
Nationalism, Global Politics and International Relations

Dr. S. K. Bose

Associate Professor, Faculty of Law, Manav Rachna University

ABSTRACT

The modern world system is in many ways a by-product of a cold war that took on the appearance of permanency until it suddenly ended in 1989. Since then there have been more talks all over the globe about nation state, nationalism, democracy so on and so forth which may extend to hyper nationalism. No doubt nationalism has been central to the globalization of world politics. It has played key role in shaping the major institution of modern international relations. India claims to be the biggest democracy in the world. By all standards the machinery for a democratic Govt. is well established here. Keeping the recent scenario in mind, in this paper the author tries to touch upon a historical context of nationalism within which to make sense of robust democracy and international relations. The paper has two objectives. First objective is to introduce the readers to some of the most important aspects of nationalism, its historical perspective starting with an overview of the rise of the modern concept of nationalism which can be termed as hyper nationalism, its relationship with fascism and modern liberalism. I think the readers need to have some basic understanding of main developments in the history of South Asia and world politics. It also very briefly touches the concept of development of the ideal of nationalism that took place in Europe in the seventeenth century and the contributing factors to the growth of the sentiment special mention must be made of the writings of Machiavelli, the great Italian politician known for his inspiring nationalist movement in the country.

KEY WORDS: *nationalism, global politics, international relations, globalization, liberalization*

INTRODUCTION

Nationalism has nowadays become so effective and pervasive a force that its importance can hardly be minimized in the political life of mankind. Nationalism has not only influenced the formation of nation-states but has also determined, to a large extent, the mutual relation between different states. Nationalism did not exist in the past, at least in the form in which we find it today. It was during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that nationalism came to be a force to be reckoned with. Nationalism is usually defined as a sentiment of a group of people united together by powerful ties, such as, common race, common language, common economy, a common pattern of life, a common history and a common ideal for the future. A group of people when united together by such ties seeks expression and development of its group personality through independent political organization of its own. Nationalism is an opinion that seeks reasoning, a response sprouts out of serene mind, it's for peace and harmony, it can never be there to feed abject idiosyncrasies.

MEANING & ORIGIN OF THE CONCEPT

Although in essence nationalism is defined as the sentiment of nationhood, in reality it is more than a mere sentiment. The exclusive right of the people of a country to form an independent and separate political existence is called nationalism. It is based on the tribal instinct of a man to lead a gregarious life as it is widely perceived. It is at the same time a psychological expression of kinship. Those people who claim a common peculiar social heritage and a common culture in art and literature have a tendency to nurture a feeling of nationalism. Originating in the gregarious instinct of a man and nourished by the rational desire for self-sufficiency, nationalism has, in the present century, come to be an active force in practical politics. As Lord Morleyⁱ remarks nationalism “from instinct became idea; from idea, abstract principles; then fervid prepossessions; ending where it is today in dogma, whether accepted or evaded”. The essence of nationalism is a unifying all-pervasive feeling among the people or people of a country who owe their first and last duty to the nation. In the past empires comprising many nations ultimately disintegrated because lack of national feeling had prevented fusion of the component nations into a homogeneous unit.

This is seen in the disintegration of the great Moghul Empireⁱⁱ in less than two hundred years. The development of the ideal of nationalism took place in Europe in the seventeenth century. Of the factors contributing to the growth of the sentiment special mention must be made of the writings of Machiavelliⁱⁱⁱ, the great Italian politician who kindled the flame not only among the Italian people, but also influenced the nationalist movements in other countries as well. The partition of Poland during the latter part of the eighteenth century transformed the ideal from a mere sentiment into an active force in practical politics. The Napoleonic Conquest^{iv} contributed, in no small measure, to the growth of this sentiment uniting the conquered people against French domination. The French Revolution also with its clarion call of ‘Liberty, Equality and Fraternity’ made people conscious of their inherent rights. India has been united politically under the imperial domination of the Moghuls, but national fusion was prevented not so much by the conflict between the different traditions of India and Islam, as by the petty ambitions of feudal princes. But resistance to the British brought out to the surface an identity to mental interests among the different people and developed a powerful feeling of nationality throughout the country.

Nationalism naturally seeks the right of self-determination enunciated by Woodrow Wilson^v at the Versailles Conference. ^{vi}This right was theoretically conceded in 1918 and has had the effect of encouraging and fostering the freedom movement in many countries. As a result, new nation-states have emerged all over the world, and if outdated politicians of ruling states think they would be able to keep even a backward state under their domination, they are only ignoring the writing on the wall.

Nationalism can be treated as ideology, as politics as sentiments. Definitions of nationalism usually frame it as ideology. This ideology is studied because it is significant, meaning that it shapes popular identity or/ and is proclaimed by movements pursuing or exercising state power(politics).

NATIONALISM IS A LIBERALIZING FORCE

Fascism was the last attempt made to stem this tide of nationalism and its discomfiture has changed the map of the entire world to accommodate new nation-states. Nationalism is especially a democratic ideal, and as such it is opposed to all those forces which impede the growth of the group personality of a people. If individual liberty is recognized as an indispensable condition for the fullest development of all that is good in the individual, the liberty of a nation is equally so. If each nation gets the opportunity of perfecting its own system of law, civilization and economic life, each will be in a position to contribute its best to enrich the common stock. The world as a whole will be benefitted by such mutual give and take. Thus nationalism is a great liberalizing force which unifies and elevates and seeks to preserve and promote all that is best in a nation. It creates a spirit of self-confidence in a nation, and self-confidence is the very foundation of constructive ability.

