

DELIBERATIONS ON NATION AND NATIONALISM

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Abstract

The present Indian situations – social, political, economic – seem to be very chaotic. The terminologies like nation, nationalism, pseudo-nationalism, patriotism, etc. are taken very fervently, emotionally, stormily and angrily. This has really created a very filthy atmosphere in India. Very bias attitude of some people in India those who want to have power in their hands are creating chaotic conditions in the name of religion and nationalism. They simply follow ‘divide and rule’ theory under the guise of nationalism. The focus of the present paper is on nationalistic approach as reflected in the three scholarly essays by Romila Thapar, A. G. Noorani, and Sadanand Menon in *On Nationalism* which evokes a question ‘are we really living in *troubled* and *troubling* times?’ This makes Indians to ponder over various terms like nation, nationalism, pseudo-nationalism, patriotism, etc. The present socio-political situations in this country are raising various questions like, ‘in which country are we living: India or Hindustan? Whether we are Indians or Hindustani?’ These questions force the real Indians to find answers to questions: ‘What sort of India do we want? What sort of Indians do we want to be? What sort of country are we going to leave behind for future generations?’ (xiii) The answers to these questions are there in the Indian Constitution in which there is no mention of ‘Hindustan’. In the present context, we, the citizens of India, need to think positively on nation and nationalism, without any biasness based on religion, caste, creed, language or region.

Key Words: India, nation, nationalism, pseudo-nationalism, Hindustan, Hindutva

After reading all the three scholarly essays in the text *On Nationalism*, as an Indian I really feel that India has been passing through ‘troubled’ and ‘troubling’ times. If we really feel that we are ‘nationalists’ there may not occur any kind of biasness in our mind related to caste, creed, language, region or religion. It is the fact that our country has been facing several problems like poverty, violence, corruptions, overpopulations, inequality, sectarianism, terrorism,

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environmental disasters, etc. If the unity of the nation has to be kept intact, we need to eradicate all these problems. Our constitution has given us freedom of speech, liberalism, and practice of any religion of our own choice. We have also been provided the fundamental rights. When various controversial issues come before us, we must discard them and our focus must be on 'nation' and 'nationalism'. A question 'What is nationalism?' has to be answered with positive attitude without any biasness. In this context Romila Thapar says, "We understood nationalism to be Indian nationalism and not Hindu or Muslim or any kind of religious or other nationalism..." (3). Further she clearly mentions that "Nationalism could only be Indian. And Indian meant that which was above all the smaller loyalties to religion, caste, ethnicity and region" (3). In this context Noorani also interprets:

When the Constitution of India came into force on 26th January 1950, sedition did not figure in Article 19(2) among the grounds on which the fundamental right to freedom of speech and expression (Art. 19(1) (a)) could be subjected to 'reasonable restrictions' by law. (77-78).

The above quote makes it quite clear that Indians should feel that we are born Indians and would die as Indians. In the history of India only one Indian citizen that is Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, the chief architect of the Indian constitution stated 'I am Indian first and Indian last'. Most of the Indians could not understand nationalistic and patriotic views of Dr. Ambedkar. Most of the citizens (citizens of Hindustan and not of India) try to accuse him for creating India and not Hindustan through the constitution. Our Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modiji also mentions in his speech 'Hindustan' and not India/Bharat. Isn't it antinationalism or pseudo-nationalism? In this context Noorani quotes, "On 17 march 2016, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) joint general secretary Dattatreya Hosabale declared that 'anyone who refused to say "Bharat Mata ki Jai" is anti-national for us. The BJP President Amit Shah said that 'the BJP will not tolerate criticism of the country'" (95). The views of staunch Hindus like Hosabale, Shah or anyone are really thought-provoking about nationalism. Their intention is quite clear to create chaos in the name of religions relating to nationalism. Thapar says, "All religions in India, irrespective of their theoretical support of social equality, maintained caste distinctions – especially in the codes of marriage and inheritance" (41). Dr. Ambedkar clarifies the title of our nation, India, in the Bombay legislature:

...I do not believe there is any place for any particular culture, whether it is a Hindu culture, or a Muhammadan culture or a Kanarese culture or a Gujarati culture. There are things we cannot deny, but they are not to be cultivated as advantages, they are to be treated as disadvantages, as something which divides our loyalty and takes away from us our common goal. That common goal is the building up of the feeling that we are all Indians. I do not like what some people say, that we are Indians first and Hindus afterwards or Muslims afterwards. I am not satisfied with that ... I do not want that our loyalty as Indians should be in the slightest way affected by any competitive loyalty whether that loyalty arises out of our religion, out of our culture or out of our language. I want all people to be Indians first, Indians last and nothing else but Indians... (xiii-xiv).

If we understand the feelings of Dr. Ambedkar that will enable us to be united as just Indians in spite of our freedom to follow whatever religion or culture we want to go for and practice in our

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private life. This will eventually help us to understand real nationalism. If we fail to be Indians that will certainly lead 'India' towards peril.

