THE ROOTS OF VIOLENCE AND PROBLEMS OF CONTROL

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VALUES, POLICIES AND THE CONTROL OF
ETHNOCENTRIC ROOTS OF VIOLENCE

by Ratna Naidu

We like to think that the most fundamental dimension of
the civilizational process has been the rooting of the principle
of humanitarianism in all spheres of life. The organising princi-
ple of humanitarian values, namely, that "man is the measure of
all things" sharply divides modern governments from their medieval
counterparts.

This principle is of course continuously violated: but techno-
logical advances and remote control systems anaesthetise the bulk of
mankind from the strongest emotion which springs from humanitarian
values, namely, "the flinching before the spectacle of pain, ... the
imaginative recoil before witnessed cruelty"[1]. Primitive technology
did not protect man from witnessing the effects of his own aggression.
Nevertheless, a small measure of our progress is that we have learnt
not to be insensitive to violence and cruelty in our everyday life.

Humanitarian value directives have codified norms and legalized
rights and obligations in areas of human relationships where these
could be unambigously identified and defined. Also, giant strides in
organized humanitarianism have occured in the last few centuries as
in the universal abolition of slavery, prison reforms and reforms of
penalty for crime, child welfare laws, laws against cruelty in work
relations and so on.

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1. Crane Brinton, "Humanitarianism" in Encyclopaedia of the Social
    Sciences, p. 544.

However, there is one key area where it has been difficult to formulate as well as implement humanitarian policies - in the area of majority-minority relations. Whereas social customs and discriminatory laws against minorities have been easier to abolish, protective legislation and constitutional safeguards, as in the area of political representation, or sponsored economic development (if the minority happens to be lagging behind) are often found to be counter-productive.

Minority is a political concept, not a numerical one. The majority-minority relation is defined basically in terms of psycho-politics —— the politically dominant group is the majority. The basis of political dominance may be economics, custom, heredity, or as in most modern democracies, merely a matter of numbers. The majorities are not always in conflict with all minorities (whether numerical or otherwise). Inter-group relations are characterised by violent conflict, peaceful co-existence and/or degrees of enmity depending on the template of memories and myths which have defined the majority's relationship with the minority whether in the recent past, or over thousands of years. It is obvious that in relation-ships where hidden volcanoes of conflict are latent, the more the minority is emancipated, the greater its ability to exert political pressure, the more the danger of conflict with the majority. The well-known example is that of the Jews. Nineteenth century revolu-tionary and humanitarian changes swept the Jew culturally, politi-cally and professionally forward, and he was emancipated and free as never before. But before the end of the century, the majorities had begun to retrace their steps and at every financial and political crisis the Jew, ubiquitous and conspicuous in his new found status, was flood-lighted as the scapegoat for Europe's problems. The ideo-logical enthusiasm of the liberal European could not sweep clean the enormous psychic burden of the ancient Jew- Gentile animosity.

Nevertheless, the humanitarian conquest of the minority problem continues, at least on the ideological plane. In the nineteenth century the ambition was merely to operationalize the equalitarian ideology by providing for equality of opportunity under the constitution and laws of the land. Recent conceptualization of the ideology of equality has evolved to the extent that it demands "equality of result"[2] through affirmative action. This has now become a matter of redistribution policies, protection against competition on a group basis on grounds of inherited socio-economic lags and so on. There is of course a furious controversy raging around the pragmatic value of affirmative action programmes[3]. It is feared that the inevitable consequence of affirmative action will be the coalescence of group identities wherever and whenever this may seem profitable by members and/or the leaders of a group. Affirmative action would seem then to create another structural requisite for conflict between communities in modern society.

Dangers of conflict between communities in modern society seem to have increased more than ever before even on other grounds[4]. Increased tempo of conquest, communication, mobility and varied and expanding opportunity pastures have in the last few centuries uprooted communities from their natural environments and their uneasy transplantation in alien lands have created today the universal problem of

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2. See, Daniel Bell, "Ethnicity and Social Change", in "Ethnicity: Theory and Experience", edited by Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1975, pp. 146-147.

3. One of the more important books which have come out on this is Nathan Glazer's Affirmative Discrimination: Ethnic Inequality and Public Policy, Basic Books, New York 1975.

