

NATIONALISM AND ITS NATURE

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Abstract

Nationalism is a feeling in which devotion of the general public is devoted to the nation, not to the king. There have been extensive discussions about the meaning of nationalism, although if seen, nationalism is an internal feeling, which binds the people of a particular country in the thread of unity. Like modern democracy, nationalism is also a product of Europe. The exponent of nationalism was John Gottfried Herder, who first used the term in the 18th century to lay the foundation for German nationalism. At that time it was given the principle that a nation was formed only by the same language, race, religion or region. However, whenever an attempt was made to establish symmetry on this basis, tension and extremism got stronger. When the cultural concept of nationalism is forcefully implemented, it is called “ultra-nationalism” or “chauvinism”. This means that when nationalism becomes the ultimate value, there is a danger of the destruction of cultural diversity. Assimilation and integrationist strategies try to establish a single national identity through various measures. In this context, our country India does not accept the recognition of such nationalism by erasing its cultural diversity, because there is a difference in the concept of nationalism of our country and western countries. Western nationalism is a type of majoritarianism, whereas India as a nation is an aggregate of its diverse languages, many religions and different ethnicities.

Keywords: Nationalism, Patriotism, Imagined Communities, Sedition, Chauvinism.

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INTRODUCTION

Nationalism is such a feeling or idea that once again remains a major issue of discussion in the present era. The world we live in today is a bit too nationalistic. I am not saying that the whole world has become one nation. Although, today, if the world is more nationalistic than it is in the sense that nationalism has emerged as the most dominant political force during the last two centuries. In today's world, there is no such person or territory which is not a part of some nation-state. That is why it is important to understand this phenomenon.

In this paper I am considering the following issues:

1. What are nations called and how nations are formed,
2. What is nationalism and what is its relation with nations and nation-states, and
3. What role has nationalism played in changing the political map of the modern world?

Apart from these, we have to also consider the nature of Nationalism within the concept of Nation building. It is also evident that the biggest contradiction with nationalism is that the more political power it has, the more philosophical it is lacking. Although today the political importance of nationalism is accepted by all, it was not theoretically formulated until the 1960s. Now there is a lot of material on nationalism, yet there is no consensus about it.

In this context, a great scholar of nationalism, Benedict Anderson has shared his views on the questions of nation and nationalism- *"all thinkers turn their backs to each other and seek abstract theories in different directions, rather than understand the problem in harmony with each other."*(Quoted in Gopal Balakrishnan (ed.), *Mapping the Nation*, p.1)

Surprisingly, scholars who fully accept the historical legitimacy, reality and political justification of nationalism also consider it an 'invented or created tradition' (Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*), also believed in '*imagined communities*' and '*cultural artefact*' and sometimes even 'myths' (Benedict Andersen, *Imagined Communities*).

Many of the issues on which there are still heated debates are related to the antiquity of the nations. Did nations exist for centuries in human history or are they a product of the present day? The answers given to this question can be broadly divided into two forms. One who

considers nations as a modern phenomenon may be called modernists and others who trace the history of nations to the premodern period may be called pre-modernist¹.

DEFINITION OF NATION AND PROCESS OF NATION-BUILDING

Before going into the discussion of the definition of nation and the process of nation-building, I would like to articulate separately some terminologies which create confusion in deciding the idea of nationalism every time. In this regard, the terms “nationalism and patriotism” are often comprehended wrongly. Where *Nationalism* has a *doctrinal character and embodies the belief that the nation is in some way the central principle of political organization*. On the other hand, Patriotism (from the Latin *Patria*, meaning ‘fatherland’) is a sentiment, a psychological attachment to one’s nation, literally a ‘love of one’s country’.

Both are always misinterpreted by the common people. As we have experienced in our own country, for the last 8-10 years the idea of Nationalism created many outrages. Here I am not touching that part in this paper because it would divert the path of discussion. In that sense, I am only referring to some instances of how our Indian legal policy also did not take any effort yet to interpret these terms.

For example- If we see the definition of *Sedition*,² Section 124-A of the Indian Penal Code, 1860, only spells out what are the acts which will be considered as the Anti-National, but it does not present a clear picture of the word “Nationalism”. [Section 124 –A] Explanations 1- The explanation of the word ‘Disaffection’ depicts the negative discourse of patriotism, but does not present the definition of it ostensibly. Besides, if we analyse these two terms we comprehend that both are very different from each other, as there is only a thin line that differs them, which is not understood easily. [As we know, the Indian Penal Code, 1860 was enacted in the British period, so I believe that the Indian Judiciary should reintroduce these types of legislation once again and interpret them in the wake of Globalization and liberal democratization.]

