

## A Study of Nationalism as Modernization



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The aftermath of the second world war and the emergence of the third world states as nation-states have brought the theories of nationalism to a crisis. The traumatic experiences of aggressive nationalism in Asia and Europe caused a wave of moral indignation and the subsequent alliances of European states for defence and reconstruction heralded a search for internationalism and supra-national alliances. If the world was divided into ideological camps thereafter, the main thesis still remained that nations must be linked in terms of ideologies and mutual dependence, and the sovereignty of the nation-states should, to that extent, be bridled, either for preserving the values of liberal democracy and freedom or for heightening international working class solidarity. It was assumed that ideological and not national, boundaries would henceforth divide the world. But nationalism was not to die yet. The supranational alliances all over the world were found to be forums of national bargaining conducted in an atmosphere of mutual suspicion. Internationalism was championed to the extent that it subserved national interests. The world was grouped and regrouped in different blocs-some of them ideological, and others continental and pan-ethnic-but never subordinating to an appreciable extent the interests and aspirations of individual nation-states.

Moreover, the war weakened the old imperial structures. Its outcome was the emergence of erstwhile colonies into Nation-states. Thus while on the one hand nationalism was apparently on the wane in one part of the globe, it appeared with renewed vigour in other parts. It was found that nation preserving nation building and nationalism still remained a major and growing force in politics.

In the last two decades dissatisfaction has been expressed repeatedly against these conceptions of nationalism. As Hobsbawm observes "the search for objective criteria of nationhood, singly or in combination, quickly breaks down". Equally, to define it subjectively in

terms of national consciousness, nothing more seems possible than to state that "a nation is what behaves like a nation, or alternatively, that it cannot be predicted but only recognised."

Even the value of nationalism is often questioned. The ascription of a consensus among all groups and classes within the nation is often characterised as of a mythologizing nature motivated to hide the class conflicts within the society. Nationalism, it is argued, is a blinker on class divisions within the nation and stands against international working class solidarity.

Problems arise particularly in the understanding and classification of third world nationalism. The experiences of nationalism and the growth of nationalities are so diverse in these countries, and so different from the 'classical nationalism of Western Europe, that the whole set of assumptions on which theories of nationalism had been based in the past become extremely inadequate. It appears that nationalism as a phenomenon is always in a flux. It changes according to no perceived pattern and reflects the chaos of history itself. Indeed, such has been the exasperation of social scientists with respect to third world nationalism that many would like to view it as nationalism of a new genre, completely different from the nationalism in the West, while others would plead for viewing it as plain anti-colonialism," and not nationalism at all.

Hence, there is a growing recognition among social scientists that 'ideological' and 'intellectual' approaches to nationalism are not enough", "The modern nation state is a historical group", "Its emergence is a social process not a self enclosed logical operation." In political science, attempts at refinement in the theories of nationalism have come from the writings of those interested in the two closely connected and yet analytically separable branches of nation and state-building on the one hand, and modernization and political development on the other.

In the political sphere, it implies growing extension of the territorial scope and intensification of the power of the legal, political and administrative agencies of the society. This needs, on the one hand, the liquidation of parochial and traditional identities and attachments and a new orientation towards the central political authority and the new national community. It needs, therefore, newer forms and institutions of socialization in which, among other things, universalization and secularization of education play a great part. All these create the need for legitimation of the central political organization in terms of a new set of values and goals such as equality, democracy and political participation. This, in turn, leads to demands of percolation of political power to wider groups in society and their incorporation into a consensual moral order. In this sense 'modernity' involves changes of the same order and magnitude as that from pre-

human to human life and from primitive to civilized societies. It is the most dynamic of the revolutionary transformation in the conduct of human life. Modernization, it has also been said, transcends the limits of territorial boundary. It tends to develop a world culture and universal value system. Thus modernization, which starts in the West becomes a global process.

If this is the case with modernization, so with nationalism. A process, also starting in the West, nationalism has spread throughout the world and has led to the creation of new nation states, which are now in the process of modernization. In fact, nationalism itself is a modernizing movement. Sociologists agree with historians that both nationalism and modernization are revolutionary processes of the first magnitude. Rupert Emerson says, as in Europe, so also in Asia and Africa nationalism represents a drive towards modernization constituting rather a break with the past than its preservation and restoration. In its assertion of the right to determine political destiny autonomously, it draws new groups and classes into the political arena, and integrates and politicizes them. It initiates a search for new symbols and means of communication and tries to draw political legitimation from popular will and participation.

The era of nationalism, therefore, is characterized by a dominant role of rising masses. The psychology of nationalism generates an awareness of the existence of possible alternatives in the status quo. Nationalism is an ethos of modernization, the ideology of the most modernizing group. With its potential for assimilation, mobilization, aggregation and participation, nationalism cuts through social barriers of family, kinship, religion, caste, race and class. It breaks down parochial traditions. It replaces old patrimonial and religious sanctions. It suppresses the intermediate authorities. And finally it binds the people with the government in a new system of representation. "Such a changeover requires that the co-mingling of social structures and political and administrative functions should be broken, that the administrative structure should be more stable but variegated commensurate with its responsibility, scope, coverage and dimensions.

In spite of all the controversies relating to nation building and political modernization it needs to be pointed out that modernization theories have put the whole perspective of nationalism in a different light. More emphasis is being placed on the complementarity of the two. As Lapalombara has put it very succinctly, "Nation-states have propelled modernity and been propelled by it. This interrelation between modernization and nation-building is one of the rare points of agreement. As such, analysis of the nationalist leaders from the point of view of modernization of a specific country becomes essential. This is also necessary for methodological reasons. For, theories and

concepts have to be validated against concrete and specific situations. Barrington Moore has said, "that the comparative analysis is no substitute for detailed investigation of specific cases is obvious.

In fact, the process of theory building, ideally, should proceed dialectically. There should be a two way flow between theory and compirical reality. Perhaps, in the theory of modernization this should be particularly so. For, as we have already seen, neither in the broad theoretical framework nor in the approaches, modernization and nation-building theories are beyond controversy. It would be interesting to see how these different theories have been sought to be validated with reference to empirical reality. Not that all the theoreticians have been interested in the study of India. But as we shall see, direct as well as oblique references to India and Gandhi, are too many to be lightly ignored.

### **References :**

1. Stephen Nancoo, 'Nationalism and change'. The Indian Journal of Political Science. Vol. XXXVIII(3), 1977, p. 293 ff.
2. Peter Worsley, The Third World, pp. 79-80.
3. Peter Worsley, op.cit., p.83.
4. Ibid.
5. Particularly influential have been G.A. Almond and G.B. Powell (Jr.) See Comparative Politics A Developmental Approach.
6. E.H. Carr, Nationalism and After, p. 40.