CHAPTER II

IDENTITY: A SEMANTIC EXPLORATION

The present study addresses the subject of identity and identity conflicts in the select fiction of S. L. Bhyrappa and Arun Joshi. For the same it is important to have the background knowledge of how identities are constructed, deployed and erased; how they merge with one another and form clusters; and how they are always already in a state of constant formation, deformation and reformation in the socio-cultural context of a country. This chapter discusses the conceptual definitions of identity and identity formation to begin with, followed by the reasons for identity conflicts in the socio-cultural space of India, knowledge of which is essential to interpret the identity conflicts portrayed in select fictions of S. L. Bhyrappa and Arun Joshi. Before discussing the intricacies of identity debates it is important to grasp the meaning of the concept of identity. Fred Dallmayr defines ‘identity’ thus: “A certain distinctness of character, that is, a specific difference of persons or groups from other persons or groups (and also from a universal sameness devoid of distinct features)” (14-15). Amelie Rorty in “The Identities of Persons” describes the meaning of identity thus:

What sorts of characteristics identify a person as essentially the person she is, such that if those characteristics were changed, she would be a significantly different person, though she might still be differentiated and re-identified as the same? (2)

Rajeev Bhargava in his book Multiculturalism, Liberalism and Democracy writes
It is a commonplace in logic that the concept of identity has to do with sameness. If an object is to retain identity, it must remain same with itself overtime. To have an identity, a thing must have features that are both relevant and enduring. If this is true of the identity of all objects, it must equally be true for the identity of human persons. To remain constant over time with herself or himself or with others, to possess or share identity, a person must be identified with some of her\his enduring and relevant attributes (4).

In all the above definitions of identity stress is laid more on the importance of having ‘enduring and relevant identity attributes or basic/essential identity attributes’ and the emphasis is also on the ‘differences’. In his book Identity/Difference, Connolly acknowledges the intimate correlation between the ‘essential’ and the ‘difference’ in matters of identity attributes thus:

An identity is established in relation to a series of differences that have become socially recognised. These differences are essential to its being; if they did not exist as differences, it would not exist in its distinctness and solidity (12).

The basic/essential attributes of identity Bhargava considers as ‘critically defining attributes’. Identity itself is a discursive site where in different styles of living and thinking is contested and also liberation from particular identities is enacted. Desires for emancipation are felt especially when the inherited identity becomes a suffocating burden or when culture turns into a prison house precipitating crisis. That is the moment when one does desire for standing outside social fold and in total freedom. But at the same time it is hard to operate in total freedom, freed of
one’s cultural identity, for it is the latter which draws the parameters and delimits one’s space for action. Losing one’s identity and reclaiming it through renegotiation is not easy in the light of the fact that identity is culture specific or socially/culturally constructed. Inspite of the impediments for deliverance, desire for liberation has always been expressed especially with identities which have been considered as stifling or oppressive for some people or groups (desire for freedom from one’s low-caste identity is one example of the kind). To outgrow the oppressive identities some, fall on to the recourse of identity politics (in relation to that specific identity) believing that political emancipation will liberate from humiliating suppressions. Some neither do have faith in “critically defining” identity attributes or identity differences, but augment identity in idealistic terms. Such arguments describe desire for liberation from defining identity attributes both as a desire for universalism or metaphysical emancipation. But ironically the idea of universalism in matters of identity is getting remoter even as the process of globalisation is nurturing fixed essentialised identities through a clash of civilizations (or identities); putting against each other, the globalizers and globalized, the North and the South or the West versus the rest. In a confrontational ambience of the kind any talk of universalism is said to often serve as a camouflage for particular hegemonic ambitions. Such ambitions always have generated resistive reactions by nonhegemonic societies or cultures through a retreat into nostalgic (essentialised) forms of parochialism, communalism, or ethnocentrism. One exit route from this (potentially violent) clash of identities however is implied in ‘the strategy of constructivism’ propounded by postmodern thinkers. The strategy of constructivism, by negating or deconstructing all existing identities in favour of contingent fabrication based on nihilating indeterminacy or undecidability nullifies
the feasibility of identity clashes. This strategy, Fred Dallmayr though appreciates as liberating yet he shows its shortcomings which basically lies in its subservience to the modern (Western) infatuation with the technical production and in its neglect of social praxis. Fred Dallmayr instead considers an alternative approach to avoid identity conflicts: an approach which centre stages dialogue and concrete social and existential interaction. The advantage of this approach is that it avoids the danger of essentialism or identity fixation, while simultaneously escaping the pitfalls of universalism and unmitigated wilfulness in the matter. Dialogical engagement also has a moral\ethical and political advantage. Partners in the engagement do not seek to manipulate, assimilate, or appropriate each other, thus treating each other as ends rather than means. Or in other words on ethical and political plane, interactive engagement reduces the chances of collision or violent conflict, thus enhancing the prospect of social peace or ensuring a ‘liveable common future’. In an age like ours-marked by brutality and seemingly endless bloodshed in the name of identity differences, this prospect is surely a happy welcome.

In the light of the argument hitherto made that metaphysical emancipation and universal identities are non-plausible or questionable, ‘political emancipation’ is said to be the most authentic and feasible experience especially in times of identity clashes. The immediacy, plausibility/desirability of political emancipation has its source in the dubious and questionable nature of metaphysical emancipation on numerous grounds and mainly on the fact that metaphysical emancipation means the liberation from all contexts or particularities into an empty space devoid of semantic significance. Similarly, the term universalism or universal ideas though has emancipating potential is ambiguous for other concrete reasons, one of which Immanuel Wallerstein describes convincingly thus:
In the international situation of structural inequality – between the rich and the poor, the strong and the weak, the developed and the undeveloped – universalism is imbued with hegemonic practices or “Universalism” is a “gift” of the powerful to the weak which confronts the latter with a double bind: to refuse the gift is to lose; to accept the gift is to lose (216-217).

To prove his point, he gives the example of French revolution as to how its universal guideposts: the principles of republicanism and basic liberty and equality of human beings was interpreted as a disguise of French imperialism and soon was opposed by European nationalists. Even Western modernity as an advanced and superior civilization in comparison with non-west and their indigenous norms was accepted in the beginning, later was interpreted as just the self-construal of the Europeans. In the conditions of structural global asymmetries, the third world or subaltern people refuse to consider Western civilisation and its civilizing ventures as universalisation, echoing Abdallah Laroui’s words, “Imperialism is a disguised murder”. Laroui’s warning as quoted in Dallmayr’s essay reads thus:

Under the aegis of military, technological and economic agendas, large masses of peoples are relentlessly streamlined today into a hegemonic world order—an induction often accompanied by overt and covert modes of violence. On the part of the globalizers, the process tends to be justified as the birth pangs of a nascent rational humanity and as the liberation of the “backward” peoples from oppressive traditions an argument perceived by the latter as a Napoleonic gesture (imperial gesture, promoting the self than the other) (281).
But there were many who defended European conquest as propagating universal ideas and the value of individual liberty, private property, and moral education among societies undeveloped or ignorant of such values. Enrique Dussel in his book *Geopolitics and Geoculture* dawns on a similar prestigious position of European conquests well captured in the following three statements; first, “Europe is more developed; its civilization is more superior to others”; second, “a culture’s abandonment of its barbarity and underdevelopment through a civilizing process implies, as a conclusion, progress, development, well-being and emancipation for that culture”; third, as a corollary, “One defends Europe’s domination over other cultures as a necessary, pedagogic violence (just war) which produces civilization and modernization” (65-66). In the light of the above statements it can be deduced that the colonizer’s identities imposed on the colonized enjoy greater prestige over that of the native identities.

One more interesting debate on identity conceives identity in extreme dichotomous strands; as disposable fictions or as natural kinds/intrinsically true. Such extreme dichotomous conception however has its own pitfalls. One has to guard against treating identities either as ‘disposable fictions’ as or as ‘natural (i.e., essential) kinds’ for many reasons. They can’t be rejected as disposable fictions as standards or criteria of identification are indispensable in social life. The tendency of treating identities as absolutely or intrinsically true is dangerous as it can lead to oppressive fixation, jeopardising especially a pluralistic society in many ways. One can always avoid the dangers of such oppressive fixation, by radical reversion or subversion which conceives identity as the result of arbitrary and ephemeral construction. To consider identity of a person largely as a matter of social construction, uphold the idea that identity is the result of manufacturing or social
engineering. Bhargava strongly disagrees any kind of unilateral or monological constructivism classifying identity as any one of the kind only; disposable fictions or as natural (i.e., essential) kinds (5). He notes that although it may be true that cultural identities are not natural and transparent in an essentialist manner, it does not follow by any means that the politics of cultural difference rests on a total hoax or that the identity /difference couplet is entirely invented or manufactured (5). What militates against the latter assumption is the relational character of identity formation: the fact that social identities are formed to a significant extent in response to social contexts, especially the contexts of language, culture, and historical experiences and memories. The identity of persons is constituted in large measure by the language and vocabulary used by them and prevailing cultural beliefs and narratives. Language and cultural beliefs however are not merely mental phenomena but something inscribed in practical ways of life or modes of conduct. This insight underscores in the identity formation the role of social practice or praxis which is described as a set of actions of several (interacting) individuals whose self-descriptions are social and hence not purely unilateral. Even Charles Taylor underscores the interactive and multilateral formation of identity in his seminal essay “The Politics of Recognition” where he observes the impossibility of existence of monologically construed identity. Taylor insists, “The crucial feature of human life ….is fundamentally dialogical character” (32). The main point here is that identity-formation always involves a form of interactive responsiveness, whereas unilateralism excludes the role of others-especially significant others in our lives. The essentialness of significant others is such that it is best proved in matters like how our understanding of the good things in life can be transformed by our enjoying them in common with people we love. For Charles Taylor (79), dialogical
interaction does not always entail common enjoyment or agreement, but may also involve mutual contestation and even struggle which is not risky just as long as contestation does not preclude further interaction into parochial separation or communalism. Like other modern and so called liberal thinkers, Taylor (80) values the importance of individual freedom; of the individual’s (“inward”) contribution to identity-formation, and hence her/his ability to challenge social conventions which may have become obsolete or oppressive. It is precisely this modern freedom which lends crucial weightage to interactive recognition; the task of continuously redefining and renegotiating social and political identities and the relationship based on them. Philosopher and discerning critic Maurice Merleau-Ponty (134) like Bhargava and Taylor disagrees with the unilateral construal of ‘self’ and other identity or in other words argues that identities are no longer unilaterally constructed or manufactured, but are seen as emerging in an open shared world. It is by virtue of this shared being-in-the world that ‘self-other’ perception and understanding are possible.