In addition, *Patriotism* provides the effective basis for that belief, and this underpins all forms of nationalism. In this regard, it is difficult to ponder when a national group is demanding and arguing for political independence without possessing at least a measure of patriotic loyalty or

¹ Palat, Madhavan K. April 2008. “Unit 10 Nationalism: Modern State and Politics”. Volume 3, Indira Gandhi National Open University, pp. 49-72. New Delhi [Hindi Edition].

² India Today Web Desk. October 9, 2019. “Use and misuse of Sedition law: Section 124A of IPC”. India Today. New Delhi. (Accessed on: 9 July 2021)

national consciousness. In this context, it can also be considered that however, not all patriots are nationalists. Not all of those who identify with, or maybe love their nation, see it as a way through which political demands are often articulated³.

Now moving on to the main argument of this paper where I am articulating the definition of Nations and the process of Nation building. As we know, the word '*nation*' has been used since the thirteenth century and derives from the Latin *nasci*, meaning to be born. Besides, in the form of *natio*, it referred to a group of people united by birth or birthplace. It can be comprehended that in its original usage, the nation thus implied a breed of people or a racial group but possessed no political significance.

Thus it is also evident that it was not until the late eighteenth century that the term acquired political overtones, as individuals and groups started to be classified as '*nationalists*'. In the French Revolution, the term 'nationalism' was first used in print in 1789 by the anti-Jacobin French priest Augustin Barruel. In this sense, by the mid-nineteenth century, nationalism was widely recognized as a political doctrine or movement; for example, as a major ingredient of the revolutions that swept across Europe in 1848⁴.

In that sense, it became very necessary to examine whether nations formed or is humanity inherently blessed with nations? *In other words, are nations a contingency or are they an integral part of the human condition?* We cannot deny that already most nationalists (nationalist ideologies, writers, poets or practitioners of nationalist politics) have tended to look upon nations as given and somewhat eternal. It could be also justified that these nations, according to nationalist perception, only needed to be aroused from their deep slumber by the agent called nationalism⁵.

According to traditional nationalist nationalism plays the role of an "awakener" who makes nations rise from their inactiveness. In the nationalist discourse, nations appear as sleeping beauties expecting their prince charming! What is missing during this understanding is that the processes through which nations themselves arrive during this world. Nations weren't always there; they emerged at some point. It is therefore important to not see nationalism in its image.

³ Heywood, Andrew.2012. "*Political Ideologies – An Introduction, Chapter 6 Nationalism*".5th Edition, Palgrave Macmillan, London, pp.168-194.

⁴ Heywood, Andrew.2012. "*Political Ideologies – An Introduction, Chapter 6 Nationalism*".5th Edition, Palgrave Macmillan, London.pp.168-194.

⁵ Palat, Madhavan K. April 2008. "*Unit 10 Nationalism: Modern State and Politics*". Volume 3, Indira Gandhi National Open University, pp. 49-72.New Delhi [Hindi Edition].

The basic belief of nationalism is that the nation is, or should be, the central principle of political organization. However, much confusion surrounds what nations are and how they can be defined. In everyday language, words such as '*nation*', '*state*', '*country*' and even '*race*' are often confused or used as if they are interchangeable⁶.

Many political disputes, moreover, are disputes about whether a particular group of people should be regarded as a nation, and should therefore enjoy the rights and status associated with nationhood. This applies, for instance, to the Tibetans, the Kurds, the Palestinians, the Basques, the Tamils, and so on.

While evaluating the thought of a nation we gain that on the foremost basic level, nations are cultural entities, collections of individuals bound together by shared values and traditions, especially, a common language, religion and history, and typically occupying an equivalent geographic area.

In this context, the state is often also defined by 'objective' factors: people that satisfy a requisite set of cultural criteria are often said to belong to a nation; those that don't are often classified as non-nationals or members of foreign nations. However, to define a nation simply as a gaggle of individuals bound together by a common culture and traditions is a challenging task which raises some very difficult questions. Although particular cultural features are commonly related to nationhood, notably language, religion, ethnicity, history and tradition, there's neither blueprint nor any objective criteria which will establish where and when a nation exists.

In this area of discussion, we found that there are fewer definitions of nations. It would be faithful to say that nations are described far more than they need to be defined.

