

## **Nation and Dissemination**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The word 'nation' which is so frequently used in the literary and sociological circles has gained momentum on the last two centuries. With the breakdown of the imperialistic and capitalistic powers, and also the rise of the post colonial set ups, the concept of 'nation' has acquired a special social and cultural construct. Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* defined nations as communities which were based on the usage of common languages which bound the members together, having finite boundaries and also having a sovereign structure. The members are glued to each other by bonds of fraternity, and though they rarely meet one another in their lives are ready to sacrifice everything for the sake of this 'imagined community'. This new idealism has put Marxism in the backseat altogether. Print media has been one of the most potent tools for the dissemination of this concept all across the globe and this was fuelled by the push from the capitalist powers. Among other factors, the novel and the narrative is yet another important reason responsible for the growth and spread of nationalism.

### **KEYWORDS**

Imagined Communities; Print Media; Capitalism; Novel and Narrative; Post Colonialism.

In the last century or so, specially by the mid twentieth century the concept of 'nation' emerged, which still remains a term difficult to define and fit particularly within any frame. The theorists have often found it perplexing to define this term. However, 'nation' and the notion of 'nationalism' can be studied analytically and an understanding can be derived, which by and large would be acceptable. Thus, one can say that for the historians and social scientists, the word 'nation' has an objective value, while for a die-hard lover of one's country, it has got a subjective significance which would be difficult to contain within finite boundaries. Today, nationality per se is a universal tag which is as good as gender, age, and other specifics which hold significance, when we talk of a person.

Unlike other 'isms', nationalism is vague and empty and is devoid of philosophical content, yet it commands a powerful political power which is capable of changing the shapes of societies and culture and also overturn decisions and policies at all levels. Thus, Tom Nairn states-

"Nationalism" is the pathology of modern developmental history, as inescapable as "neurosis" in the individual, with much the same essential ambiguity attaching to it, a similar built-in capacity for descent into dementia, rooted in the dilemmas of helplessness thrust upon most of the world (the equivalent of infantilism for societies) and largely incurable.' (Nairn Tom, p.359)

The most apt definition of 'nation' has been possibly given by Benedict Anderson, where he mentions that in an anthropological perspective and dimension, a nation is an imagined political community- and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.( Anderson, p 6) He explains the logic and rationality of the definition adequately presenting various back up statements to support his stand. Anderson coins the word 'imagined' because in a nation, people know that they would certainly never meet their fellow members in their life time, yet are aware that within the finite boundaries of this part of the globe, there is a teeming population. This conception is purely abstract and lies in the realms of the cognitive set up and a physical interface is almost out of the question. Thus it is purely imagined and the members embrace and accept this imagination as a reality and this perception continues and is passed on from generation to generation with the help of the different media, the most potent being the print media, which infuses this concept ever since the member starts visiting his schools and colleges. Gellner says that-' Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist.'( Gellner, p 169) so true in his words is Gellner who says that as is the perceived notion that nationalism is a kind of awakening, but contrary to this fact, it is actually about discovering those areas where there are gaps and spreading a collective consciousness of working in those directions for the betterment of the country. But on the other hand, Gellner in his anxiety states that nationalism masquerades under false pretences that he assimilates 'invention' to 'fabrication' and 'falsity, rather than to 'imagining ' and ' creation'. So, according to him, nationalism by itself is a glorified covering, which keeps underneath any community formed on the basis of religion, origin, race, mannerisms and others. It is a fabricated term which shelters

other 'isms' under the umbrella. So, in a way, he says that 'true' communities exist which can be advantageously juxtaposed to nations. He also goes on to the extent that all the communities which are larger than the basic and primordial villages, the first of the human settlements, are imagined and this process has continued through the cradle of civilization. Hence, a very relevant point is that communities are not to be differentiated by their falsity or genuineness, but the style in which they have been imagined.

Anderson next talks of nation as a limited entity. When we speak of limited, we surmise of something which has got finite boundaries having a fixed geographical area, and a demarcating line which makes it distinct from some other 'community'. So, even the largest nations today, which have population in billions, has a finite, limited boundary, and beyond this 'imaginary line' lies some other nation. There are points of commonality between communities all across the world- on the lines of say, Religion, Origin, Race, Language- but in spite of having so many things in common, the nations never dream of a time when the boundaries between them would be erased and those having overlapping properties would join together to give a new shape to the limited shapes on the map or globe. There are exceptions like West and East Germany, but then there have been very few episodes in world history and hence cannot be generalised on this basis.

