

The Notion as A Nation: An Appraisal

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Abstract

Freedom struggle is a movement in a nation's life which represents the assertions of the rights and the enlightened aspirations of the people against the system of slavery. It attempts at liberating one's nation from the shackles of foreign bondage. The freedom movement is a stage where a nation tries to define its myriad features and characteristics. This traumatic struggle for securing an independent nationhood tests the innate qualities of its people and their notions of a nation.

The **key words** used are sovereignty, loyalty, nationalism, superiority.

The writers like Homi K Bhabha, Aime Césaire, Frantz Fanon, Leela Gandhi and the rest have formulated the notion of a nation. The concept of a nation in the present sense of the term requiring a territorial integrity, popular sovereignty and the supreme loyalty from its citizens is a recent development. To be precise this development emerged after the Second World War and many countries fought for independence to shake off the yoke of colonialism.

The origin of the concept of a nation is shrouded in mystery and riddled with controversy. The early traces of notion of a nation were found in the social life, customs and traditions of the people. The system of cultural signification emphasizes the aspect of the oneness in the minds of the people and this was greatly helped by myths or legends. Eminent sociologist Malinowski writes: "...myth acts as a charter for the present-day social order; it supplies a retrospective pattern of moral values, sociological order, and magical belief, the function of which is to strengthen tradition and endow with a greater value and prestige by tracing it back to a higher, better, more supernatural reality of initial events." (Bhabha 45:1995) This definition takes into consideration the cultural factors constituting the formation of a nation. Sometimes the factors

are overtly expressed in the form of symbols, folk tales, folklores or legends or covertly followed by a set of religious rites.

Another aspect of cultural signification is the notion of race, language, religion and rites. Historically, race means people having a common descent or origin. Physiologically, it means descending from a group having similar physiological features. The combination of these two ideas could be understood as race. Languages are the historical formations and could be regarded as the signs of a race. Religion and rites could mean the written and unwritten codes of law, common to all people living in a particular area. This idea of grouping people into different classes was effected by the dynastic rule in Europe. Love of one's birthplace, attachment to one's religion, language and race are primitive feelings, says Hans Kohn in his book "The Idea of Nationalism". Further he says that these feelings are natural characteristics which shape man's social or collective consciousness.

J. Ernest Renan says geography as another factor of cultural signification. Many wars were fought over the years by mankind to acquire strategic positions. The love for one's motherland is reflected in its geographical canvas with its rivers, mountains and hills. Literatures have been written and songs have been sung too. Stories have been told by people showing respect to their motherland. Partha Chatterjee (1993) calls these factors as inner domain bearing the marks of cultural identity. He calls this identity as the spiritual domain as opposed to the material domain represented by science and technology, state craft and economy.

Kohn says that modern nationalism took three concepts from the Old Testament. They are

1. The idea of a chosen people
2. The emphasis on a common stock of memory of the past and hopes for the future
3. Finally, messianism.

The idea of a chosen people would mean the superiority of race, language and religion. It undermines other sects and treats them as outcasts. The emphasis on a common stock of memory of the past and hopes for the future is nothing but the bond of living together by claiming one heroic past. This bond brings in the much desired unity among people. By 'messianism' the nation acquires another image, that of a liberator of an oppressed people.

From social life or community life to that of a full-fledged nation or nationhood, Europe has passed through several phases or stages. The first phase would be the identification of the necessity of a community life. This is represented by tribes/villages or village head. Here folktales or legends would have played a role. The second phase would be the shaping of the major cultural factors like languages, races, religions, legends, mythologies, religious rites and geography. These are found in the dynastic or monarchical rule in Europe and Asia too. The third phase saw the emergence of the concept of a nation or nationhood in Europe in the 20th century. This was because of the series of revolutions rocked Europe and America. Further the World Wars I & II also recharged the spirit of nationalism. For the first time it was felt that the national spirit could be the prime factor in holding a nation together.

The spirit of nationalism emerges from the collective consciousness of the people. The collective consciousness is composed of clear ideas reflecting different aspect of social life says Emile Durkheim, the sociologist. These factors are the social tissues of the society and they do not run on parallel lines but are interwoven and they represent a network of relationships. It is this network of relationships that permeates the national spirit.

Renan further adds that it is 'Community interest' that maintains the spirit of nationalism. He further says that the desire of living together or solidarity arises out of two principles that is the rich legacy of the past and the other is the present consent or desire to live together. This past is well matched with the present desire of living together, so that one can perpetuate the value of heritage in an undivided form. Renan feels that to create patriotic spirit of oneness one should possess men and women who are healthy in mind and warm at heart. Hence Renan's approach to national spirit rests on two factors; one is the cultural factor which includes the moral conscience of the nation and the other is the psychological factor, which reflects the feelings of a citizen.

Suntharalingam (1983) argues that the idea of popular sovereignty makes up a nation and reinforces the idea of nationalism. By popular sovereignty, he means accepting the idea of that sovereignty rests with the people and not with the king or monarch.

Kohn feels that nationalism created a new kind of loyalty among its citizens. It demanded loyalty from its subjects. He further says that nations are made of a citizen that is propertied

citizens who come from a common territory, have a voice in governance and are conscious of their common, imagined or real heritage and interests.

As far as imaginative heritage is concerned Timothy Brennan (1995) says that nations are imaginary constructs. For their existence nations survive on the cultural factors. If nations are imaginary constructs, then literature produced by a nation on these imaginary constructs play a vital role. A nation is valued by its literary output and cultural contribution. The literary contribution is one the cultural facets which reflects a nation's thoughts, feelings and aspirations of the people. Literature creates imagined communities and projects the multi-faceted nature of nationalism.

Threat to the unity of a nation can emerge in the policies of ethno-centric nationalism and colonialism. Ethno-centric nationalism conceives that a nation is superior and significant to other nation. SajalBasu (1995) in his book 'Regional Movements' illustrates the cultural identity crisis faced by the indigenous people in Jharkand region of the North-East Indian Province.

Sl. no.	Basis of Identity	Central Values	Causes of Identity Crisis
1	Geography	Balance between nature and culture	Imbalance
2	Society	Equality	Inequality
3	History	Accommodativeness	Exploitation by outsiders
4	Economy	Collective management	Individualism
5	Polity	Democratic	Paternalism
6	Religion	Animism	Fundamental Brahminism
7	Art and Literature	Participatory	Non Participatory

Another threat to the existence of a nation is colonialism. Many Asian and African countries nationalism flowered because of the opposition to Western Colonialism. The fundamental traits of the colonizer' ideologies are

1. The cult of superiority- Technical, social, cultural levels

2. The colonizer' behavior as the Civilized Behavior
3. Division and dissension by the colonized society
4. Colonizer studied in his own way the classified and divided society
5. Gender studies by the colonizer
6. Legal and Education system as envisaged by the colonizer.

Conclusion

Nationalism has blossomed despite ethno-centric nationalism and colonialism. Despite these dangers the explicit goals of nationalism are the goal of self government, the concept of national unity, the dominance of the Westernized elements in the leadership, the growth of political associations and the dominance of the modern political values and belief systems. Last but the least the economic and social factors also play a pivotal role in the forming of a nation

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