In this context, the earliest attempt to define a nation was made in 1882 by Ernest Renan, a French scholar. He described the nation as a human collectively brought together by *will, consciousness and collective memory* (and also, *common forgetfulness, or collective amnesia*). He called the nation an exercise in an everyday plebiscite. If we analyse this definition it shows that the strength of Renan's definition lay in providing a voluntarist (*as against naturalistic*) component to the understanding of the nation. On that ground, Renan forcefully rejected the notion that nations were created by natural boundaries like mountains, rivers and oceans. He emphasized the role of human will and memory within the making of a nation. So a human collectivity or

⁶ Heywood, Andrew.2012. "*Political Ideologies – An Introduction, Chapter 6 Nationalism*".5th Edition, Palgrave Macmillan, London.pp.168-194.

grouping can “*will*” (wish) itself form a nation. Similarly, the process of the creation of a nation is not dependent upon any natural or objective criteria and a nation, to be, is not obliged to fulfil any of the objection conditions⁷.

But Renan’s definition also has some confusion based on three arguments, such as, a) Nations as a unique form of human grouping, and b) Role of consciousness & c) Nations could only emerge in societies that were already culturally homogenous etc.

Similarly moving to the definition of Nationalism presented by Benedict Anderson⁸, we can comprehend the concept of it to some extent. In his 1983 book “*Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*”, he analyzed the idea of nationalism as the concept of an imagined community. According to him, a nation as a socially constructed community imagined by the communities that perceive themselves as a part of that group. In this discussion, he also emphasized the role of *print media* or *print capitalism*. As it is a known fact the media creates imagined communities, by usually targeting a mass audience or generalizing and addressing citizens as the public⁹.

In that sense, we found that the main causes of the emergence of Nationalism were to establish a movement to abolish the ideas of divine theory and hereditary monarchy in Europe. In this context, print capitalism played a very vital role during the time of the industrial revolution. Because with the emergence of the printing press and also capitalism, people gained some sort of national consciousness regarding the common values that bring those people together. With the emergence of the printing press and also capitalism, people gained some sort of national

⁷ Palat, Madhavan K. April 2008. “Unit 10 Nationalism: Modern State and Politics”. Volume 3, Indira Gandhi National Open University, pp. 49-72. New Delhi [Hindi Edition].

⁸ Anderson, Benedict. 2006. “*Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*”. Quebeckor World, Fairfield, U.K.

⁹ According to Anderson, the creation of imagined communities became possible only due to “print capitalism”. Capitalist entrepreneurs printed their books and media within the vernacular (instead of exclusive script languages, like Latin) to maximize circulation. As a result, readers speaking various local dialects became ready to understand one another, and a standard discourse emerged. Anderson argued that the primary European nation-states were thus formed around their “national print languages.” Anderson presented that the primary sort of capitalism started with the method of printing books and religious materials. The process of printing texts within the vernacular started right after the instant when the books printed in script languages, like Latin saturated the elite market and also, at the moment it was observed that just a small category of people was speaking it and was part of the bilingual society.

consciousness regarding the common values that bring those people together¹⁰.

Here, I am also trying to correlate the Indian freedom struggle and the emergence of nationalism with the idea of print capitalism. As, in 1918, the Montagu-Chelmsford Report asserted that “*that part of the people of India that has political consciousness is intellectually our child.*” In one view, there is some truth to this claim, because the rise of nationalism in modern India happened under only the foreign rule. The reaction that took place among Indians against the nature of British rule was what gave rise to nationalism. In this limited sense, imperialism can claim to be the originator of Indian nationalism. At the same time, it is also worth noting that in fact, the *economic element* was the most important in the emergence and development of India's nationalism. This was the result of the conflict of economic interests between the two nations. We have also seen that during the entire independent movement our freedom fighters lead the nation to a great extent with their written works which were only possible by printing presses. A leader like Bal Gangadhar Tilak translated many books into the local language so that in more numbers people could join the movement. In that sense, print media contributed to the consciousness of the Indian freedom struggle and built a foundation of nationalism in the true sense.

In this paragraph, I am referring to some other examples of nationalism articulated by Benedict Anderson, such as when we see the tombs or any war memorial of the Unknown Soldier (Like- *Amar Jawan Jyoti, National War Memorial (New Delhi) or any monument*) then suddenly our sentiments change into patriotism and we feel attached to their sacrifices. I believe that those types of feelings only connect us as “imagined communities”. No doubt that the tombs of Unknown Soldiers are *either empty or hold unidentified remains*, but each nation with these kinds of memorials claims these soldiers as their own. In that sense, *no matter what the actual origin of the Unknown Soldier is*, these nations have placed them within their imagined community. In this context, we can understand that here the idea of “oneness (unity/solidarity)” emerges which is one of the characteristics of Nationalism.

