

THE MAKING OF PAKISTAN

A Study in Nationalism



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INTRODUCTION

'NATION', 'nationality', 'nationalism'—there is no more explosive set of words in modern political vocabulary, nor more polemical. Whether you are a political philosopher in search of a definition of 'nation' or a mere agitator claiming nationhood for your people, the concept eludes you. But elusiveness is one thing, inertness quite another. When nationalism is on the rampage no semantic defences will hold the storm; people make their own definitions and die for them. No other word is so heavily charged with emotional overtones; the discussion of no other concept attracts so many loaded phrases. To define any controversial term is notoriously difficult, to try to do so in such a disputatious field is to court disaster. For the curious there is a vast literature on the subject in which he can wallow to his heart's content.

To illustrate this confusion as well as to indicate the difficulties of precise definition let us briefly see how at different times different people have played games with this triad.

'Nation' is essentially a European concept, and it is interesting to recall that during the Middle Ages groups of students from one country working in the European universities were called nations. The University of Prague, for example, was divided into four nations: Bavarians, Bohemians, Poles and Saxons. Medieval Oxford made the Trent a national barrier: students belonged to different nations according as they came from north or south of the river. Then people also spoke of a nation of physicians, of smiths, of lawyers, and so on; we know Ben Jonson's line, 'You are a subtle nation, you physicians.' A day came when the raw facts of power eclipsed the narrow importance of the profession, and Martin Luther was quick to distinguish between folk and nation: the common people, the lowly mortals, were the folk; the princes, the knights and the bishops, the patricians who wielded political power, were

the nation. Henceforth political power and nationhood were to keep company. The modern age had arrived.

Medieval Prague or Oxford might have had 'nations' amid their students, but they certainly had no 'nationalities'. The new word itself came into use in the second half of the nineteenth century. But youth did not save it from multiplicity of meaning. Some people used it in the sense of a group of people who have certain things in common: you *are* a nationality if you have national aspirations, if you are a group potentially but not actually a nation. Others made it a spiritual or abstract or subjective aspect of nationhood: you *have* nationality if you feel that you are one of a separate group. This subtle distinction between 'being' and 'having' makes for ambiguity, and we need not go any further with nationality.

We may be deceiving ourselves, but 'nationalism' seems to lend itself to better handling. We may not be able to agree on a definition acceptable to all. But there is substantial agreement on the point that it is a sentiment, a consciousness, a sympathy, which binds a group of people together. It is the desire of a group of individuals, who are already united by certain ties, to live together and, if necessary, to die together. It is the wish of a people, who feel that they are one, to go on living as one. Admittedly this is not very illuminating. Rigorous reasoning can pick many holes in it. But must we define before we can know? We know what toothache is without sitting down to define it. We can know something even without understanding it. If understanding must come first, who among us dare say that he ever loved a woman! Who among us will pause to define the ecstasy of love, the personal tragedy of death, the smell of a rose, or the glow of a star!

This is not a flight of fancy. The argument presented here is that nationalism, like so many other human experiences, is a state of mind. We know that we are a nation, therefore we are a nation. It is not logic, it is intuition. It is not dialectics, it is instinct. It is not a thought process approved by the laws of reasoning. It is a conviction born of insight. It is a vision, an awareness, which comes to us in the flash of a moment. That is what makes it irresistible. People die for their faith; they rarely die in defence of reason.

What are the articles of this strange faith which has made

and remade modern history, which has drawn lines across maps upon its own responsibility, which has killed millions in national wars, and which has also made millions free? A study of modern nationalism points to thirteen conditions or beliefs which seem to make up its creed.

The first and the most pre-eminent is the common group feeling which inspires the members of a nation. 'We all belong to one nation' expresses this sentiment. The second, flowing from the first, is the love for fellow nationals. This certainly does not mean that, say, every Pakistani loves or likes every other Pakistani; but it does mean that in a foreign country Pakistanis will tend to get together, or, on a personal level, in a quarrel with a Pakistani and a foreigner, other Pakistanis will normally side with their compatriot. The third, which is a consequence of the first two, is common hostility to other like groups. Before 1947 the Muslims of India, who considered themselves a nation, looked with hostility upon the Hindus and the Sikhs. This hostility is in proportion to the threat which one national group poses to the existence of the other. This feeling is inevitable in a country or geographical area occupied by more than one nation, particularly if one national group feels that its existence is denied or opposed or threatened or even criticized by the other, for example, in the pre-1947 Imperial India or in the pre-1919 Ottoman Empire.

