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Nation and Nationalism: Indian Nationalist Discourse

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ABSTRACT

India is one of the ancient civilizations in the world. Sometimes, it faces crises and challenges but it remains alive always. India is an emblem of living civilization. Tracing back to its history, from 2500 BCE to the present day it has witnessed the invaders, pilgrimages, religious missionaries, colonial subjugation and political ups and downs. The culture of this land has been amalgamated and shaped with the cosmopolitan culture. It is not possible, always, to understand and interpret the Indian political dynamics with the help of western theories rather an Indian perspective is required to understand the deep rooted composite culture and heritage. So, to define the idea of nationalism we must have to understand the uniqueness of Indian Civilization which is constituted with the various languages, culture, religions, dress codes and food habits. India as nation has been constituted and shaped with multiple factors including the social and reformist movements.

The Bhakti movements which started in the early sixth century in Southern India spread over across India and reached its peak in the 14th and 15th centuries Bengal had a great impact in mobilizing the whole India in a single rhythm. In a similar way the simplicity and synchronistic effect of Sufism had greatly impacted on the minds of the rural people and later on it emerged as a special kind of cultural trend.

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(The trend of Sufi song). And in the nineteenth century we find the mature formation of nationalism through the establishment of Indian National Congress in 1885. Of course, the multidimensional journey of Indian freedom struggle and the contributions of Indian monks, social reformers and political thinkers shaped and crystallized our nationalism. The paper reflects the different dynamics and trajectories of Indian nationalism which has evolved since thousands years ago.

Keywords: Civilization, Cultural Nationalism, Dharma, Hinduness, Freedom Movements.

Introduction

In this tantalizing atmosphere where the academician, better to say the whole intellectual fraternity is divided into binary vision, it is very difficult to do justice on the topic like nationalism. The scholars, in one hand, with an intense passion to build an alternative Indian narrative without examining the history and facts and on the other, as a counter approach throwing up all the traditions blaming it as orthodox and prejudice, the scholars are engaging in promoting the ideas of nationalism in the European model. In this critical juncture, with intense care and caution we would examine the prevailing Indo-centric narratives as well as try to understand the indigenoussness of Indian nation which is entirely different from that of the Western counterpart.

Defining Nationalism: Context & Contrast

More frequently the term 'nation' is confused with the state or country. The nation and nation building is a process which is to be continued even after the formation of state. From the political end, the nation state is the ultimate manifestation of a nation and it is a sovereign entity. The essence of nation lies in the self realization and a sense of integrity among the people of various language, culture, regional identity and other physical and psychological factors and a sense of loyalty to a particular community.

Anderson (1983) defined nation as an imagined community. By referring the example of the tomb of unknown solders he showed how the solders share a common nation hood and patriotism showing the respect towards these tombs. So the nationalism is an emotional construction. Again, in Anderson's argument we find the role of 'print capitalism' in construction of nationalism. But, if we notice carefully Andersons's ideas of nationalism is not fully applicable in the Indian context. The innovation of print media has played an immense role in the growth of Indian nationalist discourse but print did not have any significant impact to form Indian capitalism. Why an Indian historiography is needed? Because, the history made by Western scholars is a

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stereotype about the Indian traditions and civilization. For a long time the history written by James Mill (1773-1836) was taught at the British Indian Civil Services, but interestingly he never visited India even, he did not have any knowledge in Indian languages. He believed that the Indian culture, laws, social institutions, ancient Indian science were comparatively inferior to the Europeans. And the Britishers were also influenced by his imaginative thought. Then the historiography of Indian nationalism, written so far, has been dominated by elitism- colonialist elitism and bourgeois nationalist elitism. So to understand the nature of Indian nationalism we have to understand the evolution of Indian civilization. India is a civilizational state of five thousand years. As a nation state it has a legacy of only 200 years and it is initiated and structured by colonial values. The unification of Indian nation state was influenced by the anti- colonial movement i.e. freedom struggle.... Political unification and aspiration towards common political entity was predominantly a modern phenomena (Kaviraj, 2014). While we are trying to understand the nature of Indian nationalism we must have to keep in mind the Indian scenario which is completely different from the Western countries. In the West the nation was formed earlier then the state was formed. So the consolidated idea of nation and its integrity was pre dominantly there in the Western countries. The unification of Japan, German and Israel are some of the examples where the nationhood was constructed on the notion of 'one nation one state'. Even, some states were formed on the principle of 'one language- one nation – one state'. So the basis of unity in those countries is either language or race but in India we cannot categorize a single entity as the base for unity or national unification. In contrast, communalism in its higher aspect is indispensable to the formation of a synchronized whole in a country like India and that is the strength of Indian unity which is a testimony since thousand years ago. Indian civilization embraces and acknowledges all kinds of diversity, plurality and dissent position. What makes Indian civilization more appealing as a harmonious whole is that it embraces all dissent position like Jainism, Shikism and Buddhism. The principle of European nation state cannot be applied to India without recognizing the fact of communal groups, linguistic diversity and ethnic identity. In India, the state formation is not at all associated with the idea of nation state. India is a civilizational state. The civilization is a continuing process and with the passage of time it is evolved with so many factors. It is not a matter of fact that once it is created thousand years ago and, it is fixed at that point. It is deconstructed with the different values, traditions— sometimes internal and external. Daya Krishna (2005) opined that the Indian civilization is an evolving process. It cannot be marked by any single factor. Thus, the emergence of nationalism is not marked by any single phenomena; it is associated with the Indian civilization. This continuity plays a significant

