ibid: 51), often resulting in civil wars or approaching them, he also analyses the contestations and conflicts vis-à-vis multiculturalism. N Jayaram (2000) provides a south Indian perspective on the experience of multiculturalism and nation-building.

According to Shail Mayaram (1999; see also Mayaram 1997), scholarship on ethnicity and multiculturalism generally presupposes a "a segmented view of society" – "Societies are seen as comprising several communities which have distinct identities derived from religion, language, race, and so on" (ibid: 380). Such presupposition is problematic, she observes, "with respect to a universe of highly complex multiple, plural and cross-cutting identities, of overlapping circles within circles, and ambiguities where boundaries are both fluid and highly permeable" (ibid: 380). She illustrates this with reference to the Mer (also spelt Mair), a community that has "inhabited a complex interstitial space in between Hinduism and Islam, in rural areas of Ajmer (in Rajasthan) that is locally called Magra-Merwara" (ibid: 380). Contemporary identity politics, Mayaram observes, has cleaved this community into two sections, the Muslim Merat and Hindu Rawat.

The suspension of intermarriage between them in this century is the primary sign of ethnicity and community. But even in a state of acute tension arising from the attempts at Hindu and Muslim religio-ideological groups to convert them, their religion and social practice continues to be extremely complex and variegated (ibid: 384).

The concept of multiculturalism, Mayaram notes, valorises religious community, and "upholds the scriptural interpretation of the dominant voice and its version of what constitute appropriate texts, canon, curricula and practice" (ibid: 399). She, therefore, makes out a case for decentring "the divergent notions within Muslim and Hindu groups of legitimate theology, ritual and cultural practice" (ibid: 399). She argues,

The question of legal pluralism cannot halt at personal laws of religious communities but must address a range of practice. Multiculturalism must transcend the binaries on which much of political and academic discourse is presently hinged – of state and community, majority and minority, universalism and culturalism (ibid: 399).

Allied to nationalism, Partition, religion and multiculturalism in the discourse on identity is the minority *problématique*, which has been, as elsewhere globally, a product of "the modern triumvirate of state, nation and liberal democracy", observes Rita Manchanda (2010a: 4). She endorses Andreas Wimmer's argument that "nationalist and ethnic politics are not just a by-product of modern state-formation" (built on democracy,

citizenship and popular sovereignty), but "that modern principles and institutions of inclusion (of belonging to the 'true nation') are tied to ethnic and national forms of exclusion" (2002: 4-5, cited in Manchanda 2010a: 4).

Contrary to the expectations of the then political elite, Partition in 1947 "did not resolve the subcontinent's minority question"; it only made the issue "hydra-headed" – "it produced a South Asian state system of ethnic kin states where a majority in one state was a minority across the border, entangling the minority question in the power intricacies of inter-state relations" (Manchanda 2010a: 30). Assertion of rights by the minority communities, on the one hand, and the resistance to granting too many such rights, or what is termed "minority-ism", by the majority community has not infrequently resulted in conflict between the two. Numerically, phrased in religious terms, Hindus constitute the majority of the population of India and Muslims constitute the single largest and most significant minority, with people belonging to other religions being insignificant in their percentage in the total population, if not in absolute terms. Accordingly, majority-minority conflicts in India have invariably taken on a "communal" colour.

Lipi Ghosh (2009) analyses the current scenario in south Asia and south-east Asia with respect to the position of minority groups. Partha S Ghosh (2007) examines the controversy surrounding the issue of a uniform civil code vis-à-vis personal laws and how it is entangled in the threads of identity politics, minority rights, women's rights, national integration, global Islamic politics and universal human rights. Sheena Jain (2007) reviews the Shah Bano case through Pierre Bourdieu's "theory of the symbolic". Apart from exploring the power and scope of Bourdieu's concepts, Jain highlights the heuristic significance of his analysis of "the state, and of symbolic violence and misrecognition" (3).

