



Perspectives on Nation, Integration, and Schism from Ernest Renan and Emile Durkheim: conception.

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Abstract

The concept of nation cannot be described merely on empirical or subjective grounds. However, nations are trapped in a temporal paradox. Nation as an abstract concept has captured people's imagination and awareness to such an extent that it has become reified in modern times. In transitional cultures such as India, it has become an identity identifier, a cause of exclusion, a forum for the spread of prejudice, distrust, and justification for violence. So, what exactly is a nation? Is it just a marriage of persons of the same race, religion, and language? The primary topic of this article is whether the nation as a notion is essentially universal and a force of integration, or if it is parochial and resulting in schism! This study seeks solutions by exploring the viewpoints of two thinkers: Ernest Renan and Emile Durkheim.

Key words: Common Past, Common Will, Inclusion, Nation

Introduction

Nations that claim to have a long history are only recent in origin and are connected to certain historical eras. Scholars have done an excellent job of capturing this paradox. „Nations, like tales, lose their origins in time myths and only fully realise their horizons in the mind's vision' (Bhabha, 1990, p. 1). Nations are seen not just as cultural manifestations, but also as structural entities. Country and nationalism have grown so inextricably linked that, since the Second World War, even “every victorious revolution has defined itself in national terms,” and even Marxist theory, which forecasts the demise of the state, has been unable to address and avoid questions of nation. Marxism's so-called universal principles are likewise entangled in the intricate enmeshment of national concerns as problems. Rather, it has evolved into a „uncomfortable oddity' (Anderson, 2006, pp. 2-3). The contemporary concept of a nation cannot be traced back further than the 18th century. Nationhood, as a gathering of humans, cannot be separated exactly from other things „a priori' and cannot fully explain nationhood on objective or subjective criterion grounds due to exceptions. Hobsbawn (2013), pp. 5–6. Nationality, on the other hand, is an identity and also membership given upon an individual by virtue of being a citizen of a nation. Among all the various identities that people carry in their daily lives, nationality takes precedence over other identities, especially in situations fraught with mistrust, prejudice, and stereotypes. Indeed, nationality as an identity has become all-encompassing and omnipotent, which an individual cannot avoid or insulate from, insofar as a type of stratification such as caste or gender appears to suggest nationality as a relatively ascriptive identity. It is not just the legal universality of nationality as a socio-cultural idea in which everyone has or should have nationality as a socio-cultural concept, but as sui-generis which is „irremediable' (Anderson, 2006, p. 5). Nations have evolved into new forms of state legitimacy. Nationalism, as an ideology and metaphor, is conveniently advocated in order to reestablish credibility. Regimes founded on ideas have also sparked conflict, war, and violence. In the sake of battle and domination, nations are tarnished with the stain of violence and slaughter. Despite the fact that there is a wealth of literature on nations, they are notoriously difficult to define (Hobsbawn, 2013, p. 3). The third of the three paradoxes puzzling nationalism theorists, as outlined by Benedict Anderson (2006), has significant ramifications. The third contradiction concerns nationality as a socio-cultural universality against nationality as a sui generis. Nationality, like gender, religion,



and caste, has become an all-encompassing ascriptive identity from which one cannot escape. One may alter one's nationality, but can one live beyond the framework of a nation? Among all the consequences of nationality becoming *sui generis*, the concept of country and patriotism being exploited as an instrument of tyranny and emerging as unalterable catches our attention.

Ernest Renan's Perspective on Nation: Fusion and Forgetting

Origin of idea of nation is attributed to Europe, particularly Germany, and specific factors to its development in Europe. Why are nations new in existence? According to Ernest Renan (1990), with decline of Roman Empire, Western Europe emerged with form divided by nations, sharing their respective specific boundaries wielding influence over each other. Days of empires or dictators expanding their frontiers are gone, Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Russia will remain as individual units and any attempts on part of any nation to dominate over others will lead to coalition and ensuing conflicts that will bring back such nations to their original boundaries. What is nation then? What are its analytical properties? In finding answers to questions, one cannot be blind to contextual aspects on the idea of nation for it emerged as idea and reality out of constant explorations and reflections by intelligentsia of particular nation. In fact, such acts of reasoning, reflections and deliberations carried out by the intelligentsia helped in crafting different variants of nation and nationalism tuned to their contexts. According to Ernest Renan (1990), essence and process of becoming nation lies in „fusion and forgetting“. It is the fusion of different categories of population; that is, sociologically speaking different groups. It is also forgetting the past; conflicts and violence. States which have categorised its people separate on their identities cannot become nation. If states in Europe accomplished in becoming nations, whereas those in east, particularly Turkey could not as the distinctiveness between groups remained as they were. Analysing in Western European context, he observes the relationship between conquerors and conquered. Though the process of conquering involved violence, it brought order and was accepted. Moreover, the differences between conquerors and conquered was dissolved. Germanic people accepted Christianity as soon as they came in contact with far Europe, married and mixed with conquered, gave up their language and adopted the language of the conquered. They imposed a mould in France which in fact became a mould of nation. It is apt to quote Renan's words here, In Bohemia (for instance), the Czech and German elements are superimposed, much like oil and water in a glass. The Turkish policy of separating nationalities according to their religion has had much graver consequences, for it brought about the downfall of the east...No French citizen knows whether he is a Burgundian, an Alan, a Taifale, or a Visigoth, yet every French citizen has to have forgotten the massacre of Saint Bartholomew, or the massacres that took place in the Midi in the thirteenth century (1990, p. 11).