role in the construction of our nationalism. Some of the main objectives which have been addressed in this paper are as follows.

Objectives

1. To evaluate the trajectories of Indian nationalism.
2. To examine the civilizational heritage and its connectivity with nationalism.
3. To understand the perspective of Indology in association with Indian civilization, identity and nationalism.

Indian Civilizational Heritage

India is a country with rich and diverse religious and cultural landscape. It is a diversified country with multiple language, religion, and ethnicity. This multicultural atmosphere has made India truly a cosmopolitan entity. Despite, its diversification Indian nation is a unity among the diversity. This is precisely what separates the Indic civilisational worldview from the European notion of nation state.

Indian nation has been evolved with multi dimensional factors which shaped the ideas and off shuts associated with it. So, here the historical pre-condition is essential in formation of Indian nationalism. It is a colonised myth that Bharat were created and developed by the British colonizers, prior to which it lacked a sense of self and history. Bharat is not a synthetic product of Mughals and Britishers. It is evident that ancient Indian intellectual foundation, cultural communication and a vast wave of pilgrimages kept the Indian civilization alive. So many holy cities in different provinces like Benaras, Nalanda, Taxila , Mathura, Ujjaini and so on were regarded as sources of sanctity by all Indians. The people across the countries, even, from the abroad used to visit those places. According to Sarkar some important 'agencies' united Bharat despite its physical and human diversities and that led to the evolution of a common culture, such as: (i) the pilgrim student, (ii) the soldier of fortune, (iii) the imperial conqueror, and the son-in-law imported from the centre of blue blood. (Cited by J Sai Deepak, 2021).

Since Vedic civilization, the Gurukul education and its tradition embedded in Indian ethos and culture unites the whole cultural landscape of the continent. Undoubtedly it establishes Bharat's antiquity, unity and Indic consciences. In the interest of its survival, as J Sai Deepak observed, " Bharat must employ the decolonial option, failing which its history and consciousness will always be forced to seek the validation of the very same colonialities that have

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historically displayed a fundamental antipathy to the very existence of the Indic consciousness.”(Deepak, 2021).

But, people are in anxiety, from where should we start? Some people suggest that we must start from where we left off one thousand years ago, when foreign invaders disrupted our life. But, in the words of Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyay (1965) “the Nation is not an inanimate object like a cloth, so that weaving can be taken up after a gap in time. Besides, it would not be rational to say that the thousand year old alien rule had interrupted the current of our national life so completely that, from that time to this day, we remained static and inert. The Nation has certainly put its genius to work, in the changing circumstances, to meet the challenges thrown at it. We have struggled to continue our life forward and to wrest independence from the aliens. The current of our national life was not interrupted but has gone ceaselessly. The tusk of turning the waters of Ganga back to some previous point would not be wise. The Ganga at Banaras may not be as crystal-clear as at Hardwar. But still it is the same holy Ganga.”

Cultural Nationalism

Having discussed Bharat’s civilisational character, it is essential to understand the nature of its nationalism which is shaped by the values of the land, cultural tradition and its indignity.

Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyya (1838-94) was in favour of national solidarity which can be attained through the growth of Hindu society. He is in the opinion that the attitude towards nation can be changed in the following ways: first, the conviction that what is good for every Hindu is good for me and my views, beliefs and action must be consistent with those of other members of the Hindu Society. And, secondly, one should inculcate a single minded devotion to the nation and its interest. (Pandit, 2023:05).

The various social and religious reforms movements which took place in various parts of India during the British rule were nothing but an expression of the rising national consciousness of the people. A number of movements like Brahma Samaj, Arya Samaj , Neo –Vedanta, Theosophical Society which brought the renaissance in India and created a fervor of nationalism.