With post-modernism which construes all determinate phenomena as derivative adjuncts of a basic absence or lack (same with identity also) and deconstructive approach which believes every identification are basically an arbitrary or wilful construction in the sense that no determination can logically be derived from a constitutive indeterminacy authenticates the arbitrary character of any identity proving it to be only a wilful construction. Thus against claims of ‘indeterminacy’ and ‘wilful construction’ of post-modernism and deconstruction any attempt to concretise or determine identity involves the sheer hidden desire for the exercise of power of the will than anything else.
Ernesto Laclau (12) has further accentuated the aporetic and conflictual character of identity, while moving the discussion more resolutely onto the political terrain. (For Laclau (12) state politics is crucial because it provides society with the kind of determinations required for generating identifiable policies and agendas). Conflictual character of identity is because of the movement between undecidability and determination and aporetic because it (identity) can never provide the correct determination. The aporetic tension between these two moves; undecidability-decidability or indetermination-determination, has crucial implications for identity formation or identification described in the words of Laclau thus: “If there is need for identification … it is because there is no identity in the first place,” (12) but rather an undecidable terrain of possibilities. Amidst the multiple identities the way a particular element (a political force, a class, a group) assumes the impossible task of a universal (fully legitimate) representation, is what Laclau (12) considers as hegemonic relation which can also be described as enforcement of power, thus making a social society the political society. Thus identity decision in such a context is always contingent, rationally ungrounded or self-grounded and exclusionary (by obstructing other agendas).

The above made discussion on the ambiguities or intricacies of the meaning and status of the concept of identity only prove the natural vulnerability of conflicts ensuing in the name of identity and the power game involved within. In the light of the above discourse of relating identity with power, the dangers or irresolvable nature of such conflicts is obvious. In the light of the observation that power is the source of the social and the absolute origin of whatever order there is in society and power is not a metaphysical quality or an essential quality but the outcome of contesting wills, the relation between power and identity proves the inherent
tendency for conflict in matters of identities. Power and legitimacy are always at odds because, given its contingent source, power can never be rationally or ethically justified; the only time for the powerful to forfeit power is when they are no longer able to insure public order.

Identity conflicts quite often occur in the changing socio-cultural ambience of a country due to the existence of hierarchy between identities of the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ of the interacting cultures. Culture of a country indeed always will have a coherent group of identities, from which, individuals or group of individuals identify with a certain number of them only. Such preferences come from a complex set of identifications which individuals make both during childhood and adulthood while immersed in respective cultural universe, through the process of socialization. Further the roles that occupy us in our adult social life (parental role, professional role’ and leisure time activity and so on) also influence our identification with this or that Identity values. Such selective identification or identification preferences of the people are often the source of cultural/identity disagreements in any society as people always resist imposition of new identities other than the one ascribed or chosen. Segregation politics followed in a society amongst the varied prevailing identities also results in identity disagreements. The dominant–subordinate relational differences between different identities whatsoever; language, ethnicity, religion, race and other elements of a culture invokes the ‘politics of difference’ which in turn impedes the easy cultural blending or coherent co-existence of identities, a pre-requisite for peaceful society. Then there is also the other impeding factor that not all cultures and identities within are able to harmoniously ‘cross-breed’. Some cultural identities during communication may prove dominant pushing the other to the brink of subservience or may develop resistance to the onslaughts of the
dominant though they are neither exclusive of each other nor absolutely capable of becoming homogeneous wholes. The net result is issues of cultural disagreements and struggles. Protests against globalization often heard in countries are of this kind. Confronting identities experience threat from each other and often show high sensitivity and acute consciousness of the self-leading to acts of self-assertion (also a defensive gesture for survival). Self-hood asserting activities in identity matters in turn inspires desensitised attitude towards others both at individual and the community level. Just as homogenisation invokes fears of disappearance, assertion and defence of self-results in negligence of others. The dominant-subordinate relation between interacting cultural identities often results in what Wang Bin describes as “cultural aphasia” (78), a situation which he observes happening in the intellectual life of China under the influence of the dominant culture of the West. Bin (78) notices the negligence of Chinese cultural authentic knowledge and traditions under the influence of Eurocentric/logocentric ideas. He further regrets the deprivation of the Chinese mind of intellectual creativity under the influence of western academia. Wang Bin (79) traces the effect of ‘cultural aphasia’ and asserts that most of the concepts used in Chinese social sciences and humanities are burrowed from the west. Bin reacts to the situation thus:

Modern Chinese concepts turn out to be a contaminated one, infiltrated by different and hostile non-Chinese ideas. The solution to cure aphasia necessities the retrieval of the lost tongue; the authenticity of Chinese knowledge and the national pride based on that knowledge (79).

What is said of China holds true to all countries colonised by hegemonic cultures. India is as much a victim of cultural aphasia not only in the past but as much in the present due to its long drawn history of cultural invasions. The
condition intensified during British colonisation and continues significantly in the present era of rampant globalisation as well. ‘Cultural aphasia’ taints the Indian ontology as well depriving the Indian mind of intellectual creativity under the dominant influence of the West. The normative development of the tradition of Indian pedagogy is arrested by the Western intellectual modes. The argument that the progress of the tradition of Indian aesthetics or poetics is affected by interceding of Western poetics by Kapil Kapoor (58) is an instance of the kind and indeed implies a regretful loss of the native lore. In circumstances signifying identity encounters; native and foreign, whatever choice an individual makes result in a hybrid identity: interplay of heterogeneous ideas within an individual’s mind. Hybrid condition is cultivated both consciously through one’s active participation in cultural/social games and also unconsciously while involved in miscellaneous relationships. “Cultural aphasia” is a negative repercussion of the phenomenon of hybridization, as both self-hood and self-worth is neglected in the course of hybrid identity formation. The cure for aphasia; “retrieval of authentic native knowledge” is the sure solution in such contexts which when enacted becomes a political gesture of expression of national pride and the ‘self’. (Ironically the concept of ‘cultural aphasia’ itself originates from abroad, presenting a Chinese argument, parasitic on the Western discourse).

Amartya Sen(ix-x) calls our attention to another interesting kind of identity conflict happening the world over in contemporary times resulting in the politics of global confrontation. Sen perceives this confrontation as a “natural corollary of religious or cultural divisions in the world” (x). The latest tendency to divide or categorize the world majorly in the name of religions or of civilization, ignoring all other ways in which people see themselves is the root cause of this identity conflict.
This unique method of categorizing according to some singular identity or some overarching system of partitioning Sen called as “solitarist approach” to human identity – “which sees human beings mainly as members of exactly one group” (x). There are always times in the history of any country when categorization based on the subject of nationality or classes or some other specific identity dominates the people’s consciousness and clashes result if anything opposes the same. But the reality of our inescapable plural identities only problematizes the solitarist approach (a good way of misunderstanding nearly everyone in the world). In our normal lives, we see ourselves as members of a variety of group – we belong to all of them.

Accepting the fact that identity is a matter of importance in a society or in the life of an individual there is the need to explore the other intricacies related to it. David A. Hollinger’s assertion as to the magnitude of Identities for a society and an individual is as follows,

Identity is not just a passive condition, but active, carrying expectations for social behaviour and character. To whom do you belong, to whom do you owe something always, (or to whom do you look up for special help) is closely observed. Where exactly a person should show his solidarity (distribution of one’s affections and resources and energies) is much debated by (27-45).

In the above words we deduce not only the importance of identities in both social and personal life but also construe the fact that ‘identity’ carries two prominent meanings; to be a member of a group (the group-centred identity) and to be an individual (individual – centred identity). Or in other words identity is both a matter of individual and group affiliation. In the case of ‘group-identity’, identity is
established by clarifying the group to which an individual most deeply belongs. Personal or individual identity introduces us to the most individual centred sense of identity. Identities, particular to an individual or single person are the most straightforward of the two; group and individual. The identity of an individual is designated by the following details: a face, a visa card, a private phone number and an e-mail account. Emmanuel Renault asserts the primacy of the individual–centred identity over that of the group thus:

Identity is to mean what we are individually, as well as what we aspire to be, what determines or specifies us, as well as how we present our particularities to ourselves, how we refer to ourselves individually, and how we identify ourselves with groups and with the general norms (101-123).

Though these two identities are talked of as different there is the link between collective and personal identity (though the notion of collective identities is often reduced to its cultural dimension within the framework of liberalism) in that personal identity in itself combines several collective identities; familial, professional, social, political, religious and cultural etc. The components of collective identity are said to be most stable and most inert. However once collective identities are attributed to personal identity, they lose their stable, inert appearance, since each individual must conciliate or coordinate them, and contribute towards giving them direction and value. And this dependency or interrelation between the collective and the personal proves them to be interdependent representatives. Since personal identities, because of their variability and their incidence, or contingency, seem to suffer from a greater normative deficiency than collective identities, they variably do affect the status of the politics of identity or identity conflicts.
Wang Bin denies clear cut distinction between ‘collective’ and ‘individual’ identity mainly due to the abstract nature of the ‘collective’ in the phrase ‘collective identity’ and also because of the fact that identity, whether collective or individual, presupposes the existence of a relationship between the ‘Self’ and the ‘Other’. He describes the problem thus:

Society consists of individuals who organize themselves into various relationships that make a society possible... A certain society’s self-image is always a biased ideology proclaimed by those who have vested interests in some relationships and power over other relationships, though it often goes by the name of “nation,” “country,” “religion,” “culture,” “party,” “the people,” and so on. In other words, we should never forget the fact that a collective self-identity is always and can only be declared by individual speakers, not by the collective itself. The collective, in this sense, is abstract and silent. Blind to the commonplace, one falls prey to ideological manipulations (82).

Wang Bin also explains the problem in the meaning of self-identity, though the term implies too much of subjectivity as follows,

Rather the world conceived of in it’s entirely is not a sum total of things but of relations. To identify one-self is to locate oneself in a certain relationship. As for defining the nature of a person or a thing in relation, polysemy prevails over univocality (83).

The above words assert the following point; a thing either animate or inanimate has its meaning/identity only in relation with other things and the fact that relation here is not something that appears between two distinct substances but a
structuring force in process logically prior to those things. In other words, they; the self and the other, are morphologically interlocked in the consciousness and the self-need not have to negate the other so as to establish its meaning. Bin (91) quotes Mencius, the champion of idealistic Confucianism and his famous assertion about the specific presentation of me (a self) in the system of Chinese cultural discourses as follows: “All things in the world are complete in me” (91). Since things only exist in relations, it is understood actually as “All relations in the world converge on me” (91). ‘Me’ is designed as the centre of a fabric of relations. Yet this self’s elevation or “me-centred atomic individualism” (Bin 91) differs not only in content but in mode, from the anthropocentric self-identity, whose classical thesis and antithesis as explained by Descartes and Lacan are quoted by Bin respectively thus: “I think, therefore I am” (Descartes) and “I think where I am not, therefore I am where I do not think” (Lacan). Neither of it has any similarity to the ‘self’ (my: me-centred atomic individualism) as identity is situated simultaneously and historically in heterogeneous relationships. Ex. I Am a Professor, a University teacher in relation to my post-graduates. Synchronically, I am also a son, a husband, a father, a colleague, a customer, a liberal minded intellectual and so on (Bin 91). The ‘Me’ in one relation differs more or less from the ‘me’ in another relation. Since a social being is inevitably entwined in a web of different relationships in which one find his or her existence, one can only define the ‘self’ by saying, “I am not what I am not and I am not what I am” in popular parlance. The ‘I’ is playing simultaneously different roles in life: the presence of one role suggests the absence of other roles which do not really disappear. Otherwise put, the utterances “I am a professor” is only an event in the sense of linguistic pragmatics, co-existing with other events that are equally significant to what I am now. There is no fixed essence of me under which all events
could be subsumed. The precariousness of the notion of identity in relation to an individual is further proved on the point that the ‘Me’ is not a pure inanimate function but an active agent of relations with lots of freedom to opt the nature of relations. Though one cannot choose from the connections enforced by nature (blood ties can’t be chosen) yet individual is free to make a new choice and establish his/her identity in society. All it requires is just conscious participation without which there would not be those relations, and one can disengage from relations no longer desirable to him/her. On the other hand, what can be chosen, however is, regulated and re-regulated by the changing economic and political and social landscape. Or in other words society and the formative changes that happen within it also influences what an individual might identify himself/herself with. For instance, in India cultural invasion from the West and the materialism it propagates has thwarted the influence of traditionally ingrained spiritualism on individuals and social life of the country compared to past. Similarly, in China as Wang Bin (94) has observed, Marxism had been identified with but in the present the market economy is rigoursly acting as master concept in the formative influence on individuals. Or in other words Chinese people identified more with Marxism in the past and the market economy in the present.