The Middle ages and even a part of the Renaissance considered countries and states creations of God, and hence the King was regarded almost like a God or an emissary of God. The state or the kingdom was a unit which functioned entirely on the generosity and benevolence of the god/ gods and the human beings were someone who were instruments in the hands of the divine. Failures were considered as the curses which befell upon the human beings and the achievements were all orchestrated by the blessings of the heavens.

With the formation and writing of constitutions, this concept and belief has gradually faded away. The concept of 'sovereignty' came into existence, which states that men are masters of their own destinies, and the nation or state is responsible for its successes and failures, without any kind of attribution to the gods or people of other 'communities'. A country alone chalks its destiny and it is the collective belief and toil of its people which are deterministic in the outcomes. Thus the concept of 'sovereignty' destroyed the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm. Even the civilizations and communities, which are most devoutly religious, cannot boast of a society today which is purely homogeneous, and thus are automatically confronted with a case of 'pluralistic' society. These nations, never shed off their religious beliefs, rather they continuously show their allegiance to God and dream of being free- freedom of expression, rights, and actions. Thus, one can say that the gage and emblem of this freedom is the sovereign state.

Anderson, finally directs our attention towards another dimension of the modern 'nations', and that is 'community'. Whenever we speak of community, we invariably sense a feeling of bond, a sense of fraternity and a common factor which binds the members in spite of all the differences present between them. Thus, regardless of the differences and exploitation which the members experience amongst themselves, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship, its roots extending both laterally and vertically like the roots of a tree which bind the spreading branches firmly, irrespective of the directions in which its branches and foliage spread all across the sky. The feeling of sacrifice, to die for the country, to experience a feeling of motherly love and nostalgia is centred in this fraternity; and this has existed for centuries and will in all certainty will exist in the times to come. It is

amazing by the fact that the history of such colossal feeling is not more than two centuries old, but never ever has the world witnessed such strong feeling in the history of the earth in the last five thousand years.

Scholars have always argued that 'The theory of nationalism represents Marxism's great historical failure'( Nairn 329-63) Thus, the Marxist centred ideology which universally assigned the development and emergence of every theory to one basic tenet of Marxism, ie. Base and Production and resources and wealth being the deciding factor, now has given way to 'Nationalism' as the factor not only in form but also in substance. Experts say that this trend will continue and it is not only confined to the socialist world but to other realms as well. Many 'old nations', which were once thought to be fully consolidated and sustained, are now challenged by the emergence of 'sub'-nationalisms within their borders, and very soon would leave behind their sub-ness and fall into the category of full-fledged nationalisms. We can conclude that, nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time. The word 'Nation' which seems to carry too easy a meaning in our vocabulary, is in fact, one of the most complicated words to explain. Rather, Nation, nationality, nationalism- all have proved tediously difficult to define, let alone to analyse. The influence which nationalism has exerted on the modern world is immense, and by contrast the explanations and meanings which we have are conspicuously meagre. Hugh Seton- Watson, author of far the best and most comprehensive English- language text on nationalism, and heir to a vast tradition of liberal historiography and social science, sadly observes: ' Thus I am driven to the conclusion that no " scientific definition" of the nation can be devised; yet the phenomenon has existed and exists.' (Anderson, p 3)

## Rise of Nation and spread of Nationalism

The spread of languages like French and German in Europe and also their elevation to the status of languages-of-power, made its contribution to the decline of the imagined community of Christendom. The explosion of the concept called 'nation' was created by the interaction of a system of production and productive relations( capitalism), a technology of communications(print), and the fatality of human linguistic diversity.( Anderson 43) The rise of capitalism created mechanically reproduced print- languages capable of dissemination through the market. These print languages laid the bases for national consciousness in numerous ways. Firstly, they created the foundation for unified fields of exchange and communication. Thus, large number of speakers became capable of comprehending one another via print and paper, who otherwise had found it difficult or even impossible to understand one another in conversation. In this process, they gradually became aware of the millions of people who were of their language- field, and most importantly a sense of belongingness developed amongst those millions who belonged to that field. These fellow readers, to whom they were connected through print, were invisible, held a secular identity- formed the embryo of the nationally imagined community. Also, print- capitalism gave a new fixity to language which in a way dissolved the subjectivity of the idea of nation, yet built that image of antiquity so central to the idea of the nation. The printed book kept a permanent form, capable of virtually infinite reproduction , temporally and 'unconsciously modernizing' habits of monastic scribes. In the history of nationalism, these 'print languages' became formal models which were to be imitated, and these operated and exploited in a Machiavellian spirit. Thus, the convergence of capitalism and print technology on the fatal diversity of human language created the possibility of new form of

imagined community, which in its basic morphology set the stage for the modern nation.