The fourth is a common territory possessed or coveted by a nation. Once the emotion of nationalism has been aroused, territory is the first and an indispensable step towards the establishment of a State. In India the Muslims claimed the Muslim-majority provinces as their homeland. The Jews have similarly claimed and won Israel as their historical and national home. The fifth is the existence of a common sovereign government or the desire for it. This is the second step after a territory has been mentally demarcated and the claim to it staked. Sovereignty, or politically speaking independence, is usually the final goal of all nationalist movements. Freedom is the open sesame which has been invoked by all colonial peoples struggling to be their own masters. The sixth is the existence of common moral, social or economic institutions or ideas. Medieval history provides some examples of nationalism (though this word was then not used to describe the movement) based

on the Christian religion. In our age nationalism has had such formidable inspirations as Communism, National Socialism and Fascism. On a less powerful scale radicalism and reformism have been the ingredients of many nationalist movements.

The seventh is the possession of some common cultural characteristics, such as language, customs, manners, literature, art, music and folk-lore. If a person shares these with others and wants to go on sharing them he is a member of that nation. Culture, in its broader sense, is the most lasting foundation of nationalism. The eighth is common religion. In the secularism of the twentieth century religion has lost much of its force, yet it has produced the two most controversial nation-states of the post-war period—Pakistan and Israel. The ninth is common history or common origin. Whether this history is real or invented is pointless so long as the members of a nation believe in it and look upon certain common historical figures as national heroes. Similarly, though modern science rejects both the theory and the purity of races, the feeling of common racial origin may lead to solidarity of sorts, as the modern Arab movements and the idea of pan-Africanism illustrate. The tenth is a common character shared by the national group. Geography, history, religion and culture combine to mould the contours of national character.

The eleventh is a common pride in national achievements and a common sorrow in national tragedies. Traditionally this pride attached to feats of arms and this sorrow to military reverses. But in our technological age, scientific competition, economic rivalry and even educational jealousy are largely replacing the race for armaments. The twelfth is simple devotion to the nation. 'My country, right or wrong' is one expression, an extreme one perhaps, of this feeling. The last is the hope that the nation will one day be great, or, if it is already that, the greatest in the world. This aspiration may work in many directions, depending on the nation's mood and background: territorial expansion, military power, scientific advance or, in rare cases, academic glory.

The order in which these conditions have been given reflects the nature and composition of nationalism. Each of the four preceding paragraphs describes one stage in its evolution. The first enumerates the three feelings (oneness, love for fellow

nationals, and hostility to other groups) which make up the emotional basis of nationalism. The second mentions the three factors (territory, sovereignty, and social ideas) which form its political and social apparatus. The third lists the four beliefs (culture, religion, history, and character) which constitute its spiritual equipment. The fourth portrays the sentiment of nationalism on three time-levels: pride in historical achievements relates to the past, devotion to the national cause concerns the present, the wish to achieve greatness is a hope of the future.

Nationalism can be a sentiment, or a policy, or a myth, or a dogma, or a doctrine. It is a sentiment when it is the love of a common soil, race, language or culture. It is a policy when it is a desire for independence, security or prestige. It is a myth when it is a mystical devotion to a vague social whole, the nation, which is more than the sum of its parts. It is a dogma when it is a belief that the nation is an end in itself and that the individual lives exclusively for the nation. It is a doctrine when a nation considers itself dominant among other nations or aggressively strives to be supreme among them (the German *Nationalismus*).

These are different aspects of nationalism, not its definitions. As a description each of them is narrow, inadequate and misleading. As an aspect each represents one facet and concentrates attention on it. Every nationalism is *sui generis* and takes on its character and shape from its context and environment. Each is a mixture of all these ingredients—but never in equal proportions. It is a compound of all these in varying combinations. One nationalism will emphasize the element of dogma, another that of sentiment, still another that of policy. The same nationalism may appear sometimes to underline its doctrinal foundation and sometimes to over-accentuate its mythical content. However, it is unwise to underestimate or ignore the role of myths in nationalism. They are liable to obsess the minds of their creators and thus to become not true but real. And a real myth is a sword which few know how to sheath.