We, the Indians must be aware of formation of territory, democracy, culture, human rights and social justice without any kind of biasness. We have the freedom of speech laid down in the constitution. "Freedom of speech is now seen as the touchstone of democracy, and the ability of individuals to criticize the State is crucial to maintaining freedom" (90), says Noorani. Here we need to understand 'nationalism' as 'Indian nationalism' and not Hindu, Muslim or any other religious or cultural nationalism. Noorani also points out that "As a matter of fact the essence of democracy is Criticism of Government" (74). But the ruling government doesn't allow any opposition to say anything against it in the house. Hence Thapar clarifies, "Criticizing the government is not an act of sedition nor can it be regarded as anti-national..." (47). But the present ruling government considers it anti-national when the oppositions raise their issues in the house. It clearly indicates that they try to smother the voice of the oppositions considering the latter as anti-nationals.

As the citizens of India, we need to understand real nationalism and our other loyalties with the nation. 'Nationalism' differentiates between the nation and the state. No government has right to take upon the rights of a nation. In the opinion of Romila Thapar, "Sovereignty resides with the nation and not with the government" (3). But in the present situation in India we find that the voice of democracy is being quashed. As per democratic views any political party can run the government but not on any religious nationalism. In the present situations the ruling government is concentrating only on religious issues for dividing people on the religious matters and caste discriminations. The criminality and rape cases have been increasing day by day and the ruling governments supporting the criminals who are in support of their political party. According to a Gujarati poet Anil Joshi, a 1990 Sahitya Akademi awardee, "The atmosphere has become hateful. There is no breathing space and no freedom of expression for literary writers. It is like losing oxygen because we are writers who wish for free breathing space. I do not need an oxygen cylinder in the form of awards to live. The attack on the writers is unfortunate and has taken away the freedom of expression" (135-136), quoted by Sadanand Menon. These views are really touching to the heart and mind of real Indians those who believe in democracy. In this context A. G. Noorani says:

In *Hector vs. Attorney-General of Antigua*, the Privy Council held: 'In a free democratic society it is almost too obvious to need stating that those who hold office in government and who are responsible for public administration must always be open to criticism' (87).

The above quote has to be taken positively. It's every citizen's right to criticize the government for not working for the nation and her citizens. As per the Article 15 (1) of the Indian Constitution (web. p. 7), "The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them". It is the constitutional provision but we find that discriminations regularly taking place regularly in this country; it's really anti-national or sometimes it seems pseudo-national. But Amit Shah says, 'anti-national activity cannot be justified on the plea of freedom of expression' (96), Noorani quotes. Such statements by any political leaders create anti-national atmosphere. We are in the secular democratic country, which does not favour any religion for nation though we have freedom to follow any religion of our own choice. Hence Thapar says, "Democracy is fundamental to our country as a modern

nation and it has to be a secular democracy” (46-47). Further she narrates, “Democracy without its complement of secular thinking falls short of being a democracy” (47-48). We are the citizens of a nationalistic country so we do not need to argue on democracy, secularism or freedom of speech. On the other hand we can have positive discussions on all these issues. That would make us take nationalism with positive attitude. If we wish to be nationalist, we need to establish our identity as a part of our nation. Shouting as a nationalist doesn’t prove that we are nationalists. So Menon says, “The creation, evaluation and maintenance of a national culture is at base a political act, and is intended to serve political ends” (127). So Romila Thapar clarifies, “Nationalism had, and has much to do with understanding one’s society and finding one’s identity as a member of that society” (5). Just waving flags and shouting slogans and penalizing people for not shouting slogans like ‘Bharat Mata ki Jai’ has nothing to do with nationalism. Hence, the slogan ‘Bharat Mata ki Jai’ is not an attitude of patriotism, but of deep patriarchy” (120), expresses Menon. To consider our nation as ‘Mata’ is nothing but ‘pseudo-nationalism?’ The BJP, RSS and other organizations related to Hindutva express that those who do not say “Bharat Mata” are anti-national. Can it be considered rightful? In this regard Thapar says, “Nationalism requires a far greater commitment to attending to the needs of the nation rather than sloganeering...” (5). It clearly indicates that everybody’s loyalty should be with Hindu nationalism or Hindutva and not with Indian nationalism. Noorani quotes Purohit, who says “The two nationalisms – the Hindu and the Indian – were fundamentally in opposition to each other with respect to their deeds” (102).

It is rightly pointed out by Menon that “Ideas of cultural nationalism emerged hand in hand with late nineteenth century ideas of nationhood itself” (116). It is historical proof that tells us that physical boundaries, languages and even religions continuously have been changing. When we think of religious, linguistic, ethnic or any other similar single identity they relate us only to pseudo-nationalisms. We, the citizens of India have got freedom of speech but the present ruling government is taking it in wrong way. Just shouting slogans has no relation with nationalism. Thapar says:

Nationalism is a function of the nation. Conceptually, it consolidates aspects of the nation such as democracy, territory and power and endorses the value systems that ensure equal rights and justice (9).

