

# GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE OF INDIAN NATIONALISM

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## ABSTRACT

*Today, not only in India but at the global level, the discursive conflict regarding nation and nationalism is visible. Many incidents like Britain's decision to separate from the European Union i.e. Brexit, and the protectionist policies of various countries, which weaken the process of globalization serve as examples. Nationalist ideas are getting support across the world, in context to which there has been an increase in the feeling of nationalism, awareness, and discussion about nationalism in India too. The concept of nation and nationalism in India is not a new thing and has been mentioned in the Vedic texts of ancient times. From the nationalist sentiments that arose against the British during the colonial period, a strong nationalistic concept is visible regarding the nation and nationalism. Kalidas, the great Sandkrit author and playwright mentions the concept of 'Virat Bharat' in his work, Raghuvansham, which also extolls the idea of nationalism. The concept of nationalism is garnering significant attention in contemporary times while being understood as a modern concept by western scholarship. In regards to this modern nationalism, not only are there different opinions and viewpoints in various countries of the world, but the basis of sentiment for nationalism is also different. Therefore, contextualising Indian nationalism and analysing the relationships and perspectives of global nationalism has become an important subject of study. Nationalism in India cannot be studied or understood from a narrow perspective without taking into account its historical and socio-cultural backdrop.*

## MEANING AND DIMENSIONS

Nation and Nationalism are English words which mean the natural development of a feeling of unity based on birth or lineage. Before understanding the nature of a nation, it is necessary to understand the difference between nation and nationalism. Nationalism is often associated with groups of people, those connected to the same race, language, religion, culture, geographical proximity etc. and are inspired by the feeling of unity due to similar political aspirations and historical development. But the basis of what constitutes a nation is much broader than nationalism. It is the main unit of organization of the state. Nation refers to a group of

people who permanently live in a certain territory and experience a bond of unity due to common political aspirations, interests, history and consciousness. They may belong to different nationalities, but a nation is when people of different races, religions, languages, and cultures live as citizens of the same state and owe allegiance to the state.

Nationalism is both an emotion and an ideology. Emotionally, a person has faith in the nation and gives priority to the national interest while as an ideology demands that the state structure or political organization be built on the foundation of the nation. People who identify

themselves as a natural community and claim to be members of a nation should live as an independent political system and have equal status with other nations within the world system and with no other and not be under the dominance or hegemony of another nation.

There are differences of opinion between India and Western countries regarding the origin of nationalism. According to Western scholars, nationalism is a modern concept. Western thinker 'Gellner' in his book "National and Nationalism" (1983) has linked nationalism with modernity. The rise of agriculture has been described as a necessity of the industrial society. Similarly, G.P. Gooch has considered nationalism as the child of the French Revolution. Most of the western thinkers explain the concept of nationalism in the context of the rise of capitalism. According to them, nationalism is not a national awakening of self-consciousness, but nationalism invents the nation even where it doesn't exist. Anderson refers to nationalism as an 'imagined community'. In modern social science, nationalism is considered a modern consciousness which emerged in Europe in the 18th century. The role of publishing capitalism, along with other factors which played a role in its rise is considered important (Anderson 1991; 7-8)

However, in the Indian tradition, the nation has been in existence since the Vedic period. In the Vedic codes, the nation union was a part of social life, where thinking in the context of the nation was considered an important part of social life. The word 'nation' is found in Rigveda too. It occurs in specific meanings in various mantra codes of Atharvaveda. But the nationalism which is discussed in the present context is considered to have emerged in India in opposition to the colonial rule. The feeling of nationalism wavered very strongly in the Indian public in opposition to the British rule. Its strong echo was also heard in Indian literature. The scholars of Sanskrit and Hindi of that time gave importance to the feeling of nationalism. Not only that, but they also started a movement against the English language policy of Lord Macaulay. The result of this

nationalist thinking was the formation of the Congress Party in 1885.

Whether nationalism is seen as a feeling or as an ideology depends on the definition of nationalism, but the question arises that based on which characteristics must a group of people can be recognized as a nation? Many such symptoms can be mentioned but keeping in mind the diverse forms in which human civilization and modern state have developed, no authentic and universally accepted list of these symptoms can be given. There can be many grounds for granting nationhood to any group of people such as common language, caste, religion, customs, culture, etc. It may also be that the members of that group live together in the same geographical area, are citizens of the same state, and are governed by the same laws. But on analysis, certain exceptions appear.

As far as common language is concerned, there are many examples where the same language is spoken in different nations or multiple languages are spoken in the same nation. For example, English is spoken in various nations of the world including Britain, Australia, America, Switzerland. More than 300 languages are spoken in a nation like India, out of which 22 languages have got constitutional recognition. Despite this, India is established as a nation. In America, Christians and Jews live together as members of one nation; Even in India, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Parsis, etc. live under the umbrella of one nation. In the era of globalization, multiculturalism has been promoted and the influence of multiculturalism can be seen in most of the big cities of the world, but nationalist sentiments have not diminished. Thus, the nation represents a group of people who identify themselves as a natural community and have common political aspirations and common interests. Due to the consciousness of common destiny, we feel bound by the thread of unity.