Indian Nationalism has a historical legacy of Hindutava connection. Many Hindu reform movements in the nineteenth century especially Brahma Samaj, Arya Samaj and the contribution of Swami Vivekananda created a theological background of Indian nationalism. Vivekananda’s idea of nationalism is ingrained in his deep sense of patriotism. As he goes on: ‘I am an Indian,

every Indian is my brother'. Say 'the ignorant Indian, the poor and destitute Indian, the Brahman Indian, the Pariah Indian is my brother'. (CWSV, 2022)

Twentieth century's movement led by Aurobindo (Anushilan Samiti and Jugantar), Dr. Keshab Baliram Hedgewar of Nagpur strengthened the quality of Hindu nationalism. But the word 'Hindu' has a wider connotation and has been used as an inclusive idea throughout history. Savarkar emphasized on the protection of Hindu people and their culture through the preservation of native political and economic systems rather than the borrowed concept from the West, for his ideas of 'Hindu polity'. So his concept of Hindutava is different from the so called Hinduism. The second head of RSS M.S. Golwalkar also advocated for territorial loyalty based on the definition of Hindu. He described the mission of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh as the revitalization of the Indian value system based on universalism and peace and prosperity to all. He also added that one cannot be a son of the soil at all who is intolerant of others faith. (2000).

The Trajectory of Nationalism

Even, while we talk about political factors, it is not only limited in the freedom struggle. It has also different trajectories. Indian freedom struggle is not only the glorious story of Indian National congress, Gandhi or Nehru. History is not a straight way line. To expedite the journey of Indian freedom movements so many incidents are responsible but these are not recorded in the main stream history. In the Godem Hills of Andhra Pradesh the Rampa Rebellion was led by Aluri Sitaram Raju, a tribal folk hero. V. Ramchandra Reddy, the first landlord to donate land to the poor as a part of Bhudhan movement in Southern India. There were so many instances which paved the way to freedom struggle.

It is evident that in India the growth of modern nationalism is intimately connected to the formation of Indian National Congress in 1885 by which People began discovering their unity in the process of their struggle with colonialism. The sense of being oppressed under colonialism created a unity among the freedom fighters and a sense of political consciousness among the common masses. Under the leadership of Congress the common people across the country took part in Non-cooperation and Civil Disobedience movements that certainly established a nationwide network. Against the proposed Rowlatt Act of 1919 the nationwide *Satyagraha* was launched by Mahatma Gandhi; he also took the initiative in bringing the Muslim community under the fold of protest by incorporating the *Khilafat* issue at the Calcutta session of the Congress in September 1920. Thus, we find a Hindu-Muslim consensus at the

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national level in order to develop a common national sentiment against the colonial subjugation.

The principle of equality reflected in Ashok Chakra, Tricolour flag (Tiranga) and National Anthem creates a sense of bonding and belongingness which promotes a psychological unity and integrity. So, in the imagination people try to connect other people across the country and imbibe the lineage of culture, feelings and a common brother hood.

The various social and religious movements which took place during the British rule had great impact in the construction of nationalism. The people who imbibed Western education and culture realized that without social and religious reforms a Nation cannot progress. A number of movements like Brhmo Samaj, Arya Samaj, Neo-Vedanta movements and Theosophical Society played a crucial role to form the tune of nationalism. Initially in 1928, an intellectual socio religious movement led by Raja Rammohan Roy was started against the Brahmanism of the time (Kulin Practice), within a few years it was spread in all the field of the society including abolition of caste system, dowry, and emancipation of women and improving the educational system, which may be called as the renaissance of Bengal. Against the orthodox Hinduism, another reform movement was led by Swami Dayananda Saraswati, popularly known as Arya Samaj movement. Keeping aside the so called caste division he emphasized for Hindu unity. Through the establishment of *Gurukul*, a form of Vedic school Swami Dayananda advocated for Vedic values, culture and religion. Vivekananda, after the great speech at the World's parliament at Chicago professed and propogated for a new kind of order-Neo-Vedanta. He believed that all living being is the embodiment of divine self; therefore, service to the God could be rendered by the service to the mankind. Throughout his life he fought against the superstitious belief, caste, and poverty. He is a leading Indian monk who not only preached Indian ethos and culture but also tried to revive the philosophy of Vedanta through the services of mankind and transformed it as practical Vedanta.

S. D. Pandit (2023) is of the opinion that Indian nationalism was rejuvenated by the renaissance of Hinduism and the spirit of Vedanta philosophy. She also added that both Aurobinda and Vivekananda were of the opinion that the religion and culture played a key role in the making of nationalism. In her opinion Indian nationalism was all inclusive Hinduness ingrained in its culture and traditions.