Similarly, Anderson elaborated a nation as “an imagined political community”. According to him, a nation is imagined because *the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet within the minds of each lives the image of their communion*. I must say that Anderson, in his statement, is very confident. Further, he also added that yes there

¹⁰ Anderson.Bendict, “*Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*”. Quebecor World, Fairfield, U.K. 2006

are so many diversities and disparities among the nations, but they are as imagined communities in every manner.

In addition, members of the community probably will never know each of the other members' faces to face; however, they may have similar interests or identify as part of the same nation. Besides, members hold in their minds an image of their affinity: for instance, the nationhood felt with other members of your nation when your "imagined community" participates during a larger event such as the *Olympic Games*. In that sense, a nation is a community without any doubt¹¹.

If we analyse the idea of Nationalism by Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore¹² whose brand of nationalism is fundamentally rooted in the question of what it means to be human. The idea of Nationalism by him presents an interesting fact, as he believed that there was no real sense of Nationalism in India ever. Here, I support his statement as we also follow the idolatry of the Nation since our childhood without knowing the idea behind it. We learn that Nation is like religion, as it is almost better than reverence for God and humanity. In this context, he also envisaged that a country is greater than the ideals of humanity. As he claimed that India has always had a social problem. But it is not only the situation for our country, but there were also many other countries which had faced the same things in that contemporary era.

In this regard, when we see Tagore's definition of Nationalism, it was also against the concept of 'Nation state', as it was western ideology. For him, Nationalism is only an instrument to organize people politically and economically. He was against the concept of blind nationalism or chauvinistic [Uncritical and unreasoned dedication to a cause or group, typically based on a belief in its superiority, as in 'national chauvinism or 'male chauvinism'¹³.] because he believed it is dangerous for the idea of nationalism in true sense which only leads to the idea of superiority and misuse of powers. His brand of nationalism was based on a humanistic approach and welfare for all, not any commercial benefits¹⁴.

¹¹ Anderson, Benedict. 2006. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Quebecor World, Fairfield, U.K.

¹² Tagore, Rabindra. 1917. "Nationalism in India". pp. 23-36.

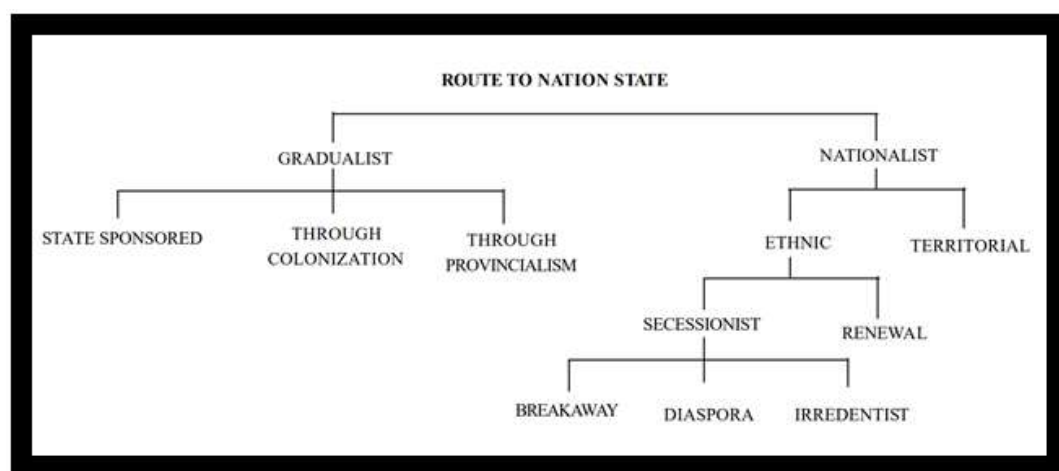
¹³ Heywood, Andrew. 2012. *Political Ideologies – An Introduction, Chapter 6 Nationalism*. 5th Edition, Palgrave Macmillan, London. pp. 168-194.

¹⁴ ISSN (Online) - 2349-8846.3 June 2019. "What Kind of Nationalism Do We Need Today? Exploring Tagore on Nationalism". Economic & Political Weekly.