## INDIAN NATIONALISM

Indian civilization and culture have been very ancient, full of diversity. The language in which

Indian culture developed is the oldest language in the world. India is a glorious ancient nation. Today the progress of the Indian nation is the basis of our self-respect in the global perspective. Although a majority of Indian scholars still see the concept of nationalism as a modern concept, in ancient Indian literature, there is a wide reflection on the importance and essence of the nation. But modern political thinkers believe that India was not a nation in the traditional sense, because it did not have the concept of nationhood. It needs to be understood that during colonial rule, there were sustained efforts to achieve nationhood by those who wanted to express nationalist aspirations. The first expression of modern Indian nationalism came in the First War of Independence of 1857 and the events that took place in the years surrounding it. During this time the seeds of nationalism were sown in the Indian public, at that time the definition of nationalism revolved around the colonial rule. When in the census, the British government raised questions on the uniformity and form of Hindu religion, Indian leadership responded with symbols of Hindu unity and started searching rituals that consolidated Hindu ideology, the culmination of which appeared in the form of 'Hindu Dharma Reform' Movement, whose aim was campaign against social evils, and movements like 'Hindu Dharma Shuddhi' started. Through these movements, evils prevalent in Hinduism were being fought while on the other hand, efforts were being made to spread the umbrella of Hinduism strongly, so that by bringing uniformity in its form and strengthening it, nationalist sentiments could be developed.

The reason for the first manifestation of nationalism to emerge in the field of religion was twofold. On the one hand, Western education, culture, religion, new economy contributed to it, and on the other hand, the contradictions arising from India's caste system based traditional religious outlook and behaviour gave birth to many religious social reform movements that played a role in it. Like the European religious reform movement, the national consciousness in India also had to go

through the experience of many religious and social movements before political consciousness awakened. In this sequence, Brahmo Samaj founded by Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Arya Samaj founded by Swami Dayanand Saraswati and led by Vivekananda serve as prime examples. Ramakrishna Mission and Annie Besant were prominent in spreading the ideas of Theosophical Society. They started as religious and social reforms, but their ideas laid the foundation of nationalism in India, based on which India's freedom struggle was fought later.

To awaken the feeling of nationalism in the religious context, Vande Mataram was written by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and Ganpati Utsav was started by Tilak. Moving a little further in this direction, Swami Vivekananda, who is considered the spokesperson of Indian nationalism, encouraged the people of India to develop a nationalist consciousness. He wanted the rise of a powerful and self-reliant India which could give the message of Vedanta to the world. He believed that Indians should be proud of their history, the ancient language Sanskrit, and religion and they should try to improve themselves according to the needs of the time. Vivekananda believed the national revival of India will begin only when people become fearless and demand their rights. Apart from this, he also tried to create unity and eliminate social evils and superstitions. He called for creating unity by removing caste pride. He believed that the caste system has divided the Indian society into different classes and had created inferiority and superiority complex among them.

Vivekananda believed that many castes, languages, religions, and cultures exist in India, but there is a common basis among the Indian people, that is, shared religious traditions and culture which is the basis of the feeling of national unity and nationalism. It was based on the Vedanta philosophy which considered the unity of man and the unity of God. Taking sutras from Bankim Chandra, he declared that India was Bharat Mata who expressed the combined power and authority of millions of her children. Bharat Mata was the mother of her people and reflects boundless energy. He compared Mother

India to God and said that it is God's will to free India. Additionally, serving the 30 crore Indian people was the ultimate task. It was also theorised that there is a deep divine purpose in India's independence. He expressed the spirit of the times that a revival would seal the liberation of all subjugated peoples in Asia and the world. Aurobindo was critical of those who claimed that India would never be a nation because of the cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity and divisions in Indian society. He believed that if we carefully study the history of Europe and England in the last two centuries, we will find that their situation was in no way different from the situation of India. But England and many other countries of Europe emerged as nations. India will also be successful in making a nation because it is the law of history. He believed that the progress of the country is not possible without political freedom and education has played a major role in the development of national consciousness.

