Chapter Two

Discourses on 'Identity,' 'Nation,' and 'Nationalism'

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This chapter outlines and describes the various concepts that act as a bedrock for the arguments that have been made in this study. The chapter starts with a description of the idea of identity and how it contributes for the creation of nations and therefore nationalisms.

In a country like India; with its diversity and existing cleavages that result in sub-nationalistic aspirations in different parts of the country that include Punjab, Tamil Nadu, the Northeast of India among others (Misra, 2000; Singh P. , 2015; Kumar P. , 1991); the societal interests may vary depending on the society that one might find themselves situated in. As this study has been conducted in a region that possess a distinct identity which is quite different from what 'India' is understood to be, there is a need to contextualise broad concepts such as 'Identity,' 'Nations,' 'Nationalism' etc. in the context of the region this study is situated in. The chapter starts with broadly discussing the idea of 'Identity' which, then leads on to a discussion on a larger collective form which identifies itself as a 'Nation' with a distinct 'Nationalism' that consolidates and proliferates the idea of the respective national imagination. The chapter concludes with a section that describes the interplay between 'Identity,' 'Nation' and 'Nationalism' and to contextualise the concepts, the study uses the more established case of Jammu and Kashmir in India and the British blunder in connection to artificial assimilative tactics, the brunt of which, India bears, to this day.

2.1. Conceptualising Identity

What is it that constitutes the idea of 'identity;' is a question that has received extensive attention by academia across various multidisciplinary setups. Of such discourse one would be absolutely sure that, just like the idea of 'identity', henceforth without quotes, has been an evolving concept, as such has also been the construction of it. Dervin (2011, p. 181) points this out when he describes identity as "…a 'floating signifier', which seems to encompass many different things".

Bauman (2004, p. 10) has spoken about the process of the creation of identity through the 'squaring a circle' which would indicate who is within that circle and who is outside of it. While this points to the exclusivist nature of the process of identity creation, it also affirms that the process has been one that is evolving and therefore never complete at any point in time. Bauman's perspective, coming from his very own phenomenological experience, as is described in the 2004 book 'Identity: Conversations with Benedetto Vecchi', of having to

leave Poland and being stripped off the right to teach there and while he had achieved so much in Britain, he would still be referred to as the 'Pole'[4].

When Bauman was receiving the prestigious Theodor W. Adorno award, preferred the European Anthem, 'Ode to Joy' over the British or the Polish national anthems (Balint, 2023). It is therefore imperative to look at identity, be it personal or group, beyond the generic concepts of just ethnicity, nationality, citizenship etc. While it might constitute one of the many, it could also constitute, the many but if it does constitute the many, it would be everywhere and, as Brubaker (2006, p. 28) notes, "If identity is everywhere, it is nowhere." In this context, Stroll (1967, p. 121) as cited in Brubaker (2006, p. 29) points out,

> "Identity and cognate terms in other languages … have been used to address
> the perennial philosophical problems of permanence amidst manifest change
> and of unity amidst manifest diversity"

In this era of globalisation, which, by virtue of its nature entails the proliferation of assimilating ideas, there is but, in a Hegelian sense, a pushback against what Bauman (2004, p. 27) asserts, has challenged the "hierarchy of identities", he writes,

> "In 1994, a poster put up on the streets of Berlin poked fun at loyalties to
> frames no longer able to contain the world's realities: 'Your Christ is a Jew.
> Your car is Japanese. Your pizza is Italian. Your democracy - Greek. Your
> coffee - Brazilian. Your holiday - Turkish. Your numbers - Arabic. Your
> letters - Latin. Only your neighbour is a foreigner. In the nation-building era
> in Poland, children used to be drilled to offer the following answers to
> questions of identity: Who are you? A little Pole. What is your sign? White
> Eagle. Today's answers, suggests Monika Kostera, an eminent sociologist of
> contemporary culture, would run rather differently: Who are you? A
> handsome man in his forties, with a sense of humour. What is your sign?
> Gemini."

The Berlin poster, in this case, hints at the era of globalisation while the change in the answer to the question 'who are you?' suggests the weakening of, as Bauman calls it, "hierarchy of identities" and he goes on to further assert that the phenomena are in fact related.

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[4] A term used to refer to a person of Polish, from Poland, origin.

In the context of this pushback against globalisation and the assimilation of identities, the works of Friedman (1994, p. 29), who attempted to establish a linkage between 'cultural Identity' and 'ethnicity' is relevant.