Nationalism is related to nation and not with religion. So Thapar expresses, “The nation is generally not centrally and directly ruled by a dynasty, it is the representatives of the people who govern it in a democratic system (9). This indicates that nation should be governed in a democratic way. Nation and value system should go hand in hand in democratic way. But the BJP leaders and RSS take the issues for the sake of political gains in the guise of Hindutva. According to Thapar, “... Hinduism is a religion, Hindutva is an ideology for political mobilization” (35). Many issues are related to nationalism, pseudo-nationalism and religious nationalism. In the present socio-religious matter the attitude of our Prime Minister seems to be bias. Even the fourth pillar of democracy called media is completely under the control of the ruling government. In the name of nationalism communal nationalism is being propagated all the time. We must consider ourselves Indians first and Indians last. Nationalism is closely related to socio-political issues. In our country, social, political, economic and cultural are very issues burning. Hence, Thapar clarifies, “Examples of this are identities of race, language, caste, tribe and religion” (23). We witness that in the name of nationalism pseudo-nationalism and anti-

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nationalism issues are always kept live for political gain. Secularism and Hindutva are two opposite aspects. Those who are secular are anti-nationals in the notion of the Hindutvawadis. Menon clear:

The cultural nationalism project of Hindutva will have nothing to do with that kind of an open 'past'. This is unsurprising because, without exception, communal nationalism take the male point of view and attempt to feminize the nation state into the Motherland or, in our case, Bharat Mata (131).

Communal nationalism, gender discriminations and caste discriminations are related to pseudo-nationalism. In the opinion of Menon "The aggressive turn towards cultural nationalism we are witnessing today with assaults on members of minority religions and Dalits..." (125) is the issue related to nation and nationalism. The staunch Hindus take the issues of Hindu vs. Muslim or Dalits vs. Upper castes with their restricted intentions. The issue of 'Gaumata' has always been creating chaos in the society. Dabholkar, Pansare, Kalburgi and Gauri Lankesh were killed by the staunch Hindutvawadi. Noorani says, "Hindu nationalism upon the country over Indian nationalism" (96) has always been overburdened by the staunch Hindus. So he further states, "We should be very clear that the only nationalism that deserves our support is Indian nationalism" (103). But the narrow-minded nationalists support religious or cultural nationalism rather than Indian nationalism. Thapar clarifies, "Where nationalism based on a specific religious, linguistic or ethnic identity has been successful in creating a nation state, it is used to justify identity politics" (30-31). Menon considers: "As a political force, cultural nationalism draws heavily upon the past to shape the identity of the present" (127). The cultural nationalism is related to the historical events. In this context Thapar says, "It is said that the Hindus once had a great and glorious past that was destroyed by Muslim conquerors. Consequently, the creation of a Hindu state is projected as a legitimate return to a rightful inheritance" (33). To keep the people involved in the issues of religions and castes is the main agenda of those who want to establish Brahmanical system. It is quite clear that Varna and caste are the products of Brahmanical system. Menon quotes:

Amartya Sen has claimed in *The Argumentative Indian* about how the BJP has been consistently working towards popularizing the Hindutva theory through misrepresenting historic facts, fabricating evidence, inventing origin stories from popular mythologies and using violence and force on moderate Hindus as well as other minorities (115).

It is considered that India is a multi-cultural, multi-religious and liberal nation. In spite of that 'the national culture' is considered as Hindu culture. So Menon further quotes Amartya Sen who says, "To project India as a Hindu country and reclaim it exclusively for Hindus, it has rewritten Indian history as essentially a history of Hindu civilization, and sees it as an essential prerequisite for establishing a grand Hindu vision of India (115). Any kind of discrimination causes a threat to nationalism in the true sense. Ultimately it threatens to constitutional rights.

On Nationalism is really thought-provoking text. All Indians must take this text in a very balanced and positive way. The text presents Indian status. The sloganeering like 'Bharat Mata', 'Vande Mataram', 'Gau Mata' or 'ghar wapsi' have nothing to do with nationalism. They are simply the examples of pseudo-nationalism. Real nationalism can be established on the basis of the constitution.

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About the author

Dr. M. S. Wankhede, Associate Professor of English, Dhanwate National College, Nagpur has two books to his credit – *Arnold's Culture and Modernity* and *Songs of Experience*, a collection of poems. He is a bi-lingual creative writer. In seminars and conferences about 100 papers have been presented and about 60 papers, short stories and poems have been published. At present he is the General Secretary of the Association for English Studies of India and a member of Academic Council, Rashtrasant Tukadoji Maharaj Nagpur University, Nagpur. He is also a Member of Board of Studies of English, Swami Ramanand Tirth Marathwada University, Nanded. Under his guidance 21 scholars have sought the degree of M. Phil and 10 scholars have been awarded Ph. D. His areas of interest are British Literature, Indian Writing in English, Feminism, Dalit Literature, Translation, Autobiographical Writings, Culture, Multiculturalism, Linguistics and Language. He worked as editor, co-editor for the conference proceedings and as the Guest Editor for the special issue of "Horizon". He has completed one UGC sponsored Minor Research Project and one Major Research Project. He was awarded with Inter-continental's 'Sahitya Shree' and Dalit Sahitya Akademy's Dr. Ambedkar National Fellowship Award in 2013.