Manchanda observes that nation states produce minorities as "an essential part of their construction process; since the majority, in producing the state, also produces the 'others' or the minorities. Minority is posited as a political category, understood in contradistinction to the nation-state" (2010a: 4). Not surprisingly, minorities come into conflict with the state, and this is discussed at length in the volume put together by her (Manchanda 2010b). Besides the situation in India (discussed by Ashish Nandy, Javeed Alam, Sukumar Muralidharan), the volume covers the situations in Bangladesh (discussed by Asfan Chowdhury, Amena Mohsin), Pakistan (discussed by Shahla Zia, Ishtiaq Hussain, Rubina Saigol), Sri Lanka (discussed by Jayadeva Uyangoda, Farzana Haniffa) and Nepal (Mahendra Lawoti). The thrust of the volume is its conceptualisation of minority as "a political category of non-dominance and powerlessness as distinct from a numerical or cultural statement" (Manchanda 2010a: 4).

Of special interest is Sukumar Muralidharan's essay, which argues that minority attributes are not innate in social identities, but are "a function of the contingent distribution of power within society and the exercise of power by the national state" (2010: 71). The danger in viewing identities as innate, according to Muralidharan, is that "nationhood" comes to be treated as inerasable. Essentially, he treats identity as a matter of individual

choice and “innatism”, as an invention of the modernisation process, a consequence of the coercive nature of nation-building. Viewed thus, it is easy to understand how identity politics – defined as the struggle for recognition and redistribution of a variety of resources – has become the paradigmatic form of political conflict in our times (Manchanda 2010a: 6).

Conversion and Religious Identity

Proselytisation has often been advocated for and practised by communities that have been traditionally discriminated against and suppressed by entrenched dominant communities as a way out of discrimination and suppression. India is a classic case of a society in which a substantial section of the population was kept out of the pale by brahminical Hinduism and subjected to humiliation, even treated as untouchables. Protesting against this, these communities have rearticulated their identity as dalits (literally, the oppressed) and have even left the fold by converting to other religions. Conversion of such communities into Christianity took place under the initiative of missionaries, and into Buddhism, encouraged by B R Ambedkar. Similarly, tribal communities, which had experienced isolation from mainstream Hinduism, were converted to Christianity by the missionaries. Has conversion radically changed the identity of the castes and tribes? What has been the post-conversion experience of people belonging to these castes and tribes? (see Jayaram 1992).

Sociologist Rowena Robinson has for long been interested in the phenomenon of religious conversion (Robinson 1993). The essays put together by her with Sathianathan Clarke (Robinson and Clarke 2007) examine the various facets of religious conversion in India. More particularly, the essays she has put together with Joseph Marianus Kujur (Robinson and Kujur 2010a) focus on dalit and tribal Christian communities, who are found to be not only marginalised but also constituted negatively – “They are characterised more by their deficiencies in relation to dominant framework, which is elite and Brahminical” (viii). Interestingly, these “independent expressions of faith” are not only “not adequately treated in the literature”, but also “marginalised by mainstream Christianity, regardless of denomination” (vii). Accordingly, the contributors to the Robinson and Kujur volume “look at what *are* dalit and tribal Christianities, rather than at what they are not and what they, presumably, *lack*” (vii).

The process of marginalisation of dalit Christians in the north Indian context is well recorded by Mathew Schmalz (2005). The Catholics are distinguished from converted Chamars; the former is the *asli* (real, true) and the latter is the *phasali* (trapped) Christian. “The *phasali* Christian is regarded as caught between Catholicism and ‘untouchability’” (cited in Robinson and Kujur 2010b: 2). Dalit Christians continue to face marginalisation and discrimination elsewhere in the country, too. They continue to be treated as dalits both by caste Hindus (Kumar and Robinson 2010) and by those regarded as “upper-caste Christians” (Mosse 2010). S M Michael (2010) notes discriminatory treatment meted out to dalits within the church – separate seating arrangements (sometimes they are asked to sit on the floor, even where raised seating is available), liturgical

services (as in separate queues for receiving Holy Communion), and even separate hearses and cemeteries.

The state also discriminates against dalit Christians, as they are excluded from the privileges of protective discrimination that are extended to the scheduled castes (scs), though in some states like Andhra Pradesh they are included under the Other Backward Classes (obcs). Interestingly, the state has played a significant role in creating special categories like the scs and backward classes. Apart from becoming essentialised and reified, these categories have been subject of controversy and contestation by communities excluded from them as well as those belonging to them.