On the generic concept of 'cultural identity,' which is "…the attribution of a set of qualities to a given population" that is "ascribed" and not "achieved," he notes, "…cultural identity that is experienced as (being) carried by the individual, in the blood, so to say, is what is commonly known as ethnicity." A challenge to this "ascribed" nature of identity is again evident in the works of Brubaker (2006, p. 37) who simultaneously lists and problematises the various common assumptions on the notion of identity. These include, (1) all people possess (or ought to) an identity; (2) all groups possess (or ought to) an identity; (3) people and groups can possess an identity without being aware of it; and (4) stronger collective identity would entail homogeneity.

In this regard, it is again imperative to bring in Bauman's idea of the artificiality of both 'identity' as well as 'national identity,' which he says "… did not gestate and incubate in human experience naturally … (and were) forced into the Lebenswelt of modern men and women." (2004, p. 20). Here he speaks of the 'achieved' nature of identity which is, as Herzfeld, as cited in Dervin (2011, p. 182), identified, the case with nation-states. He demonstrated,

> "… how, since their creation in the late eighteenth century in Europe and later on elsewhere, nation-states have made every effort to promote a sense of national cultural identity in order to limit communitarian divisions ..."

While this argument would entail that the concept of 'nation' in itself is a creation and hence an imagination, in line with the conjectures made by Anderson (2015) in his magnum opus, 'Imagined Communities', there are, though, numerous ideas that describe the idea of nations and the consequent nationalisms they espouse and have been discussed in the subsequent section 2.2 Nation and Nationalism. It is in this dilemma on the discourse of identity, that the researcher situates this study.

In this regard, the researcher does acknowledge that there is slant towards the more modern conception of identity that adhere to the idea that identity is fluid and hence looks at the 'ascribed' element of identity as problematic. As such, the assumptions that have been listed by Brubaker (2006, p. 37) are also accepted to be problematic. Nonetheless, it is these assumptions that hold true with reference to the various identity assertions, documented in

this study. They are in fact held as canonical ideas by groups that espouse their varied identity assertions, be it 'Hindutva' on a larger Indian context or the various sub-nationalistic aspirations on a smaller regional context.

2.2. Nation and Nationalism

The idea of 'Nation' is a relatively new concept and yet 'Nationalism,' which fuels the idea of the 'Nation,' henceforth without quotes, has played a very important role in the political discourse of the modern world (Gupta S. S., 2004). Reaffirming that the idea of a Nation as we understand it, is a relatively new concept, even for Europe, Bauman (2004, p. 17) makes a rather humorous remark with reference to the initial census exercises in Poland, he comments,

> "… its census commissioners were nevertheless trained to expect that for every human being there must be a nation to which he or she belonged. They were briefed to collect information about the national self-assignment of every subject of the Polish state … the people they questioned simply could not grasp what a 'nation' was and what 'having a nationality' was like … they stubbornly stuck to the sole answers which made sense to them: 'we are locals', 'we are of this place', 'we are from here', 'we belong here'. The administrators of the census had to surrender in the end and add 'the locals' to the official list of nations."

While this is a certain discourse on the idea of nation, there are also, alternative ideas. Baruah (1991) as cited in (Gupta S. S., 2004), in the context of nationalities of the modern world noted that there is an inherent perception among such nationalities of them being "political groups with national rights." She further insists that the term nation has been used to indicate a steady merging of the "…cultural and politcal boundaries after prolonged maintenance of political control by a central authority over a given territory and its inhabitants". Eriksen (1991), on similar lines, notes that, ethnicity has been analysed extensively at the level of inter-personal action, at the level of the township, at the level of faction(ing) and riots, etc. He further goes on to equate both nationalism and ethnicity with ideology, opining that both require the adherents to adopt cultural similarities.

Again, Ambedkar (1945), on nationality, describes it as a, "consciousness of a kind, awareness of the existence of that tie of kinship" and nationalism as "the desire for a separate national existence for those who are bound by this tie of kinship." He went on to, further

reiterate that nationality does not always produce nationalism up until the following conditions are fulfilled. Firstly, there must be an existence of a will to live as a nation. Secondly, there must be a territory where the same nationalism could survive and thrive. On a more recent, Indian idea on the notion of nation and nationalism, Madhav (2013) introduces the concept of 'rashtra' which is the 'Bhartiya' equivalent of the idea of the nation but is also distinct from it, while 'rashtra', he says is an "… ethic spiritual concept", the idea of nation meanders around the concept of culture. While the India nation has struggled to fit the yardsticks laid down by the existing western notions on the idea of nation, with even as late as 1930, Simon Commission referred to India as a "…conglomeration of races and religions (1930, p. 5)," there has been a noteworthy attempt, made by Deendayal Upadhyaya, who, in 'Integral Humanism' describes the Indian nation as a living organism which has come to existence on its own (Upadhyay, 2016). He brings in the concept of what he calls 'the chitti,' which is the core character or soul of a nation. On 'chiti,' he articulates,