4. See, Bell, Ibid., pp. 141-174.

ethnic maladjustment to national cultures. The migrants from
labour-surplus to labour-scarce economies (the Indian Sikhs in
Australia and England) or from skill-surplus to skill-scarce
economies (as in the current rush to West Asia) occupy the lower
rungs of the status and the socio-economic ladder and form perma-
nent sources of political discontent.

Thus the proliferation and aggravation of ethnic identities,
spawned by the political and technological condition of modern times,
would lead one to logically expect a great deal of ethnic conflict
in the coming decades, unless psychological dispositions of the
masses change drastically to match the ideological leaps of the
vanguard intellects.

But we know from experience that psychological dispositions
are slow to change and this is especially so with regard to ethnic
prejudice. Indeed, as mentioned before, political, economic and
administrative rules and regulations for the protection of minorities
merely harden conservative reaction. Since most of the liberal
policies are the creation of a small intellectual elite, implementation
of the policies are also very often subverted by the majority domi-
nated administration especially during economic and political crises.
It is important therefore that even as we leap forward ideologically,
we try to gain a deeper understanding of the ethnocentric roots of
violence.

The term ethnocentrism was coined by William Graham Sumner in
his _Folkways_[5] to refer to the widely noted phenomenon wherein one's
own group is the center of everything and all others are scaled and
rated with reference to it.

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5. W. G. Sumner: _Folkways_, Boston, 1907.

Ethnocentrism is the affection and sympathy for the in-group and the dislike and the suspicion of the outsider. Suspicion is generated by fear of the unknown, and dislike of the out-group is essentially for the culturally different: man's equipment in terms of language, manners, style of living and so on which leads Erikson to speak of "pseudo-speciation"[6]. In so far as the carriers of these different cultures are distinct physical types in terms of skin-colour and so on, "pseudo-speciation" is buttressed. One has to note also that the individual learns his love and hate in these matters through the socialization process. He learns to cherish the values of his own group and de-values that of the out-group. Supposedly the one is not possible without the other. As Murdock puts it, the folkways of the in-group constitute its "prosperity policy"[7], designed

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6. The term "pseudo-speciation" was ascribed to Erikson by Konrad Lorenz because of Erikson's use of the phrase "pseudo-species" mentality. Erikson says that "the term denotes the fact that while man is obviously one species, he appears and continues on the scene split up into groups ... which provide their members with a firm sense of distinct and superior identity and immortality". Erik H Erikson, Gandhi's Truth: On the Origins of Militant Nonviolence, Faber and Faber, Ltd., London, 1970, p. 431. Elsewhere he says - "pseudospecies ... is ... rooted in tribal life and based on all the evolutionary peculiarities which brought about man. Among these is his prolonged childhood during which the newborn, 'naturally' born to the most 'generalist' animal of all and adaptable to widely differing environments, becomes specialized as a member of a human group with its complex interplay of an 'inner world' and a social environment. He becomes indoctrinated, then with the conviction that his 'species' alone was planned by an all-wise deity, created in ... and appointed by history to guard the only genuine version of humanity ..." See, Erikson's Identity Youth and Crisis, W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. New York, 1968, pp. 298-299.

7. George P. Murdock, "Ethnocentrism", Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences, p.612.

through decades of trial and error in the struggle for existence in its particular natural environment. Over time these cultural patterns are imputed sanction by divinity and law. Obviously the defiance of such a prosperity policy by the out groups is witnessed with fear, uncertainty, in short a cluster of xenophobic emotions.

The ethnocentrism concept has generated a large body of literature[8] based on theoretical and empirical research. Broadly this body of literature may be divided into two. First, there are the realistic conflict theorists, who offer one set of explanations for ethnocentrism — that perceptions of threat, economic, political, and/or cultural, increase in-group solidarity, awareness of identity, group boundary and so on. Secondly, there are the set of explanations rooted in the social-psychology of the members of the in-group, wherein the frustrations and pain of our existential condition find projective expressions and aggressions which are <u>displaced</u> to the out-group. Ethnocentrism, in the first explanatory framework is due to threats from out-groups which are real; in the second explanatory framework the threat is merely in the minds of men. Whatever the specific explanation, it is clear that ethnocentrism emerges from man's instinctive reactions to stress (sometimes conceptualized in literature as the "hard" instinct) and therefore is a basic element in the psycho-social life of communities. In fact, if one considers that scapegoating is the epitomic concept in the frustration-aggression-displacement theories of ethnocentrism, we are led to the policy and predictive dilemma that if an out-group did not exist, it would be necessary to invent one.