Tribal communities that have converted to Christianity have been constrained to contend with what Kujur (2010) calls “double marginalisation” (see also Pati 2003). Based on ethnographic data from Malti village in Mandar block of Ranchi district in Jharkhand, he observes how, on the one hand, those at the local level accuse the tribal church of destroying the traditional culture and dividing the community and, on the other, the orthodoxy within the church hierarchy criticises its experiments in tribal liturgy and theory as divisive and anti-universal. There is also the fear, as observed by Peggy Froerer (2010), that the Oraons, a tribal people converted to Christianity by civilising zeal, may backslide into supposedly “superstitious” beliefs and practices.

Throughout the world, the identities of the dominant sections of society tend to be superimposed on the weaker ones. Robinson and Kujur observe that “tribal worldviews have more often than not suffered from the insinuation of primitivism in relation to the sophisticated universe of Sanskritic Hinduism” (2010b: 1). Of course, conversion to Christianity by tribes in north-east India has had a similar impact. A similar process of marginalisation is observed in the case of dalit converts to Christianity – “the traditional focus on caste Hinduism within the Brahminical or Sanskritic framework tends to put dalits on the periphery. Dalit religion is constituted negatively; it is characterised by what it ‘lacks’ in terms of the dominant framework” (2010b: 1-2).

Robinson and Kujur point out, “The worlds of dalit (and tribal) Christians offer us the opportunity to examine the ways in which they might create counter-cultures or manifest their opposition and resistance both to Sanskritic Hinduism as well as to authoritative, elite Christian missionary discourses” (2010b: 5). It is in this light that we need to understand the retention and even revival of jati or tribal traditions, including artistic forms (Kalapura 2010) or deities and ancestor spirits (Froerer 2010; Lobo 2010), by dalit Christian and tribal Christian communities.

The dalit and tribal Christian identities are now “deeply entangled in understandings (and misunderstandings) of the idea of the nation”, note Robinson and Kujur (2010b: 18). As Christians, they obviously fall outside the idea of nation as defined by Hindu nationalist organisations; from the perspective of the state, they are minorities. The issues surrounding this are discussed by Lancy Lobo (2010), David Mosse (2010) and Chad M Bauman (2010).

Bauman (2010) highlights conflicts and violence involving dalits (scheduled castes) and adivasis (scheduled tribes) in

Odisha. He focuses on the situation in the state's Kandhamal district, which witnessed horrific forms of violence against the dalit Christian community perpetrated by the tribal people. He highlights how the Hindu right was able to create a wedge between two extremely deprived sections whom one would have expected to unitedly resist the regimes of domination.

Proselytisation, however, is not a recent phenomenon. From a comparative perspective, Antony Copley (1997) discusses the story of conversion of Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs to Christianity by protestant missionaries in the mid-19th century. He highlights the conflict of cultural loyalties within the Indian Christian elite.

4 Caste and Tribe as Identities

For both individuals and communities to which they belong, caste has been a tenacious and persistent signifier of identity in India (Béteille 2012) and, to some extent, also in the Indian diaspora (Jayaram 2006). The volume edited by Ishita Banerjee-Dube (2006) provides a historical perspective on caste and related sociocultural processes by bringing together essays on the linkages of caste with colonialism and politics, and its practice and presence in everyday life in India. The persistence of caste and caste-based discrimination and exclusion even after five decades of independence and constitutional and governmental efforts at mitigating its role in public life is noteworthy (Béteille 2012). Not surprisingly, most of the studies on caste during the last three decades have dealt with caste groups that have been at the receiving end of caste and their responses to the subjugation and humiliation inflicted on them.⁹

Focusing on the low-caste Chamar community, Manuela Ciotti (2010) examines how some of them abandoned their traditional "polluting" work and strategically entered the upper-caste weaving profession. Drawing on empirical evidence from a Karnataka village, Gopal K Karanth (2004) attempts to refute the idea of a passive acceptance of low and subordinate status by the former "untouchable" castes. Smita Tiwari Jassal (2001) examines the process of caste identity formation with a focus on the fishing and river-faring group of castes, the Mallah or Nishad of the Bojpuri-speaking region in eastern Uttar Pradesh and western Bihar.

The process of upward mobility and sociopolitical organisation of the traditionally lower castes has attracted the attention of some scholars. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay (2011a) chronologically delineates critical moments in the history of the Namasudras. He examines their influence in nationalist and local politics from the 1870s to the 1930s to their appropriation into larger political groups such as the Congress, the Hindu Mahasabha and the Kisan Sabha after independence. Minna Saavala (2001) analyses some religious means that socio-economically mobile low-caste families use to identify themselves as "middle-class people" in Hyderabad.