Like Aurobindo, Savarkar's political views were also based on Hindu philosophy and culture. Savarkar was a strong supporter of Hindutva based Hindu nation. While defining Hindu in his book Hindutva, he has written that Hindu is the one who considers from Indus to Kanyakumari as his fatherland or holy land. According to him, the first criterion is the feeling of national territorial unity, that is, regional territorial proximity communicates the feeling of unity, hence in the mind of a Hindu, the entire geographical area from Indus to Brahmaputra and from Himalayas to Kanyakumari is Hindustan. He propagated the idea that there should be love for the state. According to him, the second criterion of Hindutva is the connection of caste or blood relations. Due to the connection of these castes and blood relations, such characteristics have developed in Hindus which are different from those of Germans, Chinese or Ethiopians. Apart from this, according to Savarkar, the third criterion was connection with culture. The person who is proud of Hindu civilization and culture is a Hindu. Thus, Savarkar described national or regional unity, caste, blood relation and culture as the basic and essential elements for the development of Hindu nationalism.

Savarkar opposed the Congress which expressed disagreement with Indian nationalism. According to it nationalism is mainly territorial, that is, all the people born and nurtured in India create the Indian nation without any discrimination. Savarkar said that for nationalism it is not necessary to have only one uniform territory. It is also essential to have linguistic, religious, and other types of unity. If only regional nationalism is imposed on the people as was done in Poland and Czechoslovakia, then such a nation cannot survive in the true sense. Savarkar believed that by ignoring Hindutva, there is neither nor can be such a thing as an Indian nation.

Ravindra Nath Tagore considered the nation as nothing more than an organization of politics and commerce. In his work *What is a Nation?* (1901), he analysed the ideas of Renan and declared imperialism as the logical outcome of a nation and did not create humanity in terms of race, language, commercial interest, religious unity, and geographical location. He advocated hybridization of religion at the cost of liberalism. He cautioned against the dangers of beliefs and aggressive nationalism and presented 'Sarv Mukti Vaad', i.e. fraternity as an effective alternative. Tagore described the concept of nationalism in Europe as completely inadequate for a diverse society like India. Tagore has classified the nation into nation-state and society. According to him, the nation-state depends on its territoriality, mechanical bureaucracy, and politics, while it is selfless, creative and based on symbiosis. Therefore, Tagore replaces the national ideology with the ideology of Swadeshi society. Tagore's Swadeshi society is woven with the fabric of love and cooperation.

Gandhiji's belief in the context of nationalism was against traditional beliefs. According to him, armed nationalism is imperialism which is expressed in the form of lynching. Ashish Nandi, while explaining Gandhi's nationalist concept, said that Gandhi always considered nationalism as a means of justice and equality. Used to define it as a universal struggle. Gandhi's nationalism was an attempt to provide national empowerment to India. According to Gandhi, village is the basic unit of

Indian civilization, Gram Swaraj, Swadeshi, Charkha will lead us towards national empowerment; Gandhi always believed in global peace. Hindu nationalism was based on respect and co-existence of communities made up of all castes, tribes, languages, religions, and identities.

## GLOBALIZATION AND NATION STATE

The current process of globalization has led to the integration of the economies of nation states. As a result, the issue of identity and interest of immigrants and minorities has become important. The process of globalization has presented a challenge to the modernity of territoriality of citizenship and sovereignty of the nation state. Globalization and nationalism have their own contradictions. The disintegration of the Soviet Union, the formation of the European Union, the announcement of protectionist policies by America, the decision of Brexit by Britain which exposes the complex aspects of nation state-oriented nationalism serve as examples. Today the discussion continues among western thinkers about the nation state. Instead of there being a supranational body such as the European Union and universal human interests being given primacy, the other view is that nation states should be officially accommodated so that the interests of all community groups, minorities and small nations can be protected. In the same perspective, Thomas Paggi (2001) and Joseph Carus (2013) talk about global justice and open borders. They believe that injustice has been done to the poor in contemporary globalization, hence, to restore justice, there should be a redistribution of the interests of the poor and the development of economies. There should be initiatives to eliminate the borders between them, refugees should have the right to move and escape anywhere. Thus, in the present context, where some thinkers are saying that the process of globalization is necessary and supporting it, on the other hand there are also nationalist sentiments emerging with equal intensity with many countries supporting protectionist policies.

## CONCLUSION

India is the largest democratic nation in the world. India is gradually gaining strength as a nation. Its history is moving from the river valley civilization to the Mughal period and imperialism towards the rise of nationalism. The single cultural values of different communities are the basis of Indian cultural philosophy and institutions which is expressed through Vedas, Up Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas, Smritis, and Math, Dham, Pieth, Ashram, Maha Kumbh etc. Shankar's epistemology, Ramanuja, Mirabai and Chaitanya's Bhakti epistemology, Gandhi and Tagore's civilizational epistemology, the religious philosophy of Aurobindo and Savarkar, and the jurisprudence of Ambedkar are indicative of the global vision of Indian nationalism. The Indian nation is different from the western nations today because at its core is the pillar of philosophy, morality, culture and coordination. From ancient times till today, India's identity itself has been of world brotherhood and Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam. That is, Indian nationalism has been far from narrow-mindedness and has been a supporter of global cooperation, justice, and humanity. Even today, the identity of the Indian nation is India's cultural nationalism.

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