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8. A comprehensive survey of this literature is in Robert A. Le Vine and Donald T. Campbell: <u>Ethnocentrism: Theories of Conflict, Ethnic Attitude and Group Behaviour</u>, John Wiley and Sons, New York, 1972.

The literature on ethnocentrism yields a large number of explanatory and predictive propositions regarding the relation between in-group structural types, as also personality types, and strength of ethnocentrism. It has been found that ethnocentrism is associated with authoritarian personality and social structures[9], and both authoritarianism and ethnocentrism has been found to be associated with conflict proneness to out-groups. Another well-known proposition is that within a group those who are socially and economically poor and therefore lack sufficient scope for individualistic aspirations (as also in the case of the authoritarian social set-up) will be the more ethnocentric.

The existing theoretical insights into ethnocentrism, valuable as they are in themselves, provide a limited frame-of-reference for comprehending our more complex encounter with the problem today. Most of the research was done in the fifties and sixties. The major events immediately preceding the period of the fifties cast their shadow on intellectual pre-occupations. These we may recall, were the World War against Nazism, and the national and the sub-national movements in the wake of the decline of colonial regimes. Ethnocentrism was basic to those events. Yet, the intellectuals of the 19th and the first decade of the 20th century had designed a frame-of reference for understanding of the evolution of social, economic and political condition of mankind in which ethnocentrism was doomed to play an increasingly insignificant role. The Marxian pre-occupation with class-based interests, the Weberian predilection for increasing rationality as an organizing principle, Durkheim's vision of organic solidarity (to mention a few) created categories of analysis which predicted the withering away of ethnicity-based interest groups.

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9. The most basic study on this is <u>The Authoritarian Personality</u> by Adorno et al, Harper and Brothers, New York, 1950.

The impairment of the grand struggle against colonial oppression by communal wars was the more easily explained in terms of the tools of Western intellectual tradition. These conceptual tools divided the world into developed and under-developed and associated value systems. Ethnocentrism and the fusion of economic and political aspirations to primordial considerations was seen as part of under-development.

It was more difficult, however, to explain the racism of the Nazi regime. How could Germany which had experienced the full flowering of the Western cultural tradition and intellectual enlightenment, regress into the racist irrationalities of a by-gone era? The aberration was sought to be explained in terms of authoritarianism. The child rearing practises and the socialization process of an authoritarian social structure bred personality types for whom ethnocentric outlets are essential. These explanations were also in comfortable conformity to the political ideology of the conquering nations — for was not the War basically a war of democracies against authoritarian dictatorships?

But now in the decade of the seventies we witness "a resurgence of ethnicity" in the most liberal, the least authoritarian, the most affluent and technologically developed nations. Summarizing the situation in the United States of America, Glazer and Moynihan say:

> "The long expected and predicted decline of ethnicity, the fuller acculturation and the assimilation (at least) of the white ethnic groups, seems once again delayed — as it was by World War I, World War II, and the Cold War — and by now one suspects if something expected keeps on failing to happen, that there may be more reasons than accident that explain why ethnicity and ethnic identity continue to persist".[10]

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10. Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan, _Beyond the Melting Pot_, The M.I.T. Press, Cambridge, Mass. 1963, p. xxxiii, phrase in bracket added.

The entire empirical evidence, whether for developed, under-developed, or for the more primitive cultures, do suggest that ethnocentrism (or ethnic attachments and communalism) does not decrease parri passu with economic and political development[11]. I suggest that if we accept that predictions on ethnocentrism have been faulty, the reasons must be sought in inadequacies in the conceptualization of the ethnocentric process.