The consideration of group identity as basic in any approach to identity is disagreed by some who argue that identity is more a degree of personhood established more by internal, psychological mechanisms than by affiliation with a group. Psychologists use the term identity in this way and assume that to have an identity is to have a unified self, capable of acting effectively in the world. Sometimes this will involve close ties with this or that group, but group affiliations are incidental rather than definitional to the process. The psychologists who speak
about identity in this way are drawing upon a long intellectual tradition that includes Locke, Hume and Freud. The idea of a ‘unified self’ or ‘stable identity’ is of great value to the individual and such individuals are of great value (service) to the society in which they live. That an individual has his own personal value however, should be the pivotal consideration that his whole moral life rests upon; an individual without a positive image of himself, will be able neither to show initiative, nor to give his life good form, nor to imbue moral values in his action towards others. Accordingly, the very shape of personal identity, the positive relation with the self, seems to be the basis of any ethical and moral normalcy. Axel Honneth as sourced in Emmanuel Renault (109) claims that it is only through successful socialization that an individual can manage to construct a positive self-image (or stable identity) and overcome the sense of importance of his own existence. Honneth in In Axel’s essay further describes the way the positive self-image can be established in three kinds of positive relation with the self: “self-confidence, based on relationships connected with amicable family and affectionate relationships with others; self-respect, based on legally and morally regulated relationships with others; and self-esteem, which consists of the perception of our existence in so far as it is endowed with a social value, or it contributes in deed for the good of all” (110). Successful socialization produces the background ethical knowledge and the recognition gained from this guarantees personal integrity.

Stuart Hall as quoted in an essay by Emily K. Bloch does not consider ‘self-identity’ as too confining or as something permanently etched instead he perceives identity (whatsoever category) “as an ever evolving reality” (249). He writes “Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact...we should think, instead, of identity as a ‘production’ which is never complete, always in
process ....” (Bloch 249). What he means is that Self-identity formation is a natural part of growing up which does not cease as soon as maturity is reached. It is an on-going process for any thinking being. The on-going formulation of self-perception\self-identity is related to one’s world view. In a constantly changing world, fraught with contradictions, world-views do keep transforming and the same impacts identity formulation not only in turbulent times but also in calmest of the times.

Individual/personal identity alone along with the national ‘me’ is becoming important in modern discourses due to globalisation and its impact on societies. Because of the flexible and evolutionary nature of the societies (becoming all the more multicultural and internationalised) people are indeed having a vague sense that community/group (cultural or social) identities have disappeared or are on the verge of becoming extinct and so people hesitate to assert their collective identity and little try to adhere to such and such social or cultural groups, as they used to do in the past. Instead individual identity alone along with the national ‘me’ alone is becoming important. Even pluralistic societies giving ‘Identity Cards’ that documents individual identity marks, neglecting group affiliations is significant of the later day development (sign of homogenisation). But however some do object and do consider giving identity cards to citizens in multicultural countries following international pattern of identification (where many of them are homogeneous societies) under the influence of westernisation as a futile effort. Wang Bin’s (67-97) sarcasm on China, issuing identity cards to its nationals in the year 1987 has the same reason. Bin expresses the futility of the whole effort for the reason that details of an individual imprinted on them never represent the sum totality of identity information related to an individual in a heterogeneous society. Further the multiplicities of identities of an individual belonging to such societies literally are
not possible to be represented on the card. Other objection is that the identity card though has the word identity in it, yet fails to recognise the humanistic dimensions, and the linguistic and cultural intricacies of a pluralistic society (China, India etc.,). But in the West where the society is more unified and homogeneous, issuing identity cards is suitable. Therefore, Wang Bin (88) feels China’s trend of giving identity card as “culturally–restructuring attempt” (88) signifying China’s hierarchical political, economic and social system. Identity card is standardising of knowledge about each and every individuals’ identity regardless of multiplicity and mutability or reification and commercialisation of human body and mind. Any imposition of uniformity (as in an identity card) or expectation of uniformity about a person clashes with heterogeneous roles each person simultaneously plays in real life and also negligence of variegated life styles and different cultural environs. Further possibilities of uniformity become all the more remote in future with the prospect of restructuring of one’s personal and cultural identity as per one’s preference.

Bauman has a solution as quoted in the essay “European conceptions of identity” by Emmanuel Renault for this dilemma of trying to define an individual in definite terms in a heterogeneous society thus:

It would be better to recognize this demise and bury our definition of ourselves with the notion of collective identities, to face today’s existing psychological, sociological, and political problems in relevant manner (102).

Merleau-Ponty’s (134) idea of human relationship further qualifies the meaning of identity. He argues that human relationship proceeds not by rational argumentation, but involves a deeper existential engagement, an engagement of “being” operating on the levels of thought, utterances, feelings, and corporeal
experience. Ponty’s observation or idea of ‘being’ is similar to psychologists’ idea of identity as more ‘a degree of personhood’, established by internal, psychological mechanisms than by affiliation with a group. But the fact that such engagements always occur and get expressed in concretely situated contexts like cultural frames, historical narratives and socio-political arrangements and this fact draws into the gambit of discussion the value of group identity. Due to this interlink between personal and group identity the historical narratives and socio-political arrangements significantly express identity conflicts and needs to be evaluated while discussing identity issues of any nature. Hence we can observe many prevailing cultural and socio-political contexts or the social body being marked by profound agonies and fissures or festering traumas derived from perceived injuries and injustices practised in relation to identity matters in the past. To this extent, historical narratives are not only celebrations of shared meanings and achievements, but also the record of social wounds inflicted by various forms of oppressions, exclusions and mis-recognitions.

It is precisely at this point that memory work has to come into play not for the sake of solidifying and perpetuating resentments or hostilities, but with the aim of social healing or therapy through the imaginative-creative re-fashioning of social relationships. Bhargava (5) is right on target when he insists that history cannot be exorcised but needs to be “worked through”. Without a proper engagement with the past and an institutionalised remembering, he writes, “societies are condemned to repeat, re-enact, and relive the horror” (Bhargava 5) of past injuries. Only a willingness to deal concretely and creatively with history and its contemporary repercussions can prepare the ground work for “a livable common future” (Bhargava 5) - and this has to happen not only through rational discussion but also “at the level of emotions” (Bhargava 5), that is at the level of human sufferings and aspirations.
What relevance we have seen of historical narratives holds good to fictional narratives as well. Identity related polemics of all kinds; encounters, conflicts, crisis politics happening within the socio-cultural ambience of the country is reflected and represented in literature of the country. So willingness to deal concretely and creatively with history needs to be followed with literature as well and the same is what is done in this study however with the specific issue of identity matters.

Conscious negligence of certain collective identity has definite purpose, direction and both advantages and disadvantages. In any society characterised by pluralism or co-existence of plural identities any representations demanding specific rights or the need of any singular group and ensuring the preservation of any particular identity alone always takes on serious political overtones. Probably such demands pre-empt the argument that the law and the state should never promote any one particular group but instead should promote what is described as universally acceptable individual rights. Even events in history the world over have proved that identity claims of specific kind could lead to radical forms of negation of the value of other human group identities. Racist or xenophobic political movements the world over; claims of Hinduism against the ideology of secularism in India, Rwanda’s genocide and Germany’s homicide by Hitler etc., have proved the same. Therefore, the much debated question is whether legitimacy needs to be bestowed on group claims or is it not better advised to accept as legitimate only those political demands that are based on the common humanity of individuals and their universal rights. But there are many who do view that this kind of underestimating of the importance that individuals give to their identity is in a way denying an individual’s values and dreams of a good life or presupposing or expecting a society where individual would be free from all social and collective attachment. However, many
theorists think that collective identity is the right of individuals and one cannot deny this right. In fact, two different philosophical (or political positions) schools of thought; Liberalism and Communitarianism do have definite views regarding this matter. If Liberalism proposes derecognition of collective identity, Communitarianism gives importance to collective rights and also to basic rights of an individual to his group identities. Accordingly, some theorists insist on the flexibility and adaptability of the individual taking precedence over identity. In the era of globalization all collective identities have begun to decline. The individual thus has greater opportunity to be free from social and cultural restrain always accommodating cross breeding and liberal nomadism.

Charles Taylor (80) in his essay “A Tension in Modern Democracy” defending communitarian position says that individuals should be recognised as belonging not only to common humanity, but also to historically formed communities, since they still have to achieve their liberty within specific social and cultural contexts. Thus, according to him people are justified in asserting specific rights of their community or collective rights and also their individual ones. This amalgamated double stance, balancing the point of view of both that of liberalism and communitarianism has the following overtones, “if the liberal position seemed to lead to a relativization, indeed to a disintegration of the identity, the communitarian position could lead to an absolute identity reduced to an inert heritage” (Taylor 80).

However, the modernity discourse is more liberal and more supportive of the view of liberalism due to its faith in individuals as always having the right to be something other than what he is by virtue of his birth, his social group, and cultural
framework, which have been imposed upon him by education and the vicissitudes of socialization. The communitarian position is contradictory to the emancipatory dynamics characteristic of modernity; which requires that the traditions and the ways of life be subjected to criticism and measured by norms having universal reach. Democratic movements that came about, in fact, in the name of these universal norms from eighteenth century onwards also viewed to reduce the burden of traditions and religions, which were symbols of domination. Or in other words modern requirement pre-empts a rational critique of cultures and customs, in the light of universal rights which in turn only means negligence of collective/group identities. Such a faith has its root in the idea that all our bearings are derived not only from values as symbolized by our identity but also equally from the exigencies of a mutual comprehensions or understanding of other people. This worry covers a range of universal exigencies especially the one like equal respect for all individuals, which could certainly remain implied, but which deeply structuralize social life and always accompany the values of our identity. Accordingly, against this view point, several consequences arise for the politics of identity. On the one hand, political relevance could be given to identity claims, provided that they are subjected to a critique according to superior norms or universal norms. On the other hand, the fact that social evolutions have upset or weakened our identities is not harmful in itself – that becomes the chance we have for our identities to be no longer valued as simple unquestioned convictions and something not subjected to rational discussion and the requirements of universality.