Apart from this, Tagore has always strongly attacked the idea of emulating the nationalism of western countries and advised India to stay away from these. According to him, the indiscriminate pursuit of nationalism will never lead to progress, but will always make us a victim of mental slavery of foreign nations. In the same sequence, he took a jibe at the issue, citing the example of *Japan*, saying that we do not need to borrow other's history as it is tantamount to committing suicide. Things borrowed are not their own, so they cannot develop except through destruction. He exhorted that Indians have to decide *their destiny*, learning from their proud history.

NATIONALISM IN A GLOBAL AGE

Moving to this paragraph, I would like to share the idea of the creation of nation-states. As we have discussed a lot about Europe. Now we have to think that is it possible to create a similar typology for the entire world? Though a neat zonal division of the world is not possible and the pattern would be much more complex. But here, I am explaining the typology of Anthony Smith¹⁵, who has attempted some kind of a division of a world into different types of routes that nationalism takes in its journey towards the creation of nation-states. It can best be understood through the table given below. As it would give us a better idea to understand the emergence of Nationalism in this modern era.¹⁶



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¹⁵ Anthony David Stephen Smith (23 September 1939 – 19 July 2016) was a British historical sociologist. He was one of the founders of the interdisciplinary field of nationalism studies.

¹⁶ Supra note 7, pp. 56. New Delhi.

¹⁷ Ibid

His basic division is straightforward. There are two routes for nation-states- gradualist and nationalist. One feature of the gradualist route is that it has been marked by the absence of conflict, violence, contesting claims over nationhood or any national movement. The other, nationalist route is predicated on the characteristics of rupture, conflict, violence and earth-moving.

According to Smith, the rupture-ridden routes often divide -ethnic nationalism and territorial nationalism. These terminologies are often easily considered as they're self-explanatory. For example - As it is a known incontrovertible fact that the secessionist movement might be further divided into three by-lanes of breakaway, diaspora and irredentist nationalism. *Bangladesh* that broke away from Pakistan in 1971 could also be available in the same category.

Similarly, the *Jews* represented diaspora nationalism within the true sense. Completely barren of a state, a territory of their own, or maybe a high culture till the mid-19th century, Jews lived for nearly two centuries like perpetual minorities on other people's lands. They were eventually constituted into a nation-state through struggle, other powers' diplomacy, group action (done to them by others), earthmoving and also the statistical probability of being on the proper side within the Great War.

Similarly, we've seen another sort of nationalism within the Arab Spring Movement in the modern world. It was a series of anti-government protests, uprisings, and armed rebellions that spread across much of the Arab world within the first 2010s. The agitators demanded a better standard of living, starting with protests in Tunisia. As it brought ideological storms from Tunisia, the protests then spread to 5 other countries: Libya, Egypt, Yemen, Syria, and Bahrain. In which many eminent rulers were deposed (Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, Muammar Gaddafi, Mubarak, and Ali Abdullah Saleh) or major uprisings and social violence occurred including riots, civil wars, or insurgencies¹⁸.

While analysing comparative politics, here I would like to refer to some glimpses of aspirant nationalism of the Indian context, especially which developed after its independence. I am not going deep into the area of discussion as we all are well aware of the Indian separatist movement or secessionist nationalism and its nuances. In this regard, three major concerns were of the forces for Khalistan in Punjab, Azad Kashmir in the state of Jammu and Kashmir and the Tamil

¹⁸ Baylis, John. Smith, Steve. Owens, Patricia.2014. "*The Globalization of World Politics-An Introduction to International Relations*". Sixth Edition, Oxford University Press, United Kingdom.pp.472.

demand for a separate state in Sri Lanka¹⁹ which were mainly ethnic movements-those of Tamils in Tamil Nadu during the 1950s and the 1960s, of Sikhs in Punjab during the 1980s, and of Muslims in Kashmir during the 1990s. In that sense, this type of Nationalism could also be considered as a Self-determination movement by Tamils, Sikhs, and Kashmiri Muslims for the first time in the Indian context.

WAY FORWARD

In conclusion, it could clearly be understood that 'nations and nationalism' evolve through a complex historical process in modern times. In this sense, I strongly believe that Nationalism is a phenomenon that is part of an ongoing process and which will continue to define our day to day lives for years to come, so we have to train ourselves according to its dynamic nature.

¹⁹ Kohli, Atul. (May 1997). Can Democracies Accommodate Ethnic Nationalism? *Rise and Decline of Self-Determination Movements in India*. Published by: Association for Asian Studies. Source: The Journal of Asian Studies, May 1997, Vol. 56, No. 2 (May 1997), pp. 325-344.