The first question is whether or not we accept ethnocentrism to be a basic human drive which motivates action. If we accept it as basic to human endeavours, then we can begin to look for it and identify it in contexts which are entirely new to the existing social science literature. To give one obvious example, while the existing studies on ethnocentrism enable us to measure ethnocentric attitudes as between different classes, cultures or groups, they fail to give us clues as to how we may differentiate between degrees of refinement with which ethnocentrism may be expressed. The upper class may be on the whole as ethnocentric as the lower class but their ethnocentrism may be on different issues and may find expression in a different manner. This is why such indicators as level of education, income and class background etc., are some times not very relevant variables for predicting tendencies towards ethnocentrism and prejudice. We know, for instance, that even in perfectly liberal democracies, ethnocentric aggression can be quickly aroused on the question of liberalization of immigration laws which might benefit the "wrong" types of nationalities. This is not to deny the conclusions of the classic studies on the lower class authoritarianism and ethnocentrism, but to suggest that ethnocentrism could also be present in various other types of social structures, and class differences in the strength of ethnocentrism would depend on the contextual framework of such studies, and specific types of issues on the basis of which ethnocentrism is measured.

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11. See especially, Cynthia Enloe, Ethnic Conflict and Political Development, Little Brown & Co., Boston, 1973.

To look at the problem from another perspective, in today's world when pluralist state systems are being increasingly consolidated ethnocentric valuing of one's culture is not necessarily accompanied by the devaluation of other cultures. In such pluralist state systems men learn to think in terms of more complex categories. Relativistic way of thinking and viewing things become habitual. However, it is important to reiterate that in these matters, intellectual progress, such as it is, does not diminish the core human drives — such as the fear of the unknown and the rejection of the untried.

Thus, there seems to be a case for a more differentiated conceptualization for the ethnocentric process. Moreover, and more seriously, I would plead for a differentiation between ethnocentrism per se and pathological ethnocentrism.

The narcissistic pursuit of the self at the individual level is the counterpart of the ethnocentric process at the group level. However, the individual's pursuit of happiness is controlled through the process of socialization and the operation of the psychological mechanism on the reality principle. One would think that ethnocentrism of the groups is also surely controlled and channelled into specified directions through the operation of the reality principle.

The individual is persuaded to restrain and even suppress and repress his impulses and desires, and thus suffer frustration that he may be accepted by the primary group. The ethnic religious, language and other primordial groups similarly restrain their cultural, economic and/or political ambitions that they may be accepted by the secondary associations and share in the fruits of the pluralist state system. Furthermore, we know that it is the breakdown of the operation of the reality principle in the individual which results in pathology (such as the psychotic who has severed normal inhibitions and cultural restraints and lives in a world of phantasy unchecked by rules of logic or social pressure). We may ask why there are no parallel analyses of the breakdown of the reality principle in ethnocentric pursuits of the group.

I would suggest that this is because we do not conceptually differen-
tiate between ethnocentrism and pathological ethnocentrism. In the
social sciences ethnocentrism has been regarded as a remnant of pri-
mitivity in the body politic. But should we on the one hand equate
primitivity with pathology, and on the other disregard the fact that
ethnocentrism is a natural and perhaps even a necessary element in
the passions which generate the developmental psyche of communities?

The most important function of ethnocentrism is that it gene-
rates survival energy in the group (just as narcissism does in the
individual). We may label that ethnocentrism as pathological which
is debilitating to survival value. The psychoneurotics absurd fears
and obsessions, delusions of grandeur, ideas of inadequacy or superio-
rity has its parallel in the psycho-pathology of ethnocentrism of the
group. Surely such ethnocentric fears and obsessions are as debili-
tating to the group as we know them to be in the individual. The more
serious disintegration of the personality and inability to interact
with others because of the loss of self-management through the failure
of the reality principle, has also its parallel in the corroding
pathology which may affect the ethnocentric process. Nazi Germany
provides a classic illustration. I have myself recorded case studies
of pathological ethnocentrism in Hindu-Muslim relations which break
out in communal riots in India today.[12]

In terms of the ideology of modern times, an odium is attached
to terms such as ethnocentrism, communalism and so on. The odium
stems from the fact that it is assumed that, the ethnocentric dis-
position is essentially antagonistic and destructive. On the other
hand, the well adjusted and mature individual who is creative and
contributive has his roots deep in the culture of his community. Indeed,
the truly secularist, nationalist, cosmopolitan is not born ex nihilo
but comes to full bloom only if his commitments have spanned success-
fully each of the boundaries of (family, community, nationality) which

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12. See, my forthcoming book, The Communal Edge in Plural Societies:
     India and Malaysia.

link him to the world of human kind in general. The best of the internationalist is often an ardent nationalist
and the nationalist is also deeply committed to his primordial attachments.