Both the modern and the postmodern justification of the dilution of identity for different reasons mentioned in this study earlier, successfully counters identity related fundamentalism. But fails to give adequate reply to the idea of social justice
which recognises the importance of allowing people to achieve their basic aspirations. The possibility for individuals to live in a world in accordance with their traditions and their identities or in other words to lead a life consistent with their respective identities is an essential requirement, and that its negation for whatsoever reason causes social suffering that is beyond the comprehension of reason and of the universal or fundamental rights. The attainment of universality independently of the values that promote social and professional identities is little relished by people. People feel contented as long as their identity is intact (can be claimed in definite terms) or has not become a problem. That is as long as they can define themselves as being part of the larger and indisputable whole, social strife don’t ensue. But cross cultural encounters imposing homogenisation; a rampant phenomenon of the nation state of India both in colonial and post-colonial times, foreground identity matters in such a way that social conflicts for recognition of identity is more frequent than for any equitable distribution of wealth. When Identities become uncertain, difficulties arise to define self as belonging to a larger whole, and then befall the need to claim attention to one’s identity precipitating conflicts in the nature of social disturbance for the cause of identity.

On summarising we realise that the dominant–subordinate relational differences in identity matters, dissolution of heterogeneous identities, high sensitivity or acute consciousness of one’s identity specificities followed up with assertive and negation activities or the desensitised attitude towards ‘Others’ at individual and the community level inspire identity politics. Many issues of identity politics in the name of varied identities; caste, class, race, gender, religion, sexuality and ethnicity are currently too rampant. Presently in the forefront is the transgender politics (lesbian or gay); a problematical identity related to sexuality. Transgender
category don’t belong to hitherto accepted group of man\woman or standard sexuality norms - hence the struggle to legitimise their group. Frequency of Identity conflicts in the present times only proves the popular saying, “for it (anything) to specifically be the subject of a demand, it must become a problem”. Not only are struggles perpetrated rampantly for identity recognition and assertion, even instances of old statutes being abandoned or modified for the same can be given. For instance, forbidding of marriage between different castes, anti-miscegenation law that made black white mixing a crime considered once legal were abandoned implying the changing situation. All these changes meant that people can contest over just where his (one’s) affections, resources and obligations should be allocated, or over where one is expected to show his solidarity. In modern context of more liberal ambience dilemmas like - is one expected to owe all of himself to his cultural capital? Or is one at liberty to belong to other groups? are quite often introspected. Hence it is said that identity discourse is ultimately about the distribution of solidarity. Identity has taken on what we might call a ‘political economy’: it is a commodity distributed on the basis authority.

With later day groups like occupation, nationality, sex orientation one always has liberty to choose or ascribe. But with group identities of the past does the individual himself or herself have the authority to decide with whom to identify, with whom to show solidarity is the question. For the country is full of people who are quite ready to tell others what their identity is or is not (in relation to traditional group identities), no matter what the other person’s preferences might be. Whenever self – identification is at odds with historical evidence and morphological details (a Dalit’s/a woman’s physical appearance is also particularised or in other words morphological trades are associated with caste/gender identity as in race matters) or
in other words when self-identification are at odds with the preconceived identification principles then that identity is always dismissed as ‘counterintuitive identities’. There are times when civic–national (‘I’ am an Indian) are resisted or suppressed over descent–community identities to avoid victimization of people by group politics and to safeguard interests of individuals by asserting solidarity with “their own kind”. One does accept modern [of recent times] multiple identities only after acceptance of descent–community identity (caste with Indian, ethno racial with Americans) first or ahead of whatever other identities; civic–national, religious, gender, regional and so on, a person may display.

The hitherto discussed aspects only proves that nothing is more fundamental to the current identity debates, however, than the issue of choice versus ascription. Who decides what your identity is? - Countries like India have always practised ‘identity–ascription’, that is, the ascribing of identity to individuals, whatever their own personal preferences may be. That is why it makes sense to speak of ‘a political economy of identity’, according to which identity is a kind of commodity distributed by authority. A variation on this tradition is possible when individuals do not abide by identity rules and voluntarily identify themselves not with groups but with subjective aspects of selfhood. Especially the infiltration of high technology and the enhanced material prosperity into life (a modern phenomenon) has encouraged such efforts towards subjective identification, which in turn has generated identifications of newer kinds not seen in the past. For instance, with power of technology and scientific knowledge, the real self-fulfilment for Indians is no longer one’s identification with some ultimate spiritual concern (which tradition prioritised) but rather with one’s actual and immediate success in this world and hence the contemporary ethic circulating in the popular parlance as to work culture is – ‘time
is money and efficiency is life’. When the term identity is applied less to politically
performative, but more to fully subjective aspects of selfhood then there befalls no
need to show solidarity with this or that group and Identity would then be more what
the professional psychologists take it to be: “a mental and emotional condition
entailing confident individuality and an ability to act effectively in society on behalf
of one’s personal interest”.

Other than the identities derived from socio-cultural ties individuals are also
tied down by identities established by the blood ties, often qualified as natural. Both
are equally strong bindings on an individual; socio-cultural ties end up in activities
of political loyalty, kith and kin relations expects filial piety. These dichotomous,
the two poles apart identities every individual needs to compromise, rejecting none
out rightly. These two farfetched realities generate constant dilemma and related
tension in individuals as to what is to be identified with, what should be the priority,
the state or the family? Whether to choose as per one’s voice of reason or that of
tradition often confronts individuals in the face of binary oppositional culture

nature
dichotomy. We have a fine paradigm of the kind given by Wang Bin (88-90) in the
context of China. According to Confucian education in China, family is primordial
in comparison to social institutions and when one has to make choice- filial duty
precedes political loyalty. But, radical cultural critics in China attacked this
argument, its preoccupation with family interests as ego-centred that compromises
national identity. Further the predominant political ideology in any historical period,
on the other hand, always stresses the importance of public authority, subordinating
family to the state. Or in other words it attempts to reduce all relationships in which
an individual might find himself\ herself to an all-embracing one: ‘to emperor or
state than to subject or individual’. However, we cannot deny that today engaged in
a different hand game, the invisible all reinforcing hand is that of high
technology\material force homologising miscellaneous responses. Nobody is
immune to this powerful restructuring force. Commodity fetishism is influencing
people’s choices. Therefore, if anybody prioritises materialistic identities over
traditional cultural and natural ties, the gesture is nothing too surprising.

One more interesting intricacy related to identity has gained prominence
because of the rapid socio-cultural changes happening, the world over. Since culture
is the determining instance in the life of a society and as identity is a concept closely
related to issues of culture the new and latest significations in relation to identity in
the changing scenario of culture is best exemplified in phenomenons of
homogenisation and hybridisation. Cross cultural encounters due to globalisation in
multi-cultural societies especially have played a decisive role in changing the
perspectives of the term identity in modern discourses denying both inertness and
untrammelled use and ambiguities to it. Of the many changes induced by cultural
encounters, homogenisation or dissolution of heterogeneous identities is an essential
change, which impresses us as assuring the minimisation of the politics of difference
and also as avoiding politicisation of differences with varied repercussions for the
society. Further due to the modern phenomenon of cross-cultural interaction
whatever choices an individual make would result in a ‘hybrid Identity’- interplay of
heterogeneous idea within an individual’s mind. It is cultivated through active
participation in different cultural/social games and conscious involvement in
miscellaneous relationships. Individual’s exposure to unfamiliar things along with
encounters with familiar but otherwise situated things, give rise to new relationships
all the time disengaging one from some of the old ones. The ‘hybrid self’ as the
meeting point of different relationships constitutes the necessary condition for each
and every empirical individual in the modern world. In such a situation what still is not much discussed but however needs to be discussed is another kind of concern: how to keep in order the miscellaneous relationships, existing simultaneously as well as changing historically. How every individual as ‘a cultural hybrid moving within a hybrid context’ is justified to put up with is the problem. How relationships are kept in order which is absolutely relevant to the country’s political life with special reference to the individual’s self-identity is the crux of the problem. Hence what Nadia Tazi has said as to the currency of the notion of identity and gender in modern discourses in the preface of her book *Keywords/Identity* means the same.

The questions of ‘identity’ and ‘gender’ became imperative: these past few decades they have heavily mobilised public opinion and the academy. They are keywords that circulate almost everywhere and deserve to be torn from the untrammelled use they so often get. They have gained from being set free from the ambiguities of globalization that render them meaningless (10).

Hitherto discussed matters on identity are indeed proof enough of the complications involved in the topic. One more proof of the same is got in the social struggle and strifes that have been waged the world over both in the past and the present, a detailed reference of which is not important for the present study. Probably in social strifes of past, the phrase identity may not have been used, as it has taken due currency only in the present (colonial/post-colonial, modern or post-modern contexts). But one thing is too clear that all the conflicts and complexities associated with identity is always imminent only in contexts where one has to share identity with others (different groups which social identity very often takes) than because of identities specific to an individual alone. Amartya Sen’s notion of identity conflict
expresses the same thus: “Indeed, many contemporary political and social issues revolve around conflicting claims of disparate identities involving different groups since the conception of identity influences, in many different ways, our thoughts and actions” (xii).

Before understanding the changes and transformations affected in matters of identity in India due to cross-cultural encounters and the phenomenon of modernisation and the ensuing conflicts, it is important to elaborate on the intricacies of varied identities as conceived traditionally in brief in this country. In fact, in the Indian subcontinent we realise that identity was never an already accomplished fact due to the persistence of cultural invasions at various phases of Indian history. The context of India is an excellent paradigm authenticating Stuart Hall’s understanding of identity as quoted in Emily K. Bloch’s essay as a “‘production’ which is never complete, always in process ...” (249). Many of the critics and historians have discussed the particular pressure of the self-identity formation for Indians in the past due to invasions of outsiders. This conflict however was more intensified during the British colonial rule as people had to formulate their identities in relation to the changes harnessed by the British by tools of Western education, Western modernism and enlightened culture (that inspired social reformation movement) and ideas of democracy and nationalism. Or simply we can say the educated Indian living in this time was inundated with conflicting influence, domestic and foreign. To amalgamate both was to evolve a hybrid identity which at times was confusing and tended towards identity crisis though they could retain their own national characteristic and try to attain the universal aspects of Mankind. The confusions imminent while formulating a hybrid identity and the undertone of identity crisis one always feels in such moments is captured interestingly by a writer
from Calcutta called Sukumar Ray as mentioned in Emily K. Bloch essay. Bloch says that Sukumar Ray in his “Nonsense Poems” has created an odd animal character by name “Kimbhat (252) (trans as ‘odd’ or indescribable” which desires all good things of other animals and as a result its ‘self’ is so transformed (with all familiar identities having lost) that it ultimately becomes indescribable; ‘a nobody’, but ironically is not happy though is itself accountable for the present condition and is unhappy, whining all the time unreasonably. In this Bloch says Sukumar Ray is only proving that in trying to emulate blindly there is always the risk of one becoming ‘nobody’. Indian suffered similar plight identifiable as identity crisis seeking to assimilate the beneficial influences of the West all the while trying to maintain one’s own native identities. Anupama Mujumdar as quoted in Bloch’s essay describes the dilemmas experienced by Indians living in the ambience of coexistence of the domestic and the foreign thus:

Soft types, militants, self-rule, home-rule, nationalism, independence etc., - some people attached to one or more of these innumerable political words. Similarly, these people were divided with the emotion of many ideologies of religion...the caste system, the revolutionary Hinduism of Vivekananda, the three divisions of Brahmoism which were completely separated, and there were the anglicized also... If somebody wanted to become a complete...in all aspects, his condition would be like the ‘Kimbhat- ‘I am nobody’ (253).

