

IDEA OF NATION AND NATIONALISM

“Let no man dare to call himself a nationalist if he does so merely with a sort of intellectual pride, thinking that he is more patriotic, thinking that he is something higher than those who do not call themselves by that name” this is a portion of a long speech, which Sri Aurobindo delivered in 1908 at Mahajan Wadi, Bombay. The sentiment and psychological expression or force between these lines contains an emotional expression called “Nationalism.” It is a state of mind associated with the supreme loyalty of an individual towards one’s native tradition, soil, or established territorial authority. But how it originated, developed, and historically shaped is a matter of debate. One group of scholars perceived it as a “socially active sentiment of attachment to land, language, and the cult (traditional patriotism) that culminated in the form of nationalism during the colonial period. But another group saw it as a cultural construct of colonialism. Unlike Europe, where its ‘loyalty’ developed through industrialization, urbanization, and print capitalism, the Indian “loyalty” evolved through cultural interaction and shared identities of diverse social, geographical, and cultural groups of people in India. This phenomenon culminated in nationalism during the colonial regime by absorbing diverse social, religious, and linguistic groups. Thus Indian nationalism represents an inclusive and composite social integration. It is well articulated in the ideas and philosophy of architecture of modern India, which had multiplicity in their nationalist visions or idea of nationalism. Therefore, it acquired different articulation in different phases. But, there were certain principles, which had been the core of such “cultural visualization” like inclusiveness and pluralism.

The transition from patriotism to nationalism in the Indian subcontinent took place through the historical process of interaction of multiple social groups. In this process, the culminating geographical identity of the people acknowledged the heterogeneities at all levels (political, cultural and religious, etc.) and provided them space and respect to flourish. But the advent of colonial authority and their disastrous intervention led to a political mutation in this historically inherited cultural community, which resulted in the growth of nationalism, crystallized by new social and political development. This unique idea was spearheaded by the middle class of the 19th century, which found it as a weapon to fight colonialism. Since then, the principles within nationalism have been changing according to the anti-colonial movement’s social, cultural, and political needs. But their greater efforts were located in the cultural space; for example, Swami Vivekananda explored India’s nationalist vision into spirituality, morality, and religion, inspired by the values of humanism and universalism. Vivekananda perceived these fundamentals as past historical heritage of India, on which idea of the nation to be imagined. But this “spiritual nationalism” found significant political space in the writings and speeches of Sri Aurobindo. He underlined Indian nationalism on the basis of religious spiritualism. He emphasized that his idea of “religious” did not indicate Hinduism but included all traditions, favouring the motherland’s service with enthusiasm. According to Sri Aurobindo, nationalism is not a political creed but a religion by which we attempt to visualize God in the nation and our countrymen across caste, class, culture, and religion. This religious nationalism (particularly attached to Hinduism) advanced the idea of “Hindutva” through the intellectual efforts of V.D. Savarkar in the late 1930s. He provided a new definition and structure to the existing



idea of “Hindu nationalism” under the concept of “Hindutva.” According to this, the idea of nationalism was based on three fundamentals-- motherland (Matrabhumi), land of ancestors (pitrabhumi), and holy land (punyabhumi). Savarkar, through his writings, clarified that it was not confined to the adherent of the Hindu faith but rather indicates a concept of “Indianness” and admitted all the faiths in its concept of nationalism, which acknowledged Indian on the three above fundamentals.



The idea of Indian nationalism also interacted with the concept of internationalism, which had its modern roots in the ideas of Swami Vivekananda, who perceived it in the idea of universal humanism. In the 20th century, Rabindranath Tagore highly celebrated this concept and viewed nationalism in a cosmopolitan vision. He was against hardening religious, linguistic, and other identities. He explored Indian nationalism through the lens of ancient Indian philosophy. Tagore associated his idea of nationalism with the concepts like peace, harmony, welfare, and, most importantly, humanity. He believed that in the environment of “pride and arrogance nationalities of the west” or narrow nationalism, the world requires a broader sense of nationalism based on the above fundamentals. Such nationalism will acknowledge heterogeneity at all levels; culture, religion, linguistics, etc. But it was only possible when the liberation of the nation was asserted from the hands of the colonial regime. Therefore, Mahatma Gandhi, unlike Tagore, perceived the idea of internationalism within the fold of nationalism by broadening its horizon and making it more assimilative and tolerant. Gandhi believed that Indian nationalism is a historically inherited common consciousness deeply rooted in the Indian culture and tradition, particularly pilgrimages. He added that this consciousness was based on accommodating the capacity of Indian civilization, which kept on assimilating different foreign cultures and religions by making them their own for centuries. He outlined that India can assert its inclusive civilization characteristic and develop into a single nation by withering away core religious, social, and linguistic differences. The main critic of Gandhi, Dr. Ambedkar, located his idea of nationalism into the spirit of dignity for the suppressed people and the construction of an inclusive social nationality. Therefore, he advocated annihilating those policies, creating differences and discrimination among the people. More recently such core ideas of tolerance, inclusiveness, non-discrimination, and secularism also inspired Narendra Modi to visualize his idea of nationalism, which was based on the fundamental unity of India nurtured through the cultural foundation throughout history. It was inspired by cultural pluralism and synthesis. Modi-ian nationalism also represents an extension of inclusive nationalism by focusing on developmental nationalism based on rich cultural foundation of India. He perceived it as a method to deal with the problem of marginalised sections of people, both socially economically.

Thus, Indian nationalism was the political mutation of patriotism, a socially and historically active sentiment of attachment to India’s, land, languages, and culture. That evolved into an inclusive ideology through the intellectual interaction of active ideas during the multiple phases of India’s struggle for freedom. Despite differences in certain principles in the fold of their national vision, there was a common consensus on certain ideas like inclusiveness, pluralism, social justice, and annihilation of discriminatory policies and practices. ■

Author



Dr. Aditi Narayani Paswan

(The author is an Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology Maitreyi College, University of Delhi, Columnist and founder of DAPSA, a think tank working for the empowerment of the marginalized.)