Whereas the pathologically ethnocentric's identitive impulses generate a negative disposition, the ethnocentric's disposition can be positive. Thus, as we bridge the gap between the ideological, the intellectual and the psychic and emotional in affairs relating to ethnicity, it should be possible for the ethnocentric to be supportive of other communities without identifying with them. The ethnocentric can be critical of other communities but his criticism does not emerge out of enmity. The ethnocentric's criticism of out-groups is non-subjective and reasoned. The pathologically ethno-centric's identitive impulses on the other hand, generate hostility, irrational prejudice and stereotype.

A great deal of the psychological substance underlying orien-tation to ethnic and inter-community problems is submerged deep in the unconscious, and can be a subject of analysis both at the level of the individual and the community. Freud's _Civilization and Its Discontents_[13], Jung's suggestive studies of myths and folklore[14] are leads in this direction. There is evidence that pathological ethno-centrism may be experienced by persons with the most cosmopolitan experiences: persons with little in their personal life which could explain the almost instinctive reactions to classes of events, objects

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13. Sigmund Freud: _Civilization and Its Discontents_, translated by J. Riviere, New York, Cape and Smith, 1930. See also his essay "On Psychology and History" reprinted in _Theories of Society_, Vol. II, _op.cit._, pp. 1265-1270 from _Moses and Monotheism_ translated by Katherine Jones (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1939), pp. 129-148.

14. See, _The Collected Works of C. G. Jung_, Translated by RFC Hall, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1959 in nine volumes.

and images related to inter-ethnic relations. For in the area of
inter-ethnic relations history easily gets merged with mythology
and folklore, and images of the ethnic enemy are almost unconsciously
determined by these. The symbols of culture associated with an
ethnic enemy evoke in us a psychic event (very much in the way Jung's
primitive perceives the rising sun[15]) rather than realistic cognition.

Unfortunately in the underdeveloped economies as possibly also
in the developed West, ethnic conflict is defined most often as a law
and order problem, specific instances of law and order in inter-ethnic
situations inevitably being interpreted (its urgency, the kind of
action required and so on) in terms of the psychological disposition
of the lathi (stick) wielding authority. We have to recognise that
psychological dispositions do not disappear merely by the assumption
of roles which require behaviour patterns which are without animus
towards members of ethnic communities. Even while the appropriate
intellectual and ideological arithmetic is learnt for job performance
the well of emotion and stereotype remains, and often tilts the balance
of judgement at critical points where it touches ethnic welfare. Hence
the importance of training, almost psychoanalytic in orientation, which
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enable those who confront inter-ethnic situations (the administrator,
the teacher, the law enforcement personnel and so on) to guard against
patterns of instinctual behaviour which are inherent to their identitive
and affiliative condition.

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15.   "The primitive is little concerned with an objective explanation
      of obvious things ... its unconscious psyche has an irrestible
      urge to assimilate all experience through the outer sense into
      inner psychic happening ...   The primitive is not content to see
      the sun rise and set; this external observation must at the same
      time be a psychic event. ... the sun in its course must represent
      the fate of a god, ... in the last analysis in the psyche of
      man ...", see, The Integration of the Personality, by Carl G. Jung,
      translated by Stanley Dell, Kegan Paul, Trench Truber & Co., Ltd.,
      London, 1944., p. 54.

Pathological ethnocentrism may find expression directly and this may be frankly rationalised by reference to historical experiences and/or current prejudice against ethnic enemies. The pathological ethnocentric broods over the evils which have been committed by the ethnic enemy against his community throughout history. Neurosis in this instance, consists in excusing one's brutality and prejudice on account of the past. But of course, more often, one is not even self-conscious about one's attitudes and actions <u>vis-a-vis</u> one's traditional ethnic enemies. Studies and training schemes would be helpful not only to make oneself conscious about one's attitude to traditional ethnic enemies (as also to traditional ethnic outcastes such as tribals, negroes, and so on), but also to devise measures to correct these attitudes such that it might generate some measure of good-will between the communities. For this we need a more complex theoretical frame-of-reference for the understanding of the ethnocentric process than what is available in the social sciences today. More systematic psycho-analytical or psycho-historical exposure of roots of types of inter-ethnic relations could perhaps yield such a frame-of-reference.