Emily K. Bloch’s cautionary words in the matter are worth mentionable here. She says,

All people really in formulating self-identity, contemplate one’s own identity in relation to others within society, but excessive attention to that is not only
self-defeating, it is ridiculous. Understanding and refining one’s own identity is more important than seeking to emulate another’s (253).

To be cautious was and indeed is (in the ambience of globalisation) imperative for Indians while emulating the characteristic of the others. Verbatim imitation will definitely prove foolish. Though much of the British ideologies (now global ones) and practises were desirable – but all needs to be questioned and accepted. But the strength of the native indigenous practices of India in the matter of identity some argue was such that complete dislocation of the self by the other never happened. The co-existence of the old and the new or the traditional and the modernity in India is a proof enough of this. Indigenous and colonial in spite of the questions of authority and hierarchy, were never completely separate. In fact, the success of British rule was only in collaboration with the elite Indian authority. This dependency of the British on the elite Indians to survive in India, Ranjit Guha sees as “…an indication that the British failed to ‘resist’- the indigenous Indian culture to the point of being forced into a symbiosis” (272). Just like the British dependency on the elite Indians there was also the vice-versa. Many Indians were not anti-British, looking favourably on many of the technological scientific and social advances they ushered in. The above discussion is just the tip of the iceberg as to the nature of identity conflicts faced during colonisation as it is all the more complex than it appears due to the multiplicities of identities in the Indian subcontinent.

India is a multicultural society characterised by many heterogeneous identities. A brief introductory kind of explanation on the different identities that characterise this nation is essential to understand the nature of identity conflicts therein. Indian society is a traditional society and demands a strict conformity by the
individuals to the social norms and conventions related to socio-cultural identities. The primacy of cultural identities in India is such that they provide persistent basis for a style of politics that downplays class position and economic interests and foregrounds instead social-identities alone. Further in India identity as group affiliation becomes more important than individual identity and is frequently invoked accordingly in public discourses. The eminent sociologist Andre Beteille has observed this supremacy of the group affiliation to an individual in India thus: “The search for an authentic identity for the individual in India’s traditional culture should not be taken to indicate a failure to recognise the subordination of the individual to the group in contemporary Indian society” (265). Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of Independent India has captured the primacy of the group; joint family, caste and village in India’s social structure in India as quoted in Beteille—thus: “In all these three it is the group that counts; the individual has secondary place” (265) and again, “An individual was only considered as a member of a group; he could do anything he liked as long as he did not interfere with the functioning of the group” (265).

In India, the answer to the question “who are you?” is invariably given in collective terms and the individual draws from his repertoire of group identities to answer this question. Group affiliations of varied commensurability; state, caste, religion, language, culture, gender, age, region etc., do exist and are frequently invoked in public discourses in the country. The difference of Dravidian/Aryan; the source identity, also exists though has lost currency and is evoked only when needed for historical or genealogical reasons. After independence the identity as an Indian, belonging to a group called ‘Indian nation’ was aimed at and strived after mainly to evolve as a homogenous society with a single destiny. But this idea of a just and
capacious (or fair) national community was difficult to materialize with all the internal segregations practised in the name of different groups; caste, class, religion etc., some of which is carried on as cultural heritage. Since group affiliations always signify primary sub-national affiliations in post-independent India, it was inevitable for the new Indian government the need to defend, protect and develop group identity rather than individual identity. Or in other words group affiliations are very important in a heterogeneous society like India when compared to a more stable and homogeneous societies like that of West and any amount of faith in personal identity cannot derecognize the group identity. The imperative to clarify, to be sure of ‘who you are’ or to what group you belong is greater here than elsewhere. Identity intricacies in India are controlled by the individual’s relation to groups so rigorously that it is often quipped that perhaps India as a society of multiple identities is destined to go its own way, rather than a single society with a single destiny.

Indian society is characterised by an unprecedented plurality of groups\communities and in its people of India project (1985-1992), The Anthropological Survey of India identified 4,635 communities (Singh 1993). Between the State-centred national community (that gives the identity of an Indian) and the solitary individual, there proliferate a vast number of societies or organisations or groups, of which religion and caste and linguistic groups are important. In modern times there has been attention paid also to groups defined by gender, sexual orientation, occupation, region and political commitments along with nationality and community of descent. Such vast plurality makes India a highly fluid society, where people regularly encounter ‘others’, very different from themselves.

Many identities in India are set in hierarchical relation dividing the Indian population into groups of high and low, allowing ample space for the play of both
the politics of difference or politicisation of differences. An Individual in India due to the multiplicity of identities and the hierarchy within is acculturated into multiple identities, yet with a certain hierarchy. After the end of colonisation and the acceptance of the democracy and declaration of sovereign independent status, it was indeed imperative for India to evolve as an egalitarian society. The hierarchical placement of identities in the binary oppositional relation of superior\inferior was an impediment to the realisation of the equality ideal. The main distrust was, could the ‘Indian we (national identity)’ deliver equal opportunities to the oppressed, though could boost national solidarity. Further the scope and significance of Identity in Indian society and culture or one’s bondage with one’s group identity especially after independence is so pronounced and important that every region of the country has its episodes of contestations and conflicts over the complex issues of identity. Thus major problem in post-independent India in fact is how to control the imminence of conflicts and violent eruptions that is always ready at hand to precipitate in the name of identity differences. Asserting specific identity claims of the ‘self’ and downplaying of identity claims of others is the main cause of conflicts and such disagreements became too rampant though such behaviour implies a morally suspect effort to distance oneself from other groups. So even today after five decades of freedom the need is to foster both the unified national “we” signifying larger solidarity and the multiple group identities signifying fragmentation/differences.

The dynamics of social-relations in India do take on specific characteristics mainly due to the importance given to identities and the underlying differences therein. It is believed that an individual’s self-perception is affected by both how others perceive him and how that individual perceives the self. That is social-
relations in India are characterised by two inter-related processes: 1] the perception of one’s own identity in a given situation; depending upon the context an individual will selectively invoke any one or more of the given identity— “self-identification.” and 2] the reactions of others in terms of the perceived identity of that individual; depending upon the context and as per the observation made, her\his significant others categorize that individual’s given group identity – ‘other-identification’. Thus confirmation of identification in social intercourses is made either through modes of ‘Self-identification’ nor through ‘other-identification’ in India. This means that identity debates in India also include fundamental issue of ‘choice’ versus ‘ascription’ that brings into discussion as to, who decides what your identity is. Multiple identities though indeed are inevitable in India yet there is always the freedom to choose in this matter. But more than choice, India has always practised “identity – ascription”, that is, the ascribing of identity to individuals, whatever their own personal preferences may be. That is why especially in India, it makes sense to speak of ‘a political economy of identity’, according to which identity is a kind of commodity distributed by authority. A variation on this tradition is possible when individuals do not abide by identity rules and voluntarily identify themselves not with groups but with subjective aspects of selfhood. Hence it is said that identity formation in India thus can include voluntary as well as ascribed membership relevant in the gamut of groups.

As already mentioned India is a pluralistic society and multiple identities galore in this sub-continent. But of these multiplicities some identities are considered as more important and are more frequently invoked than any other. Caste, religion and linguistic group identities are more frequently invoked than any other in India. This is proved or displayed in countless settings including the census,
which classifies every inhabitant of India as per above mentioned groups. Questionnaires drawn up not only by government agencies but also by school officials, employers, professional associations also demand information mainly on above group affiliations. This only proves that what is at issue, are the above mentioned groups; caste, religion, language. Interestingly these groups belong to the domain of cultural heritage. This again signifies not only the primacy of tradition in India but is also a proof that group identities especially located in the history of the country are given prime importance in India than group formations of contemporary times like sexual orientation, occupation and political commitments etc. But changes happening in modern days also have been inspiring people to prefer an attitude of neutrality instead of allegiance to any specific identity. Such detachment not only does minimise identity conflicts or events of identity crisis but also proves to be highly advantageous, the profits of which Wang Bin has described thus:

In this era of globalisation and overlapping of cultures, this neutrality with regard to cultures and their basic values could be seen to be an essential requirement, and it might appear as the only way to ensure consensus and social cohesion (83).

Within these prime group identities belonging to community of descent, caste identity is considered the principal and the reason for this is the existence of a long history of caste conception coupled with a history of prejudice. This situation is almost similar to America, where, of the many heterogeneous identities, the most important group identity is ethno-racial identity (defined by biological descent namely race and marked by such physical signs as skin colour, shape of nose and face). Government agencies, private employers and schools who routinely identified
the caste identity with the purpose of extending special services in a way are responsible in reinforcing the importance of caste identity or generating the impression that one’s caste is a huge factor in determining just what a person deeply and truly is in India. Hence of all the multiple identities the most important identity is to a very large extent the caste group in India just as it is ethno-racial group in America with which a person is instantly associated by the onlookers. The conception and genealogical evolution of caste identity in India is beyond the concern of this study. However, a briefing on this identity is indeed essential as it allows understanding of the changes within.

Like religion, Varna and Jati have been important identities of an Indian through history and both self-perception and other-perception is always referential of one’s caste identity. That is in the traditional social order the mutuality of perception always reinforced caste identity. Probably for the same reason or on the same guidelines both religion and caste identities, too, were encoded as essentialist by the colonial rulers through the enumeration of castes in their census operations. Caste identity embodies a rigid hierarchical pattern and accordingly categorisation of castes into high or low was followed. In dealing with this identity an individual had several possibilities. One was acquiescence, that is, acceptance of the relative (high/low) cultural self-esteem attached to a given caste identity: if it was low, the individual tended to be diffident and submissive and withdrew from the public domain; if it was high, the individual tended to be confident and assertive and dominated the public domain. Centuries of oppression/domination and enslavement, interrupted with movements of enlightenments and emancipation, characterises caste practises in India. The invidiousness practised in the name of caste identity was more seriously challenged especially only in recent years. Piquant controversies
often keep arising in the name of castes and even in terms of subcastes which often becomes very difficult to resolve through discussion and negotiation demanding the interference of the court of law. The protest struggle carried on to counter oppression in the name of caste has seen varied stages and the latest enlightening stance is to replace the sense of shame about one’s caste identity with self-esteem; a feeling of pride at one’s caste identity (high or low) and any feeling of dislike is condemned and considered morally susceptible. Instead even while retaining their respective identity intact, demand was made to treat equally all Indians of all caste communities, instead of any effort to reverse the history. Rebellion against one’s identity from heritage or descent – is also accused of desiring to be like the other and refusing kinship with one’s own kind. Such tendency as Jayaram J in his essay has sourced to the description of an eminent sociologists like M. N. Srinivas as “Sanskritization” (143); alternatively, an individual, or even a group, could seek to emulate the norms and values, marks and symbols, and habits and practices of the caste group(s) placed higher than its own in the hierarchy. Jayaram further added that sociocultural relocation through ‘sanskritization’ “is a prelude to upward social mobility, though those placed higher in the hierarchy are reluctant to endorse the claim to equality, let alone apriority, through sociocultural emulation. Such an aspiration for superior caste identity also implies an element of alienation from the caste to which one belongs and it may also result in marginalization” (143).