But this is not the whole story. Nationalism is, no doubt, a great force which attracts like groups, but it repels groups that are unlike. The separatist tendency inherent in it gives rise to two serious evils. Within the nation, it sometimes reveals itself in the form of a parochial patriotism which accentuates the difference between intra-national groups by placing an exaggerating importance on local institutions, undeveloped languages and provincial history and cultural: the effect of this is that many minor groups may begin to call themselves nationalities. The possibility of such fissiparous tendencies emerging has to be guarded against. This reminds us of Oscar Wilde^{vii} who believes Patriotism is the virtue of the vicious.

A BRIEF HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF NATIONALISM IN GLOBAL POLITICS

Most historians often argue that for the existence of ancient or medieval 'globalization'. From 1500 the Americas were brought into contact with Eurasia and Africa. However, nationalism as popular politics and sentiments became significant only after 1750 when the first significant global political conflicts among states invoked nationalist arguments. Nationalism initially imitated the civic forms of France and Britain with nationalists projecting their nations as historic, insisting that non historic nationalities assimilate. The stimulated counter nationalism which stressed folk culture, popular religion and spoken language.

In Europe, the focus was on stabilizing non states within a supernatural frame work. Ethnic homogenization rendered ethno-nationalism redundant and made civic nationalism acceptable. This ideology accommodated US doctrines of free markets and national sovereignty. The USSR accorded formal sovereignty to its European satellites. Beyond Europe, colonial nationalists demanded territorial independence, a principle enshrined in multiple UN conventions and declarations. Yet independent states with poorly integrated political institutions, economies and cultures confronted major problems. Nation states were highly unequal and mostly located in one of the super power blocs, although the political order was presented as one of equal sovereign nation states.

PERVERTED FORM OF NATIONALISM LEADS TO IMPERIALISM

The most serious evil, to which nationalism is a prey, has arisen out of modern capitalism. Nationalism—developed in an age aiming at the self-sufficiency of states—finds it difficult to maintain its position when the nation is not self-sufficient—when it cannot consume all that it produces. The growth of mammoth industries for the production of capital goods, consumer goods and war materials has made it necessary for every state to find out a market or markets where raw material can be bought surplus finished goods may be disposed for a profit. This economic motive reinforces the desire for more political power, and leads to the policy of colonizing under-developed countries for exploitation. This is how the whole of Asia and Africa fell under the greed of nationalism of the West. Thus nationalism, organized as the Nation-State, produces what is known as chauvinism or bellicose nationalism. This deserves unqualified condemnation from all. The evil effect of this perverted form of nationalism is that it creates hostilities between groups, supports militarism, cramp progress, and makes a nation seek military power. It produces a feeling that the laws and civilization of one's own country are superior to those of others, and may therefore be rightly imposed upon a politically weak and incapable people. It leads in the end to what is called Imperialism which is the parent of war.

NATION STATES AND GLOBAL POLITIC AT PRESENT

The disappearance of the USSR from dominant political scene led to a new wave of nation state formations and changes in the balance of international power. The end of cold war permitted the emergence of state opposing nationalism. The end of managed exchange rates of deregulation of financial markets undermined state power. The regional concentration of economic development has permitted supra-state coordination in certain regions, notably Europe. Nationalism may still be framed ethnically but now in pursuit of cultural recognition and affirmative action. Consequently the nation state appears to decline as the central legitimate political unit. This can stimulate state supporting nationalism in defense of the nation state as with the rise of radical rise of nationalism in Europe.

CONCLUSION

True nationalism is based on the ideal of 'Live and let live'. It recognizes the freedom of all nations to preserve their distinct languages, culture and civilization, in order that causes of conflicts between nations may be minimized. HG Wells^{viii} says "Our true nationality is mankind" and it is so very apt.

Self-love is not bad so long it does not lead to selfishness. It is only true nationalism which can pave the way for Internationalism, the edifice of which can be built only on the basis of mutual trust, goodwill and co-operation among nations. We cannot but ignore the words of Arthur Schopenhauer who sums up beautifully- "Every miserable fool who has nothing at all of which he can be proud, adopts as a last resource pride in the nation to which he belongs; he is ready and happy to defend all its faults and follies tooth and nail, thus reimbursing himself for his own inferiority." Nationalism and global politics have mutually shaped each other from at least the mid eighteenth century. In the most recent phase of globalization, this world order of nation

states has been often questioned. Whatever might happen to the nation state, this is an issue distinct from nationalism. Beyond this, nationalism might take a new form in the days to come in which the sovereign nation state is no longer central.

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ENDNOTES

ⁱ Former Lord President of the Council of the United Kingdom(1910-1914)

ⁱⁱ The early modern empire in south Asia (1526-1540), (1555-1857)

ⁱⁱⁱ Italian diplomat philosopher(May 1469 to June1527)

^{iv} Were a series of major conquests between(1805-1815)

^v American politician and academic who served as 28th American President from 1913 to 1921

^{vi} The Paris Peace of Conference, was the meeting in 1919 and 1920 at Palace of Versailles, France

^{vii} Irish poet and playwright (1854-1900)

^{viii} The prolific English writer(1886-1946)

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