What is noteworthy in the articulation of caste as community is the sociopolitical assertion by historically marginalised and traditionally oppressed castes groups. Focusing on Yadavs, Lucia Michelutti (2008) explains how, using popular democracy on the ground, the community has become very assertive and politically powerful in north India. Based on her

fieldwork in selected villages of Meerut district in Uttar Pradesh, Sudha Pai (2000) examines "new" forms of dalit assertion. It is important to note that the key caste conflict now is between the "backward castes" and dalits.

Based on extensive fieldwork, Badri Narayan Tiwari (2011) analyses the politics and political consciousness, participation and mobilisation among the dalits of Uttar Pradesh. He also deals with dalit social and political history in the state from 1950 to the present. Eva-Maria Hardtmann's anthropological study (2009) examines the nature and context of dalit discourses, their organisational structure, and the local practices of activists. She focuses on the heterogeneity, internal tensions and transnational connections of the movement. The volume edited by Sathianathan Clarke et al (2010) also looks at various dalit movements that struggle against insidious forms of caste-, class-, ethnicity- and religion-based violence and violation. John C B Webster (1996) discusses the issues in understanding the modern dalit movement.

Manu Bhagavan and Anne Feldhaus have put together two volumes on identity issues vis-à-vis the subalterns. The essays in the first volume (2009a) investigate a wide variety of issues related to dalit politics and literature. Underlining the emergence of "dalit" as a new political subject, this volume brings together case studies from different regions and sectors – the politics of the Chamars of Uttar Pradesh; the multiple identities of backward-caste Muslims; the colonial oppression of peasants in Bombay Presidency; the schooling of dalit women; and the lives and stories of Bangladesh war victims of 1971. Their second volume (2009b) focuses on the role of religion – encompassing beliefs, ethics, ritual, devotional literature, folk culture, popular narratives and artistic expression – and its role in the construction and deconstruction of caste and power in India.

An important aspect of hierarchy associated with caste, apart from discrimination and oppression, is humiliation. The volume edited by Gopal Guru (2011) theorises and defines the concept of humiliation within an interdisciplinary framework. The essays in the volume suggest that sociocultural contexts have a bearing on the meaning assigned to humiliation. It is significant that the policy of protective discrimination intended to ameliorate the conditions of the scs has latently stigmatised them. Ajay Gudavarthy (2012) examines the possibility of de-stigmatising reservations.

How do people come to live as they ought to live? Anand Pandian (2011) addresses this enduring question through the lens of "cultivation" – at work in the moral horizons of modern development, in the personal life of desires, deeds and habits, and in the making of living environments for both moral and natural growth. Pandian argues that the work of cultivation in all these senses has been central to the fate of the Pirmalai Kallar caste of south India, condemned and policed for decades as a "criminal tribe".

Javeed Alam (2004: 45-60) discusses the process of identity formation among the oppressed castes, whom, borrowing a phrase from Partha Chatterjee, he describes as having been and experiencing "collective unfreedom" (ibid: 46). Rudolf C Heredia argues that "subaltern alternatives represent a

horizon of revolt and revolution, which can fuse with others to construct the identities and ideologies for a brave new world” (2000: 37).

Badri Narayan (2004) shows how dalit communities are inventing their caste histories in the present context as stories of self-respect. Joe Arun (2007) examines the process by which the Paraiyars, one of the dalit communities of Tamil Nadu have sought to reconstruct their identity by revalorising the “*parai drum*”, a symbol of pollution that defined them as low and defiled, into a positive symbol of their culture.

Taking the cue from a recent conflict between Ad-Dharmis and Jats in a village of Punjab over the question of representation in the management of a religious shrine, Surinder S Jodhka (2004) looks at caste in relation to Sikhism and in the regional context of contemporary Punjab. He argues that, as in the case of other structures of social relations, caste identities too undergo change and that they have never functioned as “pure ideological systems” (see also Judge 2002). For a region-specific understanding of caste, we need to “disentangle it from Hinduism and look at caste from an historical perspective”. He argues that “while caste is nearly dead in contemporary Punjab, as an ideology, it survives and thrives as a source of identity” (2004: 165). In another paper (Jodhka 2006), he has analysed assertion and identity among the dalits of rural Punjab. Ronki Ram (2004) argues that recent dalit assertion in Punjab ought to be traced back to the Ad-Dharm movement of the 1920s, which emerged along with several similar movements in a number of regions in India. The movement aimed at carving out a distinct identity for the untouchables, independent of the Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims.