The extreme response to caste identity hitherto followed is to challenge the caste order itself, often by embracing a religion that preaches castelessness. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, the most prominent leader of the depressed caste groups, and his followers converted themselves to Buddhism in protest against caste oppression in Hinduism. Elsewhere, lower caste groups have converted themselves to Christianity
and Islam. But, as pointed out earlier, caste survives conversion, and non-Hindu religions too have caste or caste-like formations.

This does not mean that the caste system is a single dispenser of Identities. Other than caste, religion is another broadest community category of identity in India. Of the many important general identities in India, religion is perhaps the most important. Hinduism is the professed religion of the vast majority (82.7 percent) and the followers of Islam constitute the single largest minority community (11.2 percent) and other notable minority religions include Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism and Jainism. Each of these religions is divided into a number of sects, subsects and denominations. Considering the important role of this collective identity namely religion the Indian constitution has endorsed it. The sectarian identity being important, too many contestations over identity differences in this matter are common in India. Two kinds of propositions constitute the basic platform of every religious or ethnic fundamentalism in the post-colonial world; One- every group has an original and pure tradition, whether religious or ethnic and two- every group must be made to return to the original condition, and that return must be enforced by the law. These propositions do suggest the imminence of conflicts in matters related to religious identity. Even places, objects and ideas associated with each sect also are part of such conflicts. Contestations regarding religious identity are so frequent and intense that often they go beyond the realm of official mechanism for settlement and can take very violent forms. The confrontation over the Babri Masjid-Ramjanmabhumi in Ayodhya in the North Indian state of Uttar Pradesh is the most blatant illustration of such contestations. Fixity of community identities is contested by the fact that most laypersons in India continue to see themselves as having a “plural-self”. The People of India Survey has observed that
many communities see themselves as Hindu and Buddhists, Hindu and Muslim, Hindu and Christians (Singh 1994). It is hard to describe this as an instance of multiculturalism or syncretism and Nandy’s opinion in this matter is more convincing: “It seems to be the case of a society where identities are crosscutting and the ‘others’ are telescoped into one’s own self, where none of the identities can be adequately depicted or defined without taking into account some other” (142). One estimate puts the number of such communities (bicultural identity) to be around 430. According to K. S. Singh, as quoted in Jayaram’s essay the People of India Survey showed roughly 15 percent of all Indian communities could be said to fall into this category. The partition of India and the resulting communal divide and accentuation of the Hindu-Muslim Identity politics and the growing prominence and assertion of fixed identities have put the bicultural identity of these communities under severe stress. Since religion is a primordial group, identification affiliation is by the process of ascription [given], as different from the achieved.

Then the lineage (extended family) identity, both within the patrilineal communities (kutumba) and the matrilineal communities is extremely significant in an individual’s domestic and ritual life. Overarching the lineage identity may be the consanguine clan identity (gothra), which traces the clan ancestry to a mythical rishi (sage) and intraconsanguine clan (sa-gothra) between whom marriages are generally proscribed. At a more general level comes the upa-jathi (sub-caste), jati (caste) and sect variations. Among the higher caste groups generally, and even among some lower caste groups more recently, the affiliation with a monastic order (matha) is also prevalent. Among the lower caste groups generally, and the ex-untouchable castes particularly, the distinction between the “left” and the “right” groups are significant. There are regional variations in the exact arrangement of such concentric
ascriptive identities of an individual. Nevertheless, each concentric level of identity carries its mark, and these marks are meaningful and are activated in specific situations, as for instance, at the time of marriage, in the performance of a ritual and so on.

Individuals within any social group in India carry identity that may be determined by their age, generational position, gender and marital status. An individual’s education, occupation, and income \(\text{wealth}\) are also important in defining one’s identity. Identities within the group are attached with behavioural expectations: reverence is to be shown to the elders, purdah (veiling) and avoidance may be observed by the woman in the presence of men, proscription of the Brahmin widows from participating in some rituals, and so on. That is, in interacting with the members of the group an individual is required to negotiate the identity of its various members. In times of social changes (as in times of modernisation and globalisation) traditional norms related to identity did face challenges. The material and ethical superiority of the collective identity over the individual practised and functioned in India for centuries got disturbed by the individualist philosophy of the Western Liberalism (introduced as part of the colonial rule). Or in other words the traditional dynamics of Identity in India was disturbed inspiring identity politics of varied kinds. Further the liberal democratic setup of the country which always presumes the existence of a rational, autonomous, self-directing individual as an atomised unit in a nation state encouraged the subordination of the collective identity to that of the individual. Or in other words liberal democratic ideology of the independent India pre-empted the need to endorse the primacy of an individual who was like a “social atom, a citizen with a franchise” (Jayaram 146). More than during the colonial rule, it was essentially in post-independence India this liberal and individualistic
philosophy of the West was more intensely emulated. But all the time Indians felt the pressure of the constraints of collective orientation as they had interiorised it from their culture as natives of the country and therefore were unable to completely outgrow their collective identity. Thus despite the forces of modernisation set in motion by the colonial rulers, and the adoption of a liberal democratic framework after independence, the collective community identity continued to thrive and exist in India. But certain changes are decipherable even though complete denial of group identity specificities was not observed. The declining power of once-dominant Brahmins and the increased assertion of other caste communities is also one more trend to be seen. To face the challenge of the non-Brahmin caste group, the Brahmins are constrained to ignore sub-caste differences and put up a measure of unity. Further anomic situations characterised by sudden breakdown of norms also commonly occur during communal conflicts of modern times.

The repertoire of ascriptive identities do not exhaust with the family-, clan-, jati, or religion, the identity of an individual in relation to his geographical or political (state) region or linguistic group is extremely important as well. These identities though are not coterminous with religion or caste yet they have special significance in defining the nature of local- outsider relationship. Throughout India, people have special terms for identifying the outsider, and often a derogatory one, too: bhailo (outsider) or ghati (one from across the Ghats) in Gao, dikoo (one from the plains of Bihar) in Chotanagar, konga (a Tamilian) in Bangalore, kotta (a Bihari), and medo (Marwari) in Bengal, bhaiyas (people from Utter Pradesh, generally) in Mumbai, and madrassi (people from Southern India) in Delhi are some such typical expressions. Furthermore, Individuals are also members of voluntary
groups of various types, which may be relatively open (like political parties) or closed (ex. elite clubs). These voluntary groups also have identity marks and symbols: wearing this conveys symbolic message to onlookers. Wearing Khadi (home spun cotton dress) and sporting a white cap (called Gandhi topi) are even now coterminous with being a true congressperson! Similarly, Khadi knickers and black cap identify an activist of Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh, a Hindu right wing organization.

The discussion made until now indicates that in India Individuals do not see themselves as abstract entities devoid of identity attributes. They articulate different ways of life, reflecting their circumstances and expressing their distinctive identities. Having multiple Identities, invoking specific identities in different spheres of life, and reacting to the perceived identities of others, all seem to be socio-culturally embedded. Both the self-perception of one’s multiple identities and perception of and reaction to the identities of others are learned as part of one’s socialization. The large number of group/community identities discussed until now only proves how for the Indians the respective communities to which one belongs largely acts as the anchor of self-identity. That is in India an individual has to negotiate identity in essentially group terms than in personal terms. Despite the forces of modernisation, the exposure to liberal philosophy, the formal recognition of the atomised conception of the individual, and the adoption of the universal impersonal categories of modern law, an individual’s identity remains primarily meaningful only in group terms in India. Collective identities have proven far more durable in the face of economic and political change than was envisaged by social scientists. If trends are any indication, the return to collectivist identities is growing. All this does not mean that there is no individual in contemporary Indian society. But, as Beteille (1991)
clarifies, “We should not expect to find him everywhere or in only a particular idealised form”.

Since in India an individual has to negotiate identity in essentially group terms, the plurality of groups (sub-groups or sub-sects) and hierarchy within also needs to be negotiated, and negotiation is not always harmonious resulting in intergroup conflicts involving contestations over religion, language, region, or caste. The politics of identity in India is such that even ordinary skirmishes or minor accidents turn into large-scale intergroup configurations. Further the fact that in India, as elsewhere, identity does not always necessarily carry a positive value and this also suggest the imminence of identity conflicts. Identity, imposed on others, either as individuals within a group or as belonging to a particular group or community, becomes an important instrument of oppression and collectively a source of self-depreciation in certain cases. At any level, religion, caste, or even family enforced identity stigmatises an individual: A Muslim would find it difficult to get rental accommodation in a predominantly Hindu locality. Discriminations against members of the caste groups continue to be reported even after five decades of independence. Among Brahmins and some other castes, widows are assigned a lower socio-ritual status than a sumangali (a married woman whose husband is alive): they are tonsured and clothed differently, and they cannot remarry. More recently we have witnessed opposition to Valentine’s day celebrations, fashion parades, and beauty contests as they are “unIndian,” or to sari and blouse as “un-Sikhistic,” or to wearing of bindi as “un-Islamic.” Distortions of History and the use of myths are integral to such conflicts. Of course myths can also be used for a harmonious resolution of the Identity questions. For example, in Goa the myths of the seven sisters incorporates Mother Mary into the Hindu Pantheon as a
manifestation of the goddess Durga. Such syncretism can be found in every part of the country. Another interesting tendency seen in India is sudden surge of high sensitivity towards one’s identity as other identities keep contesting, resulting in violent reactions. Selfish politicians’ strategic misuse of identity notions in India as part of their vote bank politics is a well-known factor. The word Identity though has not been a subject of intellectual analysis in India yet social scientists find it useful to deal with the problem arising from the changing orientations of group behaviour under the influence of modernisation. Even as Indian society is undergoing major transformations, to study the same, identity has assumed the nature of an ideological instrument without which the study would be confounding.

