



The Concept of Nationalism

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Abstract - In this paper, an attempt has been made to understand the concept of nationalism and its relevance to the modern times. The study of nationalism is significant because the nation-state, leadership, tradition, culture, society etc. play a vital role in spreading it. Nationalism has been a related concept. It is related with the state as well as the nationality. It is not only regional or geographical concept but also a psychological or spiritual concept people acquire the spirit of nationalism by being born in a particular nation.

Keywords-Treaty of Westphalia, Allegiance, Collective interest, Identity, Asia, Africa, Nation-state, Modernization, Europeanization, Pre-modern Societies.

Nationalism is one of such major forces and plays a vital role in its functioning. Nationalism is consciousness and pride of one's on motherland loyalty to the nation-state, an ideology, a force of movement for self determination etc, "Nationalism is a unifying force in the society based on such communities, kinship, language, race, region, religion, traditions, etc. It becomes a divisive force vis-a-vis the international community. Therefore, nationalism is regarded as a political creed that underlies the cohesion of modern societies and legitimize their claim to authority."¹ "The Spread of nationalism awakened the common people and it has tended to demand self-determination. Nationalism became the dominant force throughout the non-western world, and the political map of Asia and Africa changed between, say, 1945 and 1965, as completely as had the map of Europe between 1815 and 1820."² Nationalism strengthens determination and there will even to sacrifice.

By nature people seek security, identity, status, happiness, etc. National spirit helps to fulfil such desires. This contributes to the growth and spread of nationalism. National spirit certainly given prominence to the collective interest of a group or a society by subordinating self interest. Consequently, the willingness to sacrifice for the collective interest becomes a strong force in the working of a nation state. Charismatic leadership plays a significant role in the process of spreading nationalism in order to awaken common people. From the perspective, it is pertinent to understand the leader's concept of nationalism. "Nationalism is one of the most powerful sources in the modern world, yet its study has until recently been relatively neglected."³ "The spread of nationalism on a global scale is the result of Europeanization and modernisation of the non-western and pre-modern societies."⁴

"The significant of nationalism as a force in shaping the modern world is undeniable. It swept and we moulded Europe in the 19th century. In 20th century, in Asia and African colonialism has been eroded and decolonised nations have been placed in a position to assert themselves in the international area thanks to nationalism. Nehru's words: "Any other force, any other activity that may seek to function must define itself on term of this Nationalism" are a testimony to the fact that in recent history, nationalism as a movement and ideology has become increasingly prevalent."⁵ Like the phenomenon, the large literature on it also is

impressive. The uniqueness of this literature is that not many practitioners have contributed a valid theory of nationalism. Most of them were too busy with their nationalist activities to contribute a theory on it. However, their speeches, writings, and activities helped much the theoreticians in their work. In fact it was out of the clay provided by the nationalist that the theoreticians moulded their vessels. However, few of the nationalist have a clear perspective of theory as well as practice of nationalism, though they never ventured to create a theory of their own.

“It was in European history that nationalism first appeared as an explanatory factor. And it was mainly historians who first gave due place to it in their studies. They described how the new sentiment of nationalism dissolved a common elegance. That extended to the reconstructed nations and unprecedented cohesiveness.”⁶ In this regard Pt. Nehru observed “Nationalism essentially a group memory of past achievements, traditions, and experiences.”⁷ Nehru might have assimilated into his intellectual culture that he found reasonable. No doubt he in turn had caused the concept of nationalism to change in later years. While one writer stresses the influence of Indian culture as the main force that helped the creation of the Indian Nation, the other tends to point out the colonial rule and the influence of the western culture as the main reason for it. “Nevertheless, understanding of nationalism differs from time to time and from one country to another. Nationalism in France in 1815 or 1939 was different from that in the Germany of these years.”⁸

“According to Hans Kohn one of the learned as well as most prolific authorities, nationalism was (1944) ‘a state of mind’, ‘an act of consciousness’ of a ‘large majority of a people’ which recognised ‘the nation state as the ideal form of the political organization and the nationality as the source of all creative cultural energy and of economic well being.’ For Kohn the nationalist ‘state of mind’ or nationalism, also included that belief that a man should give his supreme loyalty to his nationality.’ Louis Snyder defines nationalism as a ‘condition of mind’, feeling or sentiment of a group of people living in a well defined geographical area, speaking a common language, possessing a literature in which the aspirations of the nation have been expressed, attached to common traditions and common customs, venerating its own heroes, and in some cases, having a common religion.”⁹

Nationalism has been a related concept. It is related with the state as well as the nationality, it is not only regional or geographical but also spiritual and psychological concept. People acquire the spirit of nationalism by being born in a particular nation. Historically we had a number of states where nationalism was an accepted ideology. In ancient India, Rajya or Rashtra in Sanskrit meant state or nation with this provision we may state that the concept of state seems to have a historical precedence over the concept of nation or nationalism. In this context nationalism the Kadamba family ruled from two different centres. One centre was in modern north Karnataka and the other was in modern Goa. One family ruled Karnataka in the 4th and 5th century A.D. and the other family ruled from Goa in 10th century onwards. In both cases, one may say that regions were synonymous with nation. However, historians believe that the concept of state is more appropriate than the concept of nation.

India has been full of nationalities and in this context not only western historians but also several Indian historians have believed and maintained that India consisted of many nationalities. These nationalities to be welded together and unified into one nation under the advance and impact of the British rule thus the British rule brought nationalism to India for the first time. However, in the context of western nations the western state arose sometime towards the concluding period of the middle ages when feudal

order was breaking down and new nation-state were coming into existence. These nation states have existed as a system since or for the first time in 1648 when they came together under the 'treaty of Westphalia'. Since then we have been talking of nation and nationalism.

Nationalism is a psychological concept. People born in a particular nation believe that they are the member of their nation and owe their allegiance to that nation. In this sense nationalism and patriotism are more or less the same. Love of one's nation has been natural. Hence love of one's language and culture has been regarded as reinforcing the spirit of the nationalism. Depending on one's point of view, nationalism can be positive or negative force.

References

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