How did this concept of nation emerge then? Modern nation is considered to be „historical result brought out by a series of convergent facts“ [emphasis added]. They were listed as „direct will of provinces“, „general consciousness“ as rational kernel over the whims of feudalism as manifested in the cases of Italy and Germany. Renan was vocally expressive in asserting the claim that it was France which founded the principle of nationality (1990, pp. 11-12).

Nation as Human Will

But then what is nation? For this, Renan attempts to find answer by articulating what is not nation and through which he tried to dispel the false premises of nation. Nation is above dynasty. Though the creation of territory, its unification and sentiments over it (which is subsumed, integrated, and



represented by nation at present) owed to dynasty, it could be erased from the memory of individuals over a period of time. Some nations came into existence without the legacy of dynasty. Transition from monarchy to democracy amplifies this proposition. On similar lines, Renan dismisses racial, religious, ethnic and linguistic bases of nation. Historical factors played an important role in dissolving the components of race as identity marker in Western Europe since the time of Roman Empire. There is no such thing as pure race. Whether it is France, Italy, Britain, and even in Germany, people are mixed. Language converse to religion is not ascriptive and is broader in its scope in uniting the people. That is why, if religion unites people in vertical fashion, language, whereas, integrates people horizontally and hence, more inclusive in nature. But Renan argues that Human Will is above the language. United States and England speak one language (English) and Latin America and Spain speak the same language (Spanish), yet they constitute separate nations. Renan (1990) cites the case of Switzerland consisting of citizens speaking three to four languages and diverse regions which are integrated through understanding and will, which is superior to language.

On talking about religion, Renan is categorical in dismissing it as the base of nation. Religion was important metaphor and means in extension of relationship outside the family. Religion ensembled the group and enshrouded the social life of individuals and state itself. Aspect of structural differentiation resonates in Renan argument. Religion acted once as basis of social identity in providing meaning and making sense of life has ceased to do so now. Renan expressed, There is no longer a state religion; one can be French, English, or German, and be either Catholic, Protestant, or orthodox Jewish, or else practice no cult at all. Religion has become an individual matter; it concerns the conscience of each person (1990, p. 18).

Renan's Views on Essence of Nation

Renan's views are unequivocal here, „Nation is a soul, a spiritual principle“ (1990, p. 19) [emphasis added]. Two things are essential in making a nation: Past and Present. Past consists of common endeavours, sacrifices and devotion kept alive through memories as legacy. Present, whereas, is manifested in willingness to live together. Nation as entity is based on the shared consensus of its people. In fact, suffering, enjoying and hoping together builds the aura of nation. It is about sharing a past not only of things to be rejoiced but also things suffered. „Suffering in common unifies more than joy does“ (ibid.). Renan having delineated the essential properties of nation attempted to define nation as, nation is, therefore, a large-scale solidarity, constituted by the feeling of the sacrifices that one has made in the past and of those that one is prepared to make in the future. It presupposes a past; it is summarized, however, in the present by a tangible fact, namely, consent, the clearly expressed desire to continue a common life (1990, p. 19)

French Nationalism and Durkheim's Scientific Sociology

Criticisms about the relative role and superiority of German race in making of nation and nationalism found expression among several intellects; of them significant were the views of Emile Durkheim which resurrected the space and role of individuals. In fact, Durkheim's construction of scientific sociology was evolved in the larger context of French nationalism; lack of nation pride and defeat of France at the hands of Prussia. Durkheim's sociology is „viewed to be intrinsically connected to the struggle to consolidate the Third Republic“ (Thom, 1990, p. 35). In main stream literature of sociology,