It would be indeed interesting here to include TRS Sharma’s (270-286) discussion of identity issues exclusively as per Hindu paradigm, an awareness of which will definitely inform the study further. Sharma places two ancient Indian paradigms as providing convenient frame work for discussion of the notion of identity. They are dharma and karma and Sharma quotes Kjell Madsen (271), the Norwegian philosopher who treats both dharma and karma as one composite notion which would provide the site for formulating a sustainable notion of identity: “Karma is what’s necessary about personal identity,” he says. “I’m what I am by doing what I did. One sculpts oneself; the basic meaning of karma is action ...Karma is what anchors and situates” (271). Sharma further qualifies on the argument by stating that when “one’s identity becomes too dense, closed, and ‘monadic’ by which he means the rigid community rules/identities that serves as a prison house for an individual then that person in order to escape from the oppressive influence begins a “process of individuation, a new karma”; an act of ‘rupture’ destabilising the cognitive framework of the community. Further it is said that on losing one’s
identity, the process of individuation or action to attain a new karma is inevitable. But losing one is not easy due to one’s rootedness in culture and gaining one within one’s own culture is a more complex and a messy process. Further it is ascertained that the new identity one seeks will stick only if it is in full accord with one’s samskaras. One more interesting nuance related to identity is implied in the phrase “karmic density” (274) again used by Sharma in his essay. By ‘karmic density’ Sharma means - the karma (identity) that accrues of an individual through repetition of certain actions. The predispositions based on this ‘karmic density’ along with samskaras sustained by the culture or social practices handed down together decide the identity factors of a person. That is the individual’s action and culture combine to give identity to a Hindu. Sharma quotes U.R. Anantha Murthy’s saying in the novel Samskara (273) “... in our every act there is a communitarian sense” and “we involve our gurus, our gods, our fellow humans” signifies the combination of an individual’s act and community practices; the deciding factors of identity. Furthermore, there is also the argument that it is hard to operate in total freedom, freed of one’s cultural identity as it is the culture which draws the parameters and delimits an individual’s space for actions. The complexities related to identity issues in Hindu culture discussed until now have similar nuances that characterise identity in general discussed earlier. The natural and cultural dichotomy in identity in Hindu culture is described as the conflict between svabhava (instinct) and svadharma (social identity). It is also believed that one can break free of one’s svadharma/one’s social identity and seek a new role in wider karmic field. Such efforts are said to make possible further personal growth. However, the whole affair of changing identity is said to constitute an important moral debate. The big question of this debate in Hindu faith is if can anyone really break out of one’s deterministic
samskara or social self and be existential in one’s search, inventing a new self, a new identity? The answer is ‘yes’ for even any closed system that operates with the force of religious sanction is bound to give way in face of serious challenges of crisis and changed perception of its members.

The varied intricacies of identities discussed until now just reasons out as to why India is too vulnerable to the imminence of identity conflicts. Further the rapid socio-cultural changes and influx of disparate ideologies has as much contributed to identity conflicts in India. It has confused individuals as to their respective identity claims to the extent of not knowing one’s identity and also has inspired questioning of the formulation of one’s identity. In the early years of Indian independence, the conflict between the global (Pan-Indian nationalist identity) and the local (regional/secessionist group) or global/local binarism was more pronounced defying Indian political systems advocacy of assimilationist doctrine-whence regional identity are expected to merge with the national/Indian. There was the conflict between those who preferred the traditional way of life with apprehension of losing their cultural and linguistic distinctiveness and those who wanted to usher in modernity. Torch bearers of convention were worried about the legacy of community’s cherished ideals and mores or the cultural baggage of the community. There were those who, though not disrespectful to the tradition, wanted to usher in modernity. They believed that regional/secessionist identities impose limitation and were restrictive and parochial and there was the need to forget and forego that identity in order to become an Indian and to form an inter-ethnic, composite national culture. This parochialism was also asserted politically when after the end of imperialist rule, greater emphasis was laid on self-rule; asserting legitimacy to rule and work for their own progress at the district and village level though continuing as
the constituent unit of the nation. Such assertions are also the result of uneven economic development and inner contradictions of a multiethnic and multicultural society. After the British came to administer, two things happened—the traditional power structure of villages was dismantled and clan allegiance weakened but this helped the growth of pan-Indian consciousness.

Multicultural policy of India aims to recognise and promote the understanding that multiculturalism reflects the cultural and racial diversity of Indian society; that multiculturalism is a fundamental characteristic of Indian heritage and Identity. Even Indian literature gives voice to ‘difference’ or is characterised by plurality of voices opposing marginalisation of any kind. Or in other words literature of pluralistic society expresses border crossing or avowed consciousness of its multiple heritages. These voices in fact challenge the singular voice of ‘neutral universality’ that implicitly denies social and cultural difference. Characters caught between two or more worlds, events signifying remembering and recovering of the past, creating spaces for the merging of the past with the present are quite often exploited in literature allowing ample opportunities for emergence of new identities. Characters are often portrayed in constant dialogue with their culture of origin and as involved in the struggle for asserting self-image/self-definition and as carving their identities within new social, cultural, political contexts and ultimately as trying to reshape their identity in literatures of multicultural societies. Writings merge the political and personal, past and present, history and fiction and the boundaries between these dichotomies fade. Advocacy of tolerance in literature of multicultural societies mainly aims at attaining acceptance or even celebration of difference. It also aims to invoke genuine sense of empathy and compassion. The identity related themes characteristic of the literature of the pluralistic society
elaborated by Mary Economou-Bailey in the context of multicultural Canada holds true also to India. Mary’s words run thus:

All these works explore and expose themes of loss and migration. The importance of remembering and reconstructing the past is another theme pervading all of these novels, as characters struggle to find their identity, to deal with ghosts of past, to suffer displacement and embrace survival, and to establish fragmented relationships with lovers, family, community. While these writers write about painful experiences, tragedy on both a personal and universal scale, yet they allow the possibility for their characters to heal, to recover from loss through love, and to reconstruct memory and then fold it into the written work as a testimony of past tragedy. And through these characters, we too experience some sort of catharsis (228).

After discussing the usual characteristic feature of literature in any country of multiple identities we need to remember one most vulnerable tendency of pluralistic societies like India is identity conflicts. Conflicts of the kind are generated for both assertion and recognition of identities in the phase of threat for existence or disappearance. The politics of identity and politicisation of identities are the twin major phenomenon invoked in the socio-cultural space of India both in colonial and post-colonial times either to ameliorate conflicts or assert identities. Conversion of cultural identities into political identity and politicising identities was considered sure steps towards rectifying injustices prevalent in relation to identity matters in India. It was a means adapted by colonial rulers which later was to serve as precedence to rulers of independent India. Identities of caste, gender and religion especially were converted into political identities during colonial rule, for the
advantage it gave for the ruling British to control India through their strategy of divide and rule. Conversion of varied cultural identities into political identities continued in the postcolonial times by the Indian state and law to fulfil ideological norms of an egalitarian society. That is in the independent nation state of India the hegemonic practises in the name of differences was interceded and laws were framed to legally empower the subordinates’, whatsoever kind. Reservation laws in matters of caste, gender, minorities, tribes and many land reformation acts are the result of state and judicial interceding to counter injustices in this matter.

A cultural identity becomes a political identity when the legal and administrative organs of the state enforce it and proceed to discriminate between them, generating rights or refusing rights. Or in other words when political authority and law obliges a cultural identity then that cultural identity becomes political. Conversion of identities into political forms has its own repercussions which is well summed up by Mahmood Mamdani thus:

As a rule, cultural identities are non-coercive, consensual, voluntary, and can be multiple. All postmodernist talks of hybridity and multiple identities belong to the domain of culture. Once enforced by law, however, identities cease to be all of these. A legal identity is not voluntary, nor is it multiple. The law recognises you as one, and as none other. Once it is enforced legally, cultural identity turns into a legal and political Identity (17).

Mamdani sums up the above impact with the following words, “When law imposes a cultural difference, the difference becomes reified. Prevented from changing, it becomes frozen” (18).
Transformation of a cultural identity into political identity confirms the definiteness of that respective identity which in turn leads to assertion of separateness. Then rights of whatsoever kind are vehemently fought on the basis of exclusivity\separateness which in the long run keeps out any possibilities of inclusions. This strikes a note of discord among the historically disadvantaged groups who are often encouraged to suppress their internal differences to gain maximum success in their fight for their rights. Or in other words exclusivity politics deter them from acting in unanimity to gain political mileage or to gain justice in the fight to counter hegemony politics of identity. Thus the prospective of getting greater mileage by remaining united of the different suppressed classes is forever lost. Concept of “Social Pathology” (Renault 109), - meaning those situations where the social world impedes the satisfaction of anticipation rooted in the identity. Social struggles against these pathologies are interpreted as conflicts instituted by socially despised individuals who wish to restore positive relationship with the self.

Both the politics of identity difference and politicisation of identity differences for the benefits it fetches, has generated new problems in a country like India where multiple identities galore. As culture is understood as primordial and historically constructed or cultural identities as vestige of tradition because of its ancient genealogy, politicisation of identities qualifies them differently. Cultural identities as the legacy of the past, when transformed into political identities with all legal entitlements either cease to just remain as vestige of tradition nor can they be dismissed as an invention of the contemporary times. The question as to when cultural identities grounded in long histories that precede colonialism took on political dimension is best answered in the fact that it is the outcome of an encounter with western modernity mediated by colonial power. Indeed, instances can be given
as to the way identity is politicised for the desired ends during British rule. Aware of the link between identity and power the coloniser's best played the politics of difference in identity matters of India. One of the strategies of this game was to transform the cultural identities into political identities. To begin with the British distinguished between the native elites and the native populace with a purpose to promote the colonial project. They shaped native elite preferences to create native clones of western modernity through a discourse on civilization and assimilation, where they dismissed native tradition as backward and superstitious. On the other hand, they shaped mass preferences through a discourse grounded in tradition or in other words they harnessed tradition for colonial project; disentangling its different strands, to separate the authoritarian and the emancipatory and to harness it to the colonial project. By repacking native passions and cultures selectively they aimed to pit these very passions and cultures against one another. Thus identity politics was already a mass phenomenon during the colonial rule itself and events of politicisation of identity are happening unabated in contemporary times as well. The hitherto unasserted ones are proclaiming afresh suggestive of the imminence and inevitability of identity conflicts in India. The motivating factors of social strife caused due to identity conflicts was always due to sentiments of injustice arising either from a denial of one’s dignity both as an individual and as a group of specific identity. Awareness of the infringement on the values one bestows on one’s facets of identity also results in identity conflicts. Only when a specific identity seems hurt does it become the object of a political or social conflict. Further the faith that cultural identity is the rigid identity and the unyielding assertion of it always invokes reactions of denunciations by others precipitating the politics of identity. Requirement for universality though is suggested as a solution to avoid identity
politics, but the non-feasibility of universal identity (discussed in earlier paragraphs as impractical idealism) has overruled its contribution to ameliorate identity politics. Another interesting facet of identity conflict is talked of which Harban Mukia as sourced in Renault’s essay calls by the phrase the “transmutation of identity”. Prolonged denial for recognition of an essential identity may instigate an individual or group for implausible affirmation of his/their own value in the guise of imaginary identity traits resulting in events of “transmutation of identity”. Such moments are characterised by a conscious or unconscious merging of varied identities to form a monolithic, self-opinionated and unequivocal identity. One fine paradigm is the multiple facets; identity conflicts can have in India. For instance, events of communal violence in India are not just the struggle for the religious-community rights but have within it the subsuming of other denied identity rights like that of class, caste, region, gender etc. The best example is the way rape is politicised in India; an event of rape significantly merges the religious, national and other identity interests with sexual identity. In any molestation or rape case in India the first thing of importance is not the inhumanity ingrained in the event itself but the communal identity of the perpetrator of violence and that of the victim becomes important and if these two belong two different communal groups then the whole affair take on new meaning and goes beyond the idea of sexual atrocity to include communal and caste identity struggles as well.

