

A Critical Evaluation Of The Debate Over Rashtra And Nation

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Abstract

The debate of Rashtra and Nation appeared on the political table during the pre- independence era of India. It was necessary to have such debates to understand and propagate our philosophical lineage. It was also necessary to free the mind of Indians from the subjugation of British crown and it had fulfilled its motive. The idea of Rashtra which got inculcated into the hearts of Indians lead them to go against the British imperialism either through revolution, through mass movement or through spreading awareness into the masses regarding their rights. This inculcation of Nationalist feeling and awareness about rights in Indians resulted in humongous mass movements and eventually the Independence of India. But after the independence of India, we see a waning Fraternity among Indians. it does not seem that Indians want to live together anymore with the felling of brotherhood. Evidence of that can easily be found when we look into the Naga insurgency or any other such insurgency in North-East or any of the other parts of India be it Kashmir Militancy or Khalistan movement. We must look into ourselves and do an introspection that if this Rashtriyata in our heart and soul. We must try to comprehend that why Indians don't want to live together and demand a different Nation all together or at least a different state on one or another identity.

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I. Introduction

The debate between Rastra Vs Nation emerged wide reaching when Indian Nationalist leaders such as Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Deen Dayal Upadhyay, Shri Arbindo went against **notion of Social Darwinism** propounded by the Britishers and went with the Nationalism to approach the history of India. Britishers, applying the western definition of Nation, believed that India was not a Nation because it consists of in lots of diversity regarding language and religion so the Indian Nationalist described Rastra by the Nationalist approach, the Nationalist approach looked at the National movement as a movement of India people due to the 'Rashtra Bhavna' that they shared which grew out of the awareness of the exploitative Nature of colonial rule. The concept of Rastra expresses the '**Spiritual consciousness**' while Nation explains the formation of community based on common language, religion, culture, history etc. Rastra don't struggle for the identity because in eye of Rastra everyone considers as 'one' while Nation struggle for identity for this to understand we take classical examples if Italian learn the French language, they became French but Bhartiya never change because of the core nature of Rastra whether they learn any other language or follow any other religion.

The concept of Rashtra

The concept of Rastra has an enormous meaning in comparison with the European concept of Nation. The concept of Rastra was first mentioned in Rig Veda. The Rig Veda in Mandala and hymn 173 blesses the king saying May all people desire you (as the Ruler); may no-one rule over your **Kingdom**. It also advices the king saying Be firm like Indra himself, and uphold the **kingdom** here, in the same hymn. The Atharva Veda declares: "**Mata Bhumiputroahamprithvya**" mean the Earth is my mother and I am her son. We revere our land as our mother since it nurtures us and thus, we call Bharat Mata, this is resemblance of Bhartiya Rashtriyata. Many political thinkers also give their views on Rastra or Hindu Nation. **Aurobindo's** concept of Nation was deeply influenced by **Bankimchandra Chatterjee**'. Aurobindo revered India as Mother goddesses and called nationalism as **religious sadhana** and he believed that the liberation of the motherland is the most urgent duty of her children which they must be ready to sacrifice even with their lives. He wanted to unite the people towards Rastra because people will highly devoted towards Rastra. We can infer that Rabindranath Tagore define Rastra at International level, he adds humanism with Nationalism, he wanted to extent humanist values from National territory to International, he emphasized on universal humanism. He also criticized Western or the Eurocentric notion of Nationalism for its Nationalism for its chauvinism and greed for economic or political power.

The concept of Nation

The word Nation comes from the Latin word *Natio*. Romans use the term *Natio* in coterminous with the English term *born*. In Modern times, the *treaty of Westphalia* signed in 1648, was watershed development in the formation of modern **Nation-State system**.

Ernest Renan define Nation based on will, consciousness and memory. Renan defined a nation as a "soul, a spiritual principle" that is forged through a shared past and a shared will to live together in the present and future. He emphasis on the idea that Nation does not form on the basis of common language, culture or a common territory but on the will and consciousness that people want to live together who have shared common history and built common future.

Renan's definition was not comprehensive it could not define all the Nation and the Stalin came up with his definition of a Nation based on the physical features of a Nation. He says "A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture." *Ernest Gellner* came up with idea that *nations in the end are made by nationalism, and not the other way round*. It is not the case that already formed nations create their own justification through the ideology of nationalism; but rather that nations are made by nationalism. If we apply this understanding to the Indian case, we would infer that it was not the Indian nation that created Indian nationalism, but rather that the Indian nation itself was created (along with various other factors, of course) by the ideology of Indian nationalism. If we sum up all the three definitions then we find a comprehensive definition that in a way includes all the Nation of the world. For instance, European Jews in the 20th century were not clearly define by Stalin definition of Nation but was covered by Renan's definition.