The essays in Sukhadeo Thorat and Katherine S Newman’s volume (2009) explore contemporary patterns of economic discrimination faced by dalits and religious minorities like Muslims and the underlying attitudinal orientations that contribute to inequality in various spheres of life. The volume investigates empirical evidence of discrimination by focusing on the urban labour market as well as other markets in rural areas.

There have been important historical excursions into caste as identity. Awadhendra Sharan (2003) seeks to unpack the administrative and knowledge practices through which the community of “depressed classes” (scs) was delineated in colonial Bihar. He shows that right through the colonial period, there remained a great deal of ambiguity about how to distinguish lower castes from tribes, unclean castes from “untouchables” and these from the depressed classes – ambiguities that were consequent on the particular enumerative exercise being undertaken.

Anand Pandian (2005) examines the politics of security and caste difference in the late 19th century Madras Presidency. Relying on a vernacular principle of interpretation emerging from the colonial archive itself – a Sanskrit “Law of Coincidence” – he makes a case for collective identity in colonial India as a conjunctural attribution. He examines “the trajectory of a widespread peasant movement that sought in 1896 to evict a single caste from hundreds of settlements altogether” and “tracks an intimate traffic between administrative sociology and native stereotype that converged on an assessment of this

caste as thieving and predatory by nature” (2005: 1). Birinder Pal Singh (2010) looks at seven tribes of colonial Punjab that were declared “criminal” by the British administration and finds that, even today, they constitute the most oppressed population in an otherwise relatively prosperous state.

The transformation of the category “Maratha” from its precolonial register as a military ethos to that of a caste in the early 20th century is the theme of Prachi Deshpande’s paper (2004). Surveying the category’s genealogy in non-brahmin literature and colonial ethnographic writings and policy, she argues that “this caste-based register of “Maratha” was shaped through a complex, interactive process by both colonial and Indian discourses” (7). In doing so, she historicises “Maratha” and emphasises the importance of locating the modern history of caste and its encounter with colonialism in regional/local contexts.

Tribe has also been invoked as a primordial category in the discourse on and contestations about identity (K Suresh Singh 2002). Archana Prasad (2003) provides a systematic critique of the romanticised notion of tribal life, identity and ecology that informs much of today’s scholarship as well as popular perceptions related to tribes. She examines the genesis of a certain vision found in the work of Verrier Elwin and how it links up with the contemporary realities of ethnicity, caste and community and a hegemonic Hindutva politics. Anthony R Walker (1991) deals with the “western romance” of the Todas of the Nilgiri hills in south India. Kumkum Yadav (2003) analyses the way the tribal question is engaged with Indian narratives. Sujit Choudhury (2007) throws light on the complex process of formation of the Assamese nationality¹⁰ vis-à-vis the evolution of Bodo society. He traces the different phases of history through which the Bodos emerged as the most dominant ethnic minority in Assam.

Using the case of the Bhutias, the Lepchas and the Limbus, who are defined as tribes in contemporary Sikkim, Vibha Arora (2007) discusses the “politics of identity” and the “identity politics” of being and becoming tribal in India. She argues, “The cultural politics transforming a group into a tribe and a ‘Scheduled Tribe’ reflects its political strength and power to influence the regime of representation in order to appropriate preferential entitlements and resources” (ibid: 195). Thus, “Being tribal does not necessarily indicate indigeneity, oppression, or subaltern status; it signifies political assertion and empowerment in Sikkim” (ibid: 195).

5 Migration, Diaspora and Identity

We are now living in what has been called “the age of migration” (Castles and Miller 1993). Migration of people and their resettlement elsewhere necessarily results in identity issues, and in conflict. This theme is often discussed under the rubric of “insider-outsider” politics. The essayists in the volume put together by S Irudaya Rajan (2011) deal with issues related to migration, identity and conflict. The essay by Rajan et al (2011) particularly focuses on the politics of conflict resulting from migration. Nel Vandekerckhove (2009) examines the battle over “indigenous homelands” in Assam.