> "…every society has an innate nature, which is inborn, and not the result of historical circumstances… national culture is continuously modified and enlarged by historic reasons and circumstances. Culture does include all those things which, by association, endeavours, and the history of the society, have come to held as good and commendable, but these are not added on to chiti. Chiti is fundamental and is central to the nation from its very beginning (p. kindle location 1027 of 1629)"

On similar lines, in viewing the nation as a living organism, Tom Narin (1981) associates the idea of nationalism to an ailment that plagues the "pathology of modern developmental history" terming it as "neurosis", characterised by essentially the same ambiguity a person who is suffering from the ailment would encounter. In both cases he asserts that they are incurable. From the notion of nation comes nationalism which as Chakravarti (2016) suggests, is inevitably built on the program of exclusion, while articulating on Tagore's idea of nationalism, notes that Tagore's idea on nationalism associates it with pride, chauvinism, aggressive posturing and hate culture against an imagined or actual 'other' who is seen and targeted as an enemy. On a similar line of thought, Kumar (2017) point out that nationalism and national unity are not two sides of the same coin going on to further assert that an exclusivist idea of the nation could destroy the nation itself. Like Tagore, as cited in Chakravarti (2016), Eriksen (1991) also considers both ethnicists and nationalists to be very

assertive on their differences with the 'other', in the event of conflict. In his view, on the distinction between nationalism and ethnicity, he notes,

> "… Unsuccessful nationalisms therefore tend to become ethnicities whose members reside more or less uncomfortably under the aegis of a state which they do not identify with their own nationality or ethnic category." (p. 265)

In this context, 'ethnos', which is a historically established community of people characterised by a common, relatively stable, cultural features and distinctive psychological traits and by an awareness of their identity and distinctiveness from other communities (Bromley & Kozlov, 1989), "… ethnic ideologies tend to be at odds with dominant nationalist ideologies" (Eriksen, 1991) which is primarily, a result of the assimilating nature of nationalist ideologies that aim to achieve integration and as a result disregard any ethnic affiliations. Likewise, "…once 'national integration' is officially interpreted as being antagonistic with regionalism, it seeks to legitimise the suppression of regional movements" (Gupta S. S., 2004).

On the idea of nation as an imagination, which is the central idea behind Anderson's 'Imagined Communities' (2015), notes that anything beyond a primordial village which has face-to-face contact and sometimes even that, is imagined. Gellner (1964), on similar lines, voices, "…nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: It invents nations when they do not exist (p. 169)", Anderson (2015) in this regard argues that, Gellner in his assertion emphasises too much on the falsity aspect of the existence of nation while forgetting that, in doing so he acknowledges the existence of 'true communities' which could later conveniently masquerade themselves as nations.

2.3. Interplay of Identity, Nation, and Nationalism in the Indian Context

In the Indian context, the interplay between identity, nation and nationalism and the various contestations on the discourse of the same could be understood through the example of the status of the erstwhile princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, also known as Kashmir and Jammu (Burn, 1908, p. 71) and the ongoing tussle between the nation of 'India' and that of 'Pakistan' on the issue. While the reasons for the contest for the territory of Jammu and Kashmir are varied, the conflict has three political groups, asserting what they believe, are their legitimate claims. This is in line with what Baruah (1991) notes about the political rights that respective nationalities believe they possess.

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As such, there is India that looks at the state of Jammu and Kashmir as an inalienable part of the Union of India which is contested by political outfits within the state, who seek the independence of Jammu and Kashmir from both India and Pakistan and return to the pre-1953 arrangement of limited association with India (Tremblay, 1996-1997). While the abrogation of Article 370, a provision in the Indian Constitution that accorded special privileges to the state on matters of autonomy, extended basic rights to certain groups through the implementation of other provisions, which had been, until now, denied to the respective groups, it was criticised by the other interest groups that saw this action as an attempt to dissolve the distinction between the identity of Jammu and Kashmir and that of India (Paul, 2021).