The Debate

There are two aspects of the debate of Rashtra vs Nation, the one which favor that Rastra is really different concept from European notion of Nation the another one which do not favor and says it look like this topic is over exaggerated. Well, we will see the both aspect in detail. Firstly, we see the positive side, Rastra is actually very different from the European notion of Nation. The definition of Nation does not cover the situation of Bharat. Indians don't share common language, culture, religion, tribe etc. The concept of Rastra is not as new as Nation. It is mentioned in shlokas in Vedas, Puranas, Arthashastra and Manusmriti. In Bharat we unite because of 'Rastra ki Bhawana' which is not in case of Nation. Aurobindo added spiritualism in the concept of Rastra which doesn't happen in Nation. It is surprising that people united and devoted towards Rashtra even there is so much diversity in religion, culture, language, tribe or we can say there is nothing in common. The parameter of Nation has constantly changed overtime but that of a Rashtra have withstood the test of time and still the base remains the same. The concept of Rashtra was *Ekatma* (integral) to how Indian culture taught Indians respect and love towards Nature. Nation on the other hand, is a materialistic term which regards race, language, geographical limit as it's basis. Now let's move towards the other side of the debate which says the Rashtra Vs Nation is overstated. If we see superficially, we perceive that the concept of Rashtra is actually very different from European notion of Nation but when we see extensively, we find that there is lots of flaw which is overlooked. Many thinkers and philosopher also give different views on this debate. A conspicuous point noted in Bankim's Nationalist thought is that his earlier liberal rationalist him to questioned the very basis of colonialism by asking why has India been subject to repeated foreign invasions for so many years. Bankim is not satisfied with the answer that is the lack of physical strength has been the reason why Indians have been unable to defend themselves and thus fallen into colonization. Bankim goes on to challenge this argument, he explained that if everything depended on sheer physical strength then '*Kabulis*', who are physically much stronger than the British, would be more powerful than the latter. What Bankim wanted to explain that there are other factors that play a crucial role. He gives two reasons, First, is that Indians lack a natural desire for Liberty and the second reason for subjection is that there is lack of solidarity in Hindu society. If you analyze thoroughly, we identify the lack of unity lies before independence of India among Bhartiya. The concept of Rashtra was not so strong, if Rashtriyata ki Bhavan was that much strong at that time among citizens, they, in the first place, must never have gotten to be a British colony by a mercantile company and even if they got to be colonized. They must have revolted against Britisher's rule and got free from British as soon as possible and Britishers could not have ruled for so long.

When we examine the revolt of 1857, we find that it was not the nationalist feeling which united Indian Kings, Princes, Queens and soldiers against Britisher's rule. It was their own selfish motivation to safeguard their kingdoms and estates. For soldiers, they wanted to secure their religion, there were rumors of caw and pig fat in the ammo. They had to peel off the cap of magazine by their teeth. Taking caw fat and pig fat was prohibited in Hinduism and Islam. And in the East India Company army, Hindus and Muslims were the biggest majority. They thought that white government (gora sarkar) wanted to corrupt them of their religion.

Some rulers who initially sided with the British but later rebelled against them like Nana Sahib initially had very good relation with Britishers but he rebelled when British denied him of his father's pension. He

rebelled because of his personal benefit not because of Rashtriyata ki Bhavana. Same case goes with Begum Hazrat Mahal, Taty Tope and Mangal Pandey. At the time of Independence, the debate of Rashtra Vs Nation come in existence. Nationalist leaders needed to boost the enthusiasm and confidence of Indians for they accepted the British and European idea of white supremacy and thus their mind were subjugated, they believe that the Britisher cannot be conquered. So, our leaders tried to glorify the Indian philosophies and thus glorifying Rashtra over Nation.

Even after Independence, Indians did not unite and were not devoted. If Indians would have united partition of India would never have happened on the basis religion. Even then the concept of Rashtra was not as strong. We see various religion, states and tribes demand their own separate nation. For example;

Kashmir

People want a separate nation because of Muslim majority, it took the form of militancy which resulted in terrorist attacks, strikes, stone pelting and others. It was a *mujahidin militancy* following the *Afghan Mujahidin Model*. Initially, the pre-existing *Jammu & Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF)* was used for igniting the militancy in the state which was established in 1964. It used the network of *Pakistan state sponsored terrorist organizations*. These militant groups used the routes of and got trained by *Inter-governmental Service (ISI)* of Pakistan.