A significant aspect of migration has been the movement of people across the boundaries of nation states. Such international migration from India has resulted in the formation of what is called the Indian diaspora. The volume edited by William Safran et al (2009) contains essays on the Indian diaspora – approximately 20 million across the world – in different contexts such as post-9/11 challenges, ethnicity in the us, cultural identity versus national identity, gender issues among the diaspora, and so on. Sreelekha Nair (2011) has explored the “multiple identities” of nurses working in the Arabian Gulf. Karen Isaksen Leonard (2007) has done a comparative study of Hyderabad emigrants – in Pakistan, the UK, Australia, the us, Canada, Kuwait and the UAE – from the late 1960s to the end of the 20th century. Pravin J Patel and Mario Rutten (2010) discuss Gujarati ‘Patidars’ as a metaphor of the Indian diaspora.

The volume put together by Susan Koshy and R Radhakrishnan (2008) examines practices of political organisation, civic participation, religious activity, cultural production, sexual relationships, family organisation and economic activity through which displaced communities reconstruct themselves. It allows us to probe scalar levels from the individual to the community, to the national and to the global. Ideas of home, cast in a world-in-motion, offer new understandings of globality and belonging. Combining psychoanalytical practices with clinical data, Alan Roland (2011) explores the psychological effects of immigration on Asians and Asian Americans.

The Indian diaspora, however, is not homogeneous. Not only is it heterogeneous, Indian diasporic communities are also diverse, reflecting the diversities in the population in India. The contributors to the volume edited by Jayaram (2011c; see also Jayaram 2011a) examine the notion of “diversity” in the context of diasporic communities such as the Punjabis, Tamils, Jains and Indian Jews. Jayaram (2011b) further elucidates the diasporic perceptions of “India” and “Indian-ness”.

In an interesting study based on ethnographic research on three prominent communities in Kerala – Ezhava Hindu, Mappila Muslim and Syrian Christian – whose members have migrated to west Asia in search of jobs and livelihoods, Prema A Kurien (2004) explores the factors responsible for the striking differences between the communities in their patterns of migration and the resultant social change. She shows that in each of these communities their different ethnicities influenced patterns of Gulf migration and outcomes of migration, in turn, affected ethnic identity. Her work contributes to our understanding of both modern Kerala and ethnicity as a concept for comprehending social identity in the modern world. The religious background of the three communities determined their social location within colonial and postcolonial Kerala. This, in turn, affected their occupational profiles, family structures and social networks, as well as their conceptions of gender and status, and was thus fundamental in shaping migration patterns. The rapid improvement in socio-economic status brought about by international migration resulted in a reinterpretation of religious identity and practice. This was manifest in changes in patterns of gendered behaviour and status in each of the three communities. Thus, Kurien’s book

studies patterns that compose an identity shift in response to circumstance and opportunity that occurs differently, but markedly, on the three poles of religion, gender and status. Yet within this story of change, identities reconstitute themselves, they do not dissolve or disappear.

6 Gender and Identity

Gender has emerged as an important reality around which identities are articulated. The essayists in the volume edited by Julia Leslie and Mary McGee (2000) examine processes by which gender identities are formalised and ritualised through language, ritual, narrative and politics. As noted earlier, the gender dimension in identity politics has been examined with reference to the Hindu right by contributors to the volume edited by Sarkar and Butalia (1995). Muslim women in Mumbai (S Khan 2007), gender politics in the Muslim community (Zoya Hasan 1998), and women’s narratives on being Muslim (Kirmani 2009) are some noteworthy discussions on the identity of Muslim women. Atrayee Sen (2008) provides an interesting account of the role of Shiv Sena women in communal violence in a Mumbai slum.

The construction of gendered identity, to be sure, is socio-historically contextualised. Thus, Malhotra (2004) explores the construction of gender identity among middle-class Hindus and Sikhs. Focusing on the Singh Sabha reform movement spearheaded by British-educated Sikhs in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Jakobsh (2005) traces the development of gender ideals under the Sikh gurus and their adaptation, and in some cases transformation, by the new intellectual elite. The essays put together by her (Jakobsh 2010) show that, as in other religions, the situation of Sikh women and their experiences are conditioned by multiple factors including identity, socio-economic status and the political context. They cover three distinct themes – texts, conditions of Sikh women in India and women in diasporic contexts – dealing with women’s lives and religious experiences.