Renan indicates two aspects which constitute this soul or spiritual principle called nation. The first one he identifies as the rich legacy of memories to the members of the community from different sources. The second he borrows from the theory of Bhabha, which summarises that it is the present day consent and desire to live together, and also the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that an individual has received in an undivided form. A nation, according to Bhabha, is held together by the sharing of the glorious heritage, the regrets in the past, the opportunities and the misses, and also the fact of having suffered, enjoyed, and hoped together. A nation is thus, a "large scale solidarity" which fantasises a past, envisages a present with a mutual consent to live a common life.

Another important aspect is the correlation between nation and literature. The study of literature comes under the head with its origin in a philosophical tradition formulated with the idea of the nation in mind. All literary narratives share an intrinsic relation with the central concept of the nation. Anderson's *Imagined Communities* has opened all possible discourses about nationalism's relationship to narrative forms such as the novel.( specially with the growth of the novel in the last two centuries vis-a-vis other forms of literature) The structure of literary narratives is intricately related to the power structures existing in a society. Thus, it won't be wrong to say that literary genres are the structural paradigms and primarily responsible for the emergence of the nation- concept in history.

In his seminal work, *Nation and Narration*, Homi.K. Bhabha begins his book with an exploration of this idea of the correlation between nation and narrative:

Nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind's eye. Such an image of the nation- or narration- might seem impossibly romantic and excessively metaphorical, but it is from those traditions of political thought and literary language that the nation emerges as a powerful historical idea in the west. An idea whose cultural compulsion lies in the impossible unity of the nation as a symbolic force.( Bhabha1) Bhabha regards nation as analogous to narration. He analyses that “ nation, as a form of cultural elaboration.....is an agency of ambivalent narration that holds culture at its most productive position, as a force for ‘ subordination, fracturing, diffusing, reproducing, as much as producing, creating , forcing, guiding”( Bhabha 3-4). Just like the Roman deity Janus which is two faced, so is the ambivalence of the language and the narrative of the nation. The language in the narrative of the novel is polyphonic, and the narrative itself is hybridised. This is very important to convey the cultural effects of the nation. Novel thus, is a colonialist discourse that provided ideological support to the expansion of the empire. But, this was the discourse which was appropriated for nationalist liberation. So, if we speak of dissemination, then the novel has become a nationalist discourse that resists imperialism and supports nationalistic struggles. Among the narratives, novel occupies a paradoxical position: it is at once a colonialist discourse and a derivative nationalist discourse. This is very true if we read the literature produced in our country- be it the literature of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and also the literature produced during the Indian Freedom struggle. The same holds true for the American novels- during the time of the struggle of America against the imperialist powers and also in the early phase when the puritans by and large dominated the country.

Timothy Brennan observes that the rise of modern nation state in Europe is almost inseparable from the forms and themes of imaginative literature. The political tasks of modern nationalism have determined the direction of the course of literature., particularly the novel. Bhabha remarks-

Nations, then, are imaginary constructs that depend for their existence on an apparatus of cultural fictions in which imaginative literature plays a decisive role. And the rise of European nationalism coincides especially with one form of literature- the novel.( Bhabha 49)

The creation of the nation involves the role of many institutions, movements and groups; and among these, the role played by imaginative literature or literary myth has been crucial. Literature compliments the political movements that lead to the creation of the nation.

Sociologically, nationalism has been historically associated with the rising military and political power of early nation states such as Great Britain, the United States and France. These powerful states succeeded in capturing existing states or established a breakaway state built on nationalist principles. A power shift in favour of nationalism is more likely the stronger the nationalist movement, ie. the more it has been able to mobilize larger segments of population beyond the confines of the intellectual circles, army factions, segments of lower clergy or lower level colonial bureaucrats that form the nucleus of nationalist movements. A shift of power also depends on how the strength of the established regime changes over time- its capacity to resist nationalist forces and to avoid institutional reform, abdication, or the loss of territory to secessionists. Wars fought either on the territory in question or elsewhere in the empire represent the most proximate cause influencing the staying power of the

established elites. Within neighbourhoods, a nation- state creation may propel its own replication in the adjoining states through the domino effects produced by the lack of congruence between ethno- national and political boundaries. This may also be one of the factors contributing to the rise and dissemination of nationalism.

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