Durkheim's views on social reality and society are recognised and appreciated as methodical efforts to lay firm the empirical foundation for the budding discipline and is also well remembered for creating a niche of autonomy for the discipline from other social sciences. Essence of Durkheim's perspective consists in viewing group existing above individual as collective personality. Just as worshipping of totems and celebration of religion is celebration of powers of society so as placing group or society above individual as collective personality implied the welding of France as coherent and integrated nation. Nation as coherent and nationalism as moulding process is integrating factors of society. Nation as collective identity and nationalism as source of integration is an emergent phenomenon and are specific to societies under organic solidarity. If celebration of the powers of society was through that of religion in simple societies, nationalism is, whereas, in complex societies, sine qua non for providing the mould and *raison d'être* for the solidarity and integration of society. M. Marion Mitchell who examined Durkheim's ideas from the lens of nationalism observes, Although the *raison d'être* of his scientific research in sociology was the welding of France into a well-organized and well integrated nation, and although there is a great deal in his thought which is pertinent to an understanding of the national ferment of contemporary times, no one has approached Durkheim's work from the standpoint of his nationalism (1931, p. 87).

Nation and Durkheim's Ontology

Though Durkheim has not explicitly constructed a theory of nation and nationalism, his project of sociology was deeply influenced by the ideas of nationalism. Durkheim's discussion of nation and nationalism can be found in his two principal works: *Division of Labour in Society* (1933) and *Professional Ethics and Civic Morals* (1992). *Division of Labour* was an important lens to analyse the morphological and moral transformation of society. Organised structure and division of labour develop with the disappearance of segmental structure. Increase in volume and density of societies are responsible for the emergence of division of labour. Thus division of labour is not mere division of economic labour; instead, it consists of concomitant and comprehensive changes in social organisation due to division of labour. Nation as collective personality over individual and as part of society has informed Durkheim's project of ontology, which placed him on trajectory different from that of Comte and Spencer. His ideas are neither speculative like Comte nor organicist with biological reductionism as manifested in Spencer's ideas. Instead, he was realist and sought independence from philosophy, psychology and biology. Also, the issues he approached were empirical whether it may be solidarity, integration, division of labour and suicide whose forms, character and intensity change when societies transit from mechanical solidarity to organic solidarity. As the societies became complex in their form and function due to „rapid growth in the principles of organic solidarity“, individuals who hitherto remained attached firmly to the usages of the group are now released from the same implying the relative isolation of individuals from groups and ensuing „moral isolation“. Consequences of such attenuation of integration of individual from the rest of group has manifested in the forms of increasing suicide rates coupled with industrial and commercial crisis, growing antagonism between capital and labour heralding which Marion Mitchell observed as „economic anarchy equivalent to Hobbes“ description of the state of nature (Mitchel, 1931, p. 93).

Basis of National Integration

Increase in volume and density of society allows individuals to scatter over vast geographical area, with which existing collective conscience becomes indeterminate. It is the struggle for existence and needs



which lead to the division of work. Specialisation in functions is the core aspect of division of labour which will keep individuals involved in diverse activities and eliminate the conflict. Division of labour implies specialisation of function which does not merely mean more production „but it is to enable us to live in new conditions of existence that have been made for us“ (1933, p. 275). If competition places isolated and estranged individuals more in opposition, it is division of labour, whereas, unites at the same time it opposes. Division of labour can exist only in the midst of pre-existing society. If the emerging relations in division of labour is not subject to regulations of power, „there would be chaos, from which no new order could emerge“ (1933, p. 277). Obviously Durkheim is indicating the role of state in preserving and ensuring the order. But regulation by state as an apparatus is not sustainable unless they are powered by ideas and beliefs supplying the moral unity. Durkheim sees in nationalism fulfilment of this function as beliefs and sentiments serving as source of collective conscience and integration in societies which are highly voluminous and dense. Individuals here are spread over vast area, involved in the sphere of impersonal competition being atomised and estranged. Nationalism as beliefs and sentiments serve as the new source of collective conscience, which gives the essential mould for the society consisting of anonymous individuals. Thus association and cooperation are crucial factors for ensuring stability. Collective life is not born out of individual life and it is the latter which is the result of former. It is the associations, professional associations to be more precise, which connect individuals with state. Cooperation as a phenomenon is a necessity at advanced division of labour and not at the earlier stage. It is similarities between individuals which tied the individuals in simpler societies. Thus Durkheim remarked „what is first in knowledge is last in reality“ (1933, p. 280). Individuals among whom labour is divided in advanced division of labour may not belong to the same society; they may belong to different nations and nationalities. Division of labour, hence, includes internationalities. Durkheim observed, Attention will be called to the international division of labor. It seems evident, in this case at least, that individuals among whom labor is divided do not belong to the same society. But it must be recalled that a group can, while keeping its individuality, be enveloped by another, vaster and containing several of the same kind (1933, p. 281).