That women as a category are more vulnerable and subject to violence is well known (Zoya Hasan 1994; Chatterjee and Jeganathan 2000). Based on extensive fieldwork and sifting of archival material, Prem Chowdhry (2009) analyses the phenomenon of contentious marriages and elopements in rural and semi-urban north India, which has frequently resulted in extreme violence against women. Women as victims of violence resulting from insurgency, militarisation and armed conflict in Kashmir have been covered extensively by Urvasi Butalia (2002), Sabha Husain (2002), Seema Kazi (2009) and Nyla A Khan (2009).

7 Conclusions: Trends and Scope

The foregoing survey and the accompanying bibliography show the wide and intensive coverage that identity as a theme has received in the work of social scientists, historians and journalists alike. What is noteworthy, identity has been invariably discussed in conjunction with community, even as community has become a fuzzy concept far from the definitive concept that it once was in sociology. Further, while community identity has a positive dimension in that it helps individuals

associate themselves with a community and reinforces community solidarity, it is its negative connotation that seems to have attracted more attention.

Rather than being primordial, identity is constructed, and its construction is strongly influenced by politico-historical and sociocultural conditions. The construction of identity is pitched at different and often overlapping levels – the nation, region, language, religion and caste/tribe. Depending on the context, an individual invokes different identities at different times. Conversely, an individual may be ascribed/denied a given identity, irrespective of whether s/he is agreement with it. The play of community identities when resources and symbols are involved often results in conflict, not infrequently violent. Conflict between communities reinforces their identities and hardens community boundaries. It is the burden of the state to ensure that community identities and interests are protected and that communities do not conflict with each other. However, given the nature of democratic politics, the state and its machinery cannot or does not act as an impartial referee – either it tries, in vain, to please all communities, or sides with one community that serves its political interest the best. This dynamics of identity in relation to community and conflict is well illustrated by the studies surveyed.

At each level of its construction and play, serious scholarship has engaged with identity. Significant contributions towards conceptualising identity have come from Arjun Appadurai, N Jayaram, Prema A Kurien, Gopa Sabharwal and Amartya Sen. On nation, nationalism and sub-nationalism, the leading contributors include Sanjib Baruah, Neera Chandoke, Partha Chatterjee, Nirad C Choudhury, Sudipta Kaviraj, Ashutosh Kumar, Sajal Nag, T K Oommen and B G Verghese. Incisive analyses on Partition have been carried out by Papiya Ghosh, Mushirul Hasan, Gyanendra Pandey and Satish Saberwal. Religion and communalism have attracted the widest of scholarship; Amrita Basu, Neera Chandoke, Bipin Chandra, Gitika Commuri, Veena Das, Asghar Ali Engineer, Papiya Ghosh, Partha Ghosh, Mushirul Hasan, Farhana Ibrahim, Surinder S Jodhka, Paramjit S Judge, Gyanendra Pandey, Rowena Robinson and Ashutosh Varshney. The identity dynamics surrounding caste/tribe have been examined at length by Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, Ishita Banerjee-Dube, André Béteille, Gopal Guru, Surinder S Jodhka and Badri Narayan Tiwari. The discussion on diversity, multiculturalism and secularism has been enriched by Rajeev Bhargava, T N Madan, Rita Manchanda, Sahil Mayaram and T N Srinivasan. Gender issues in relation to identity have been addressed by Urvashi Butalia, Prem Chowdhry, Zoya Hasan and Tanika Sarkar. Finally, identity issues arising from migration and diaspora have been dealt with by Prema A Kurien, N Jayaram and S Irudaya Rajan.

The subject has been of interest to many disciplines. Contributors to it include anthropologists (Appadurai, Ibrahim, Mayaram), demographers (Rajan), economists (Amartya Sen), historians (Chandra, Mushirul Hasan, Pandey), political scientists (Bhargava, Chandoke, Partha Chatterjee, Zoya Hasan, Kaviraj) and sociologists (Jayaram, Jodhka, Judge, Kurien, Madan, Oommen, Saberwal). Very few scholars appear willing to cross their disciplinary boundaries; most of them operate with the conceptual frameworks and methodological apparatus of their disciplines. The disciplinary orientation obviously circumscribes the understanding of the phenomenon.