Article 370 had, in fact allowed, temporarily, the existence of a nation within another nation but once abrogated, the idea of who was to be considered 'autochthonous' also changed and hence the justification behind extending the rights accorded by the state to the deprived groups. While the Treaty of Accession to India was signed on October 27, 1947, it was, only, truly executed on August 5, 2019. While there might have been the will for Kashmir to still exist as a nation, the second pre-condition that Ambedkar (1945) had proposed, in relation to territory for the nationalism to survive and thrive ceased to exist when the political head of Kashmir acceded its lands to India. Likewise, there is also Pakistan that stakes claim over the state of Jammu and Kashmir based on the religious demography owing to what the notion of the nation, viz. Pakistan and for this notion to survive and thrive, again, the Kashmiri nation must cease to exit. Here, it also becomes imperative to scrutinise the role of the British colonisers of India who are credited with initiating the conception of the modern Indian nation, which is again one of the many discourses on the origins of Indian nationalism. McCully (1935) in his article, which was written prior to the independence of India from British suzerainty, acknowledges this, and introduces a trichotomy in this regard,

> "…The first classification consists of those writings which seek to explain or associate the origins of Indian nationalism in terms of native institutions, the roots of which long antedate the establishment of British rule. Into the second classification fall writings which recognize that modern Indian nationalism has arisen largely as a result of influences introduced into India through the contact with Great Britain, and in which, upon the whole, the authors incline to perceive a favourable or beneficent character. The third classification is comprised of writings which indicate consciously or unconsciously some

recognition of British influences, but which regard such influences as baneful, deleterious, and unfavourable to the people and civilization of India."

In order to contextualise the concepts that have been referred to in the preceding sections to the Northeast, it is imperative to understand that the 'squaring of the circle,' as Bauman (2004) calls it, and the 'achieved identity' that Brubaker (2006) describes it, the attempt to envisage a collective identity was initiated by the British during their colonial rule of India as a means to enhance the efficacy of their rule and as Vendekerckhove (2009) notes, they did this through identification, classification, and mapping of all communities in South Asia. The British intended to categorise the ethnic groups as in terms of developed versus backward and in some cases also martial versus criminal. Although the British left in 1947, laws and penal codes that were defined by them based on these racist taxonomies were either prevalent or still used as a foundation for the laws and codes that were instituted by the post-colonial Indian state and it is here that there is the evident scope of conflict between different identities which also reflect in the form of nativism and anti-India rhetoric, which is not limited to anti-Hindutva rhetoric but extends beyond that.

This study, 'Media Polarisation and the Assertion of Ethno-Religious Identities in the English Print Media of Northeast India' revolves around the of the understanding of 'Identity' as a concept which is asserted by various groups to protect or promote the interests of individuals or communities that see themselves as 'autochthonous.' In the case of both, the assertion of Hindutva in the whole of India and, therefore, in the four states selected for the study or for that matter the existing ethnic identity assertions in the respective states – all assertions are geo-culturally located, emphasizing on the 'natural' geo-cultural links of communities in their area. In both cases, the element of 'autochthony,' meaning belonging to that place must be seen as a "…reactionary measure against the de-rooting of identity in the neoliberal globalising context" (Vendekerckhove, 2009).

The ethnic assertions are therefore oppositional to the assertion of the collectively perceived imagined identity of what is 'India,' which in this case, the era of the BJP, is also the perceived idea of what is espoused by Hindutva's conception of what is the 'Hindu Rashtra.' These sub-nationalistic aspirations, though, are not limited to the opposition of the assimilating nature of Hindutva but could also be seen as an opposition to the perceived idea of 'India' itself, independent of the assimilating idea behind India. To cite an example in

this regard is a particular slogan that has been in use in the state Meghalaya since the anti-outsider pogroms of the 1980s, which is a state that has also been selected for the current study, that is 'Khasi by Blood, Indian by Accident' (Harriss, 2022; Sirnate, 2009). Again, in the case of 'Hindutva,' as an assertive ideology, should be seen from the perspective of the overarching idea of globalisation, which, by virtue of its nature seeks to achieve likeness in the areas of culture and thereby threatening the existence of cultures that are different from the standardised practices of living one's identity.

2.4. Summarising Comments

This chapter dealt with the various discourses on ideas such as 'identity,' 'nation' and 'nationalism.' It started with an overview of the concept of identity and then went on to discuss the notion of nation and nationalism. It further contextualised the concepts in relation to India describing the interplay between them with an example of the state of Jammu and Kashmir and the Northeast of India, which is the research setting for this study. The following chapter will articulate the rise of Hindu nationalism in India which provides context to the findings, that have been articulated in the later chapters. It also aids in describing the evolution of the discourse of the time, that this study is set in and in doing so acknowledging that these are evolving situations subject to change which is again an ontological limitation of studies that deal with discourse.