In the last few decades, the Indo-centric narratives have become very popular and gained a central place in the nationalist discourse. In the opinion of Radha Kumud Mookerji (1914), generally it is assumed that Indian unity is

contemporary to British colonial regime, but it has a long historical tradition which is one of the components of Hindu consciousness. But, problem arises while this broad sense of Hindu consciousness is narrowly interpreted in order to fulfill the petty interest. Even the word 'Rashtriya' has been adopted instead of Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh' as the word imbibes the nation's holistic spirit, culture and tradition. Citing an instance of Doctorji, Guru Golwakar presented the underlying view point: "In Bombay there is a locality known as 'Hindu Colony'. Some persons of that place thought that the foreign word 'colony' should be changed. They came together to change the name. Our revered founder, who was in Bombay at that time, was also invited. When he was asked for his opinion, he said, "More than the word 'colony' it is the word 'Hindu' that requires to be changed first." All those who had gathered, being very much staunch Hindus, felt shocked. They asked, "How is it you, being a staunch Hindu, are opposed to the word 'Hindu'? Doctorji replied, 'I am not opposed to the word 'Hindu' as such. I am only opposed to its use in the present context, which denotes that in our own country the Hindus have formed a colony! How can there be a colony of Hindus in Hindustan... Either you accept that this is not your motherland and that you have come from somewhere outside and formed a colony here, or you change the name "Hindu'."

In the opinion of Pandit DD Upadhyay the *Bharatiya* culture is holistic; it is higher than the Western concept of Nationalism, Democracy and Socialism. Bharat believes in mutual cooperation, tolerance and an integral sense of happiness and discards Darwin's principle of 'Survival of the Fittest'. According to him, Dharma is the repository of Nation's soul. If Dharma destroyed, the Nation perishes. But the Western concept of religion is not synonymous with Dharma. Dharma is much wider. It is not confined to temples or mosques. Worship of God is only a part of Dharma.

Conclusion

While in the name of upholding nation and nationalism the dissenting voices are suppressed and subjugated the real value of Indian nationalism is undermined. Though, my motive is not to tolerate the disruptive activities threatening to our unity and integrity. Any position against the hegemonic discourse creates a sense of alienation – may it be language, culture or any other dominant factors. So in order to revive the sense of unity and integrity which strengthens the Nation, one must be careful about the diverse components of Nation. So, Nation as a unifying force in India is something different from the Western notion of nation based on monolithic ideas.

The thought of standardization actually paves the way of domination

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and the 'other' becomes subordinate and alienated from the main stream. It is not only the question of subordination, rather an identical existence of a region which enriches the rich cultural heritage of nation. It is the shared common property of the community. Speaking in regard to the Nation, Arunima (2016:32) emphasized, "I must add that there is something really interesting about thinking about language as common property, or recourse, rather than collapsing it into the more available idea of passionate identification."

If you allow the question of self determination for any nation or national entity, then, why not is it for the cosmopolitan nation or other nations in the world? Challenging the domestic walls of nations a cosmopolitan view should be imbibed in the meaning of nationalism. Simultaneously, the regional entity along with the distinct culture, language and aesthetics should be prioritized. None will dominant others. It is the beauty of Indian Nation and Nationalism. So, the analysis of historical origin of Indian nationalism shows that it is mainly cultural based on cultural connectivity, mutual coexistence, and emotional attachment across the country. This attachment is noticed while the Indian cricketers are playing in abroad or a South Indian girl wins the gold medal in Olympic. A sense of emotional attachment is created through these events. We, being the Indian, are glorified by their personal achievements. Even, we feel proud while our countrymen are felicitated by Nobel award. Thus, the whole India is tied with a single thread. Thus, an integrated notion of nationalism is formed. The holistic spirit of our nationalism cannot be understood by political unification only which was initiated in 1885. It has multidimensional trajectories and it is shaped through multidimensional factors. History, literature, folklore, songs— all played vital role in the formation of Indian Nationalism. So, while we talk about our nationalism it is based on Indian civilization, values and culture. Therefore, what should be the model of our nationalism? In the words of Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya— "Our goal is not merely to protect the culture but to revitalize it so as to make it dynamic and in tune with times." (Upadhyaya: 1965). The source of our nationalism is inherited from its ancient civilizational heritage which upholds the diversity, tolerance and cosmopolitanism. We are promised to learn – *ano bhadrah kratava yantu visvato* (Rig Veda- 1.89.1) which implies let the noble thoughts come to us from all directions. India believes in cosmopolitan nationalism inherited from its Vedic origin- *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*.

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