By and large, there is a tendency among scholars working on identity to engage themselves in exegetical work. Often ideas (and opinions) are sought to be substantiated by anecdotal evidence or delineated in analytical mode. This is more so among scholars dealing with concepts – such as nationalism, secularism and multiculturalism – at the most general level. Discussion stemming from this often takes on a polemical overtone.

There are, however, intensive field-based studies exploring the issues of identity and community at the micro level. These studies use the ethnographic method and the analysis of narratives. Such studies yield incisive insights on identity and community dynamics at the ground level. However, the generalisations that they yield are expectedly socio-historically circumscribed. This suggests the significance of and the need for comparative analysis of identity and conflict. Scholars working on the historical dimension of identity and community make extensive use of archival material and oral testimonies. The importance of their work lies in highlighting the processual dimension of the construction of identities as also the metamorphosis of community.

While much is known and theorised about identity, community and conflict, one dare not say that there is nothing more to be known. The fluid and metamorphosing nature of identity and community as social constructions necessarily implies that the subject needs continuous scholarly engagement. Substantively, the survey suggests the following directions for further research.

- (a) At the broadest level: The changing nature of the Indian nation-state in the light of a changed international configuration and globalising forces; the conjunction and disjunction between global forces and local realities; the implications of the rise of states for the federal set-up; and the phenomenon of regions within regions.
- (b) At the ground level: Comparative analysis of inter-community relations (peaceful as well as conflictual) and identity articulations; the changing nature of inter-caste relations (hierarchy and/or identity); and the gender dimension in both inter-community and inter-caste relations.

More important, given the significance of identity-community-conflict as an interrelated theme, social science programmes must accord due place to it in both curriculum and pedagogy.

NOTES

- 1 Rowena Robinson (2001) has explored the global reach of Hindu fundamentalism via the Internet.
- 2 My thanks are due to Kaivalya T Desai for helping me in sourcing the material from various journals.
- 3 The essays in Peter Robb's volume (1997)

examine whether there were south Asian concepts of race, or, as has often been argued, race became an issue in the subcontinent only under western influence after the 18th century. In this context, one may recall the debate on "caste as race" that animated the World Conference against Racism organised by the United Nations in Durban, South Africa,

21 August-7 September 2001 (Ramanathan 2001; Shiv Visvanathan 2001).

- 4 Nirad C Chaudhuri draws attention to the fact that "the same long time interval separates the derivative from the original. The first citation of the word 'nation' in the OED [*The Oxford English Dictionary*] is from AD 1300 whereas the derived abstract noun did not appear till 1836" (1997: 51).

- 5 For a critical appraisal of the Gellnerian theory of nation and nationalism by an Indian, see D V Kumar (2010).
- 6 Among sociologists in India, Oommen has made a significant contribution to the discussion on nation, nationality and nationalism in the south Asian context. His elucidation of the concepts of nation and nationality (2004: 23-41), nationalism and collective rights (42-62), the untenable linkage between religious nationalism and democratic polity (63-83), and the relation between language and nation (84-104) are particularly noteworthy.
- 7 Not surprisingly, there has been rethinking on the nature of federalism in India (see Rasheed-uddin Khan 1997; see also Narang 1995).
- 8 The essays in the volume edited by Chetan Singh (2011) show how, despite the similarities, Himalayan societies are diverse in terms of various aspects such as environment, inter-caste relations, marriage customs, religious practices and folk traditions.
- 9 Among the notable exceptions is the case study of Kamma, a Telugu-speaking dominant caste in Andhra Pradesh, by Yamada Keiko (2008). Keiko traces the role played by the modern historical consciousness of region and language in the writing of caste historiography during the first half of the 20th century. His analysis of the development of different historiographies – from those of non-brahmin leaders Suriyadevara Raghavayya Chaudari and Tripuraneni Ramaswami Chaudari to socialist-cum-nationalist leader N G Ranga and a caste movement ideologue Kotta Bhavayya Chaudari – demonstrates the correlation and complicity between history and caste identity and homeland language movements.
- 10 The nationalist upsurge in Assam is discussed at length by Hussain (1993), Baruah (1999), and the essayists in Bhuyan (2000).
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