All the above discussions thus prove that the struggles for recognition of identity could be characterised by a normative deficiency (that is, has an element of abnormality as well). Or it proves that identity is not unequivocal, but composed of many facets, and individuals are faced with the problem of unifying it into a form that would bring subjective autonomy into play. Since perception of one’s personal
identity is not inseparable from socially ascribed identity, social recognition of identity is considered among the fundamental needs of the self. Struggles of recognition are therefore political in the sense that they contain a demand for the world that permits the satisfaction of certain needs. Hence struggles for recognition and activities of resistance of the same always take on a political dimension. Although strongly political, the struggles for the recognition of identity are not always politically relevant. They bear an emancipatory content when they protest against an unjust world or when they target social and cultural causes that deny recognition. They lose all legitimacy when they follow exclusivity of identity; whose method of affirmation is through a denial of the dignity and identity of others. Any claim becomes political not because it is not true, but because this truth does not reflect an original fact but a fact created politically and enforced legally. Central to leading a just human life, therefore, are the responsibilities of choice and reasoning. Violence erupts (is promoted) says Amartya Sen,

By the cultivation of a sense of inevitability about some allegedly unique – often belligerent – identity that we are supposed have and which apparently makes extensive demands on us (sometimes of a most disagreeable kind). The imposition of an allegedly unique identity is often a crucial component of the “martial art” of fomenting sectarian confrontation (xiii).

The prospect of violence in sectarian confrontation can be minimised by judicial use of choice and reason. That is our ability to choose or rationalise the relative importance of our different identity associations and affiliations in an unbiased way can defeat violence or successfully execute programs for peace or defeat of violence. The awareness of existence of the link between identity and
power is one more reason attributed to the transformation of cultural identities into political identities. According to Honneth as quoted by Renault only those who are able to establish the three positive relations with the self (discussed in earlier paragraphs), will be entirely justified, in their struggle for the rights of social or cultural identities. If one acknowledges that a positive relationship with the self is the circumstance of all moral life, then he/they capable of this positive relationship with the self alone can make legitimate demand in identity politics. But this usage is largely confined to the professional community of psychologists. Thus it figures small in a study of this kind, which has in view the cultural life of India as a whole.

The tendency of the people to be influenced by the other/s or to identify with this or that group is too obvious. We are indeed influenced to an amazing extent by people with whom we identify. Hence Oscar Wilde said, “Most people are other people” (Sen xvi) is a remark on human tendency to be influenced by others. “Their thoughts are someone else’s opinions, their lives a mimicry, their passions a quotation” (Sen xvi) We have seen in the human history the world over the way in which such fostered sense of identity with one group of people is be made into a powerful weapon to brutalize another (activity promoted sectarian hatred – ex – Kosovo, Bosnia, Rwanda, Timor, Israel, Palestine, Sudan). Prioritising one particular identity over all others while promoting good relations among different human beings of different civilizational affinity (or amity) or religious or community friendship – is also described as “miniaturization of human beings (Sen xiii)” as the whole situation ignores the great many different ways in which people relate to each other. This kind of singular promotion of a singular allegedly predominant identity drowning all other affiliations not only effectively constructs hatred but also overpowers (kills) natural human sympathy or kindness we may
naturally have “the result can be homespun elemental violence, or globally artful violence and terrorism” (Sen Xiv). In the effort to assert the greater power of one identity over the other lot of violence has been perpetrated followed up with justification of violence by the perpetrators to deny any charges of un-civilized behaviour. The hypocrisy that underlies the whole affair of identity violence is expressed thus:

In pornography of violence (identity claims often turn violent), as in pornography, the nakedness is of others, not us. The exposure of the other goes alongside the unstated claim that we are not like them. It is pornography where senseless violence is a feature of other people’s culture: where they are violent, but we are pacific, and where a focus on their debasedness easily turns into another way of celebrating and confirming our exalted status (Hollinger 13).

Another risk or danger that belies the politics of identity conflicts and the violence practised in its name is its tendency to become perpetual and too fatal. The xenophobic ethnic conflicts and the related violence that characterises the political history of many a country like Germany (Hitler), India (partition) and Rwanda (1994-genocide) are some evidences of the kind. Historical events have proved that violent events keep happening whenever victims and perpetrators trade places; where yesterday’s victims are today’s perpetrators. When victims turn perpetrators – it is a situation where “victims become killers”.

Identity issues take on new meaning and interpretation in the present times of globalisation. We witness increased involvement of different societies with in global systems. The world has become in important respects a single social system as a
result of growing ties of interdependence which now affect virtually every one. Seen as a process of world unity, the social, political and economic conditions which crosscut borders between countries through the process of globalization, decisively condition the fate of those living within each of them. The real danger of the impact of globalisation is that it is proceeding in an uneven, fragmented way. Expansion of inequalities within and between societies is one of the most serious challenges facing the world in contemporary times. Large disparities of wealth and living standards separate the industrialised countries from the less developed countries of Asia, Africa and South America where most of the planet’s population live. Globalisation is leading to the creation of a ‘global culture’. Some are apprehensive of this culture, because local customs and traditions get overwhelmed by the values of the most powerful and affluent, a form of ‘cultural imperialism’ in which the values, styles and outlooks of the Western world are spread so aggressively that they smother individual national cultures. In contrast, others have linked processes of globalisation to a growing differentiation in cultural traditions and forms, claiming that global society is now characterised by an enormous diversity of cultures existing side by side. Rather than cultural homogeneity they assert, local traditions are joined by a host of additional cultural forms from abroad, presenting people with a bewildering array of lifestyle options from which to choose, leading to fragmentation of cultural forms than to a unified global culture or to a new form of ‘hybrid identity’.

It is also argued that societies largely maintain their individual characteristics despite economic pressures and cultural values in many respects define how business is conducted within a nation. There may be a convergence of political and economic ideologies, but there are deeper elements of culture which cannot be easily
abandoned. Global economy is still limited, the real layer of globalization being restricted to capital markets and in most other areas institutions being intensely local. On a cultural level it is not clear weather homogenisation is proceeding nearly as rapidly and, to a certain extent, there is a real resistance to cultural homogenization also because of the simultaneous and contradictory influences and consequences of homogenization, pluralisation, traditionalization, and hybridization of the components of culture-material and non-material. Accessibility does not really result, as T. K. Ommen says, into acceptability in the realm of culture; and accessibility is often associated with the possibility of adaptability. The processes of globalization eroding the differences and diminishing the spaces between the nations are also “fragmenting the imagined unity within those nations”. If the global circulation of the cultural and other commodities is leading to global homogenisation, it is also revitalising the traditional markers of national identity within national boundaries. Consequently, the nation-state can no longer impose a relatively uniform sense of identity. Instead national identity must compete with other identities that are driven by the twin engines of profit and purchasing power.

The rise of Hindu nationalism is seen as an offshoot of globalisation in India, in pursuit of identity assertion through “syndicated Hinduism”, a protest against a kind of cultural imperialism that, some feel, threatens to smother local cultures with powerful brand of the West. The argument is that the local, primordial identities resurface due to globalisation, when an attempt is made to challenge their uncertain stability. This is true in both the society of the third world and of the first world. The Western dominated globalization, it has been observed, has placed non-western countries on the defensive, whereby many Islamic countries have turned inward looking. One also saw Buddhism a revival in many countries, Confucianism
showing vitality in East Asia—a re-awakening of cultures around the globe, resisting Western projects imposed in the name of human rights, political freedom and economic internationalism. Lancy Lobo (36) gives instances of how cultural backlashes have taken place in response to globalisation: The Islamic revolution in Iran, liberation theology movement in Latin America, the New Christian Right in the USA, contemporary religious Zionism in Israel and religious environmentalism have responded in a liberal manner. In Yogendra Singh’s (15) opinion globalization has a far reaching cultural potential in India, which still remains a largely a nation of peasants and working classes totalling about 70% of the population, rendering the influences of the institutional structures of globalization to some extent self-limiting. Simultaneously India is also witnessing a growth of the middle classes now ranging between 150 and 200 million, offering vitality and opportunity to the forces of globalization, and also exposing the new social, cultural and economic forces of globalization, to the contradictory impulses of acceptance and rejection. Today this dualism acutely defines the limits of globalization in Indian society. There are strong social, cultural and political movements that are extremely suspicious of the new institutions and linkages which globalization brings into wake in society. At the same time there is a substantial population which does not shy away from the cultural, social, technological and economic linkages and institutions which follow globalisation; a large majority of the middle class are being supportive of this process. The homogenizing thrust of globalisation results not only in defining cultural identities or growth of ever new forms of symbolization of nationalism or regionalism, says Singh (20), it also encourages people to define their identities through religion or through its more extreme manifestations in the form of religious fundamentalism, to make religion the basis of national cultural ethos.
Illustrating the relations between globalization and religion, it is said that if globalisation provides benefits for the rich and the poor alike, delivers their rights, provides social justice, equity and prosperity for all, then perhaps the cultural and religious questions may not arise. But if it fails, culture or religion will be used as a weapon to attack those countries which are epicentres of globalizations says Lancy Lobo (116). Of the many dominant processes operating in modern India, globalisation and Hindu nationalism are the most crucial. Sociologists like Lancy Lobo believe that globalisation has contributed to the deepening of communal, religious, and ethnic consciousness in India. The middle class Indians, says Lobo, influenced by a superficial sense of modernity and technology, entertainment, clothes, cosmetics are in search of their roots in their traditional culture and primordial identities and easily find solace in religiosity, superstition and obscurantism. In Lobo’s opinion (116), the Hindutva forces have made good use of this for political purposes in India. In the late 1980s with the liberalization of economy, globalization made its entry into India and Hindu nationalism gained momentum alongside as well. Picked up speed since the early 1990s in India, globalisation impinged on the socio-cultural, economic, and political domains of the country. Increasing globalization is one of the causes of the fundamentalist reaction; it inspired a fear in the middle classes/castes that the changes taking place are eroding their economic opportunities and cultural superiority. Moreover, the lower castes and tribes who got educated and became upwardly mobile were perceived by the upper castes as threatening the Hindu social order resulting in the Hindu nationalists making advantage of these fears to push their agenda. The Hindu nationalists made globalization responsible for all the ills in India when they were not in power. Thus as markets become global and emotions more local, the
challenge before India as a multicultural society is to define the essentials of its identity all the while allowing for flexible adaptation.
Works Cited


-----.