Punjab

Sikhism is one of the World's religions founded in the 16th century in the Punjab region of what is now India and Pakistan in time of partition. There are around 25 million Sikhs worldwide, making it the fifth largest faith group. The vast majority live in India, The Khalistan movement calls for an independent homeland for Sikhs in India. The movement was primarily led by Akali Dal, who adopted a stronger stance for a separate state around the early 1980s, together with Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale. "Following the 1947 independence of India, the Punjabi Suba movement, led by the Akali Dal, sought the creation of a province (Suba) for Punjabi people." The movement got divided when Bhindranwale started taking extremist and gave the movement a form of militancy. Akali Dal separated itself from the movement. The khalistani now demanded a different country rather than a province. Khalistanis killed Hindu minority in the state. When these separatist activities got out of the hand our former Prime Minister had to take direct military action. Resulting into operation cactus and tank entered in Shri Harmandir Sahib.

Manipur

Manipur demand separate state or federally Administrated union territory due to ethnic turmoil. The two communities share existential triggered by the fear of losing land. The Meitei have demanded safeguard by seeking status as Scheduled Tribe, arguing they need to preserve their territory and unique culture not just from non - Manipuri's but also from the state's recognition tribes. The latter including the Kuki- Zo, fear that this measure would open the way to the Meitei acquiring land in their areas. As a result, the conflict has reignited the Kuki-Zo demand for a federally Administrated union Territory.

Nagaland

The *National Socialist council of Nagaland (NSCN)* is a Naga Nationalist group operating in North - East. The main aim of the organization is to establish a sovereign state, "*Nagalim*" unifying all the areas inhabited by the Naga people in north -East India and Myanmar. There are different factions of the NSCN, which came into existence such NSCN-IM, NSCN-K, NSCN- SS. These successionist demand came up, when just after independence the Government of India tried to integrate naga areas into Assam and eventually into India. And then in 1955, the separatist declared the formation of an independent government. They launched an armed rebellion. In retaliation, the Government of India sent army restore and maintain peace and order in the region. By following a policy of suppression and non-negotiation, the government firmly opposed the secessionist demand for the independence of Naga areas.

Tripura

Tripura witnessed a surge in terrorist activities in 1990s. the area under control of the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District council was increased after a tripartite agreement between, New Delhi, the State government and the district council. The Government has since brought the movement under control, and the government of Tripura has so far succeeded in limiting the extremist activities. There has been steady decline in violence since 2003. There were multiple terrorist organisation which actively participated in it. They were *Tripura Upjati Juba Samiti (TUJS)*, *Tripura National Volunteer (TNV)*, *National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT)*.

Meghalaya

Meghalaya has also been prone to tribal insurgency. There are mainly three tribes namely *Garo*, *Khasi* and *Jintia*. All these Tribal groups have their own insurgent organisation, for example Garo tribe has *Garo National Liberation Army* (GNLA), *Achik National Liberation Army* (ANLA), *Liberation of Achik Elite Force* (LAEF), *Achik National Volunteer Council* (ANVC) while the Khasi and Jintia Tribe have *Hynniewtre National Liberation Council* (HNLC). There is a terrorist organisation which needs a very special mentions and that is *Garo Hills Liberation Army*, which is formed by deserted police personnel. GHLA launches guerrilla attacks on whatever they think is representative of the sovereign of India. They attack and extort the rich people in the state. GHLA is also involved in organised crime such as kidnapping, drug & human trafficking and arms smuggling.

Mizoram

The movement by the *Mizo National Front* had racial and religion overtones, and its declared aim was secession of Mizoram from the Indian Union. It took the form of armed uprising and violent conflict. But a successful conclusion of Mizoram Accord of 1966, and put an end to the insurgency.

From the very beginning, it was not the nationalist feeling but every other interest or force has united Indian under one banner from revolt of 1857 till now.

It can be inferred from these cases and the successionist movements that it is not the nationalist feeling among Indians but it is the central forces that is keeping India united. We discriminate against our own people. We consider and call north-eastern as Chinese and call them Chinkis and momos pejoratively. Even people from Bihar are discriminated against all over India. Hindi speakers are discriminated in southern part of India on linguistic basis.

II. Conclusion

The debate is if the concept of Rashtra is indeed different from the European notion of Nation. The people of various region with different culture have come together to form Indian Rashtra on the basis of equality and mutual respect for their distinct identities. We also see Spiritualism which is very different in the Rashtra is not seen in European One very distinct feature which is considerable is the huge diversity of India in culture, language, tribe etc which is not seen in any Nation But, when we shed the light on facets which goes against the narrative propagated by our Nationalist leaders on Rashtra because it seems to be serving the interest of politics during independence movement era and even now. Sometimes it seems that this topic is overexaggerated because this diversity become curse when we see the so much of discrimination based on these diverse identities such as religion, race, region, language, tribe and others. After seeing so many instances of disagreement among the people on the range of issues, many of which eventually leads to riots, conflicts, massacres and successionist movements. This clearly implies the fact that the Rashtra which the leaders showed us don't want to live together and is a myth. But, whatever it maybe it has kept us together so far.

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