Essence of Durkheim's views on Nationalism

Durkheim rejects hard nationalism; his views on nationalism were sensible, progressive and advices cooperation between nations. For one people to be penetrated by another, it must cease to hold to an „exclusive patriotism, and learn another which is more comprehensive“ (1992, p. 281). Prediction of European Union as international order and cooperation between the nations from Europe can be clearly seen in his writings. Durkheim noted the dawn of collective conscience between European nations. He saw the possibility of European Union in 19th century itself; European union seemed to him a higher order of collective conscience which should be characterised by cooperation, wisdom and free from caprices of monarchies and princess. Rights of each nation shall emanate from the duties of every nation. Durkheim is unequivocal when he articulates about the dysfunctions of hard nationalism that can be cited for the sake of clarity. Inversely, every return to strict nationalism always results in a protectionist spirit, that is, in a tendency of peoples to isolate themselves from one another economically and morally (ibid.). Division of Labour is not mere mechanical exchange between different nations or societies, which he calls as „mutualism“ (1992, p. 282). Division of labour is higher than mutualism which refers to the aspects of existence, diversification of needs, specialisation increasing the productivity but at the same leading to anonymity, estrangement between individuals; cooperation and professional associations as mechanism to establish the stability between the units and connect the



anonymised individuals. It also basically refers to the host of changes taken place among the people encompassing their beliefs, values and actions. Nationalism functions as source of collective conscience for the people in highly voluminous and dense society. Durkheim rejected Kant's notion of complete autonomy of individual and argued that the autonomy which individuals have is a relative. How much autonomy is required for individual depends on the state of mind of societies. What types of servitude and subordination are legitimate is determined in the spectrum of time. Durkheim sees the rights of individual in the state of evolution and with progress bound to continue, what seemed luxury is now a definite right. According to him, individual morality is not in antagonistic to the state; instead it is the product of state. In fact, it is the state which is responsible for the gradual liberation of individual and individuation of society. State instead of oppressing individuals, as popularly perceived, redeems individual from society and provides individual the milieu from which she or he develops „his faculties in freedom“. Hence, Durkheim does not see individual as particular person, instead conceptualises individual as genre or abstract category which is liberated from the nest of collective particularities, who have developed self-interest (1992, p. 68). State while in this process remains no more mystic but individualistic in essence. The fundamental duty of the state is calling the individual to a moral way of life“. Durkheim expresses, „If the cult of the human person is to be the only one destined to survive, as it seems, it must be observed by the State as by the individual equally“ (ibid., p. 69). First duty of state in the context of advanced division of labour characterised by international competition and threatening is to preserve the collective entity; „its goal is national collectivity and not the individual“ (ibid.).

Conclusion

Nation and nationalism have emerged not only as the instruments of mobilisation and integration in contemporary times but also a new form of stratification – as a marker of identity, prejudice, discrimination and violence. This paper has made an attempt to examine the essence of the idea of nation particularly through the perspectives of Ernest Renan and Emile Durkheim. Nation and nationalism today greatly triggers the sentiments of people and has become a most sought after means for mobilising the people. Ideas of nationalism as a process not only involve imagination of particular geographical area but also people and groups to be inhabited. The phenomenon of belonging to a nation also leads to the question of exclusion. Nation and nationalism apart from arousing patriotic feelings and integration of groups have also created prejudices, fears and incidences of violence in societies which are in transition, particularly in the Indian context. One's patriotic spirit is doubted, humiliated, vilified and looked with contempt just because an individual is not from the majority identity. Is nation merely to be equated with religion or race? This question has prompted the author of this paper to go in pursuit of the essence and meaning of nation. Ernest Renan observes that success of nation lies in forgetting the conflict and violence associated with past. But in the name of nationalism and patriotism, past is invoked and present is lived through it. Shared interests common to all people irrespective of religion, race, and language will bind the people in Renan's model of nation. Instead, diversity which is much celebrated as source of strength is now being projected as anti-national. Nation and patriotism are no more an informed and cultivated opinion, value framework and vision of integration but deformation manifested in the forms of jingoism characterised by concoction of facts, presaging of lies and spreading of hatred. Existence of nation ceases to be based on common interests between diverse people. Though the idea of equating nation with religion and race has been well demystified, the cycle is swinging towards the other side, that is, the revival of religion, race and other parochial factors as source of nationalism and nation. Reason is substituted to prejudices, hatred and violence.



Citizenship and civil society as the space for dissent and critical views is easily branded as anti-nationals. Higher is exclusiveness in the defining idea of nation, greater is the schism among people and groups.

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