



NATION AS A FACTOR OF INTEGRATION AND SCHISM: ANALYSIS OF ERNEST RENAN AND EMILE DURKHEIM'S PERSPECTIVES

Sociology

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ABSTRACT

Nations claimed to be having hoary past are only of recent origin and they are tied to specific concrete times. This duality is well captured by scholars. Nation can neither be explained solely on objective criteria nor on subjective grounds. But idea of nation as imagination and consciousness has come to be reified so much so in contemporary times that it has become an identity marker, a source of exclusion, a space for dissemination of prejudice, suspicion and justification for violence in societies under transition like India. What is nation then? Is it just a union of people belonging to same race, religion and language? Focal question of this paper is to examine whether the nation as an idea is intrinsically universal and factor of integration; or parochial and brings schism! This paper attempts to find answers by examining the perspectives of two Intellectuals-Ernest Renan and Emile Durkheim.

KEYWORDS

Nation, Inclusion, Religion, Race, Division of Labour, Common Will and Common Past

INTRODUCTION

Nations claimed to be having hoary past are only of recent origin and they are tied to specific concrete times. This duality is well captured by scholars. 'Nations, like narratives, lose their origin in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in mind's eye' (Babha, K. Homi. 1990:01, italics are added). Nations are not merely experienced as cultural phenomena but also as structural entity. Nation and nationalism have become inescapable things that since second world war even 'every successful revolution has defined itself in national terms' and even Marxist ideology which predicts the withering of state could not address and escape from issues of nation. So called universal concepts of Marxism is also caught in the intricate enmesh of the issues of nation as problem. Rather it has become an 'uncomfortable *anomaly* as observed by Benedict Anderson (2006:02-3, italics are in original). Nation as perceived in modern sense cannot be dated back than 18th century (Hobsbawm, Eric 2013). Nation as grouping of individuals cannot be distinguished precisely from 'other entities *a priori*' and cannot explain nationhood completely either on objective or subjective criteria grounds as they carry exceptions (Ibid:5-6, italics are in original).

Nations have become new ways of legitimacy for states. Nationalism as ideology and metaphor is conveniently espoused to renew the legitimacy. Regimes which are justified on ideologies have also unleashed tension, war and violence. Nations are smeared with blemish of violence and bloodshed in the name of war and dominance. There is so much literature on nations yet it is 'notoriously difficult to define (Ibid:03). Among the three paradoxes perplexing the theorists of nationalism as listed by Benedict Anderson, the third one has serious repercussions. Third paradox refers to the issue of nationality as a socio-cultural universality versus nationality as sui generis. Nationality has become all-pervading ascriptive identity from which one cannot escape like gender, religion and caste. One may change the nationality; but can individual live outside the framework of nation? Of all the repercussions emanating from nationality assuming the form of sui-generis, idea of nation and patriotism being used as tool of oppression and emerging as unalterable.

Nation and nationality may become a method and justification for persecuting its own citizens when regimes define and divinize them; it may become a convenient pretext for distorting the diversity and also a medium for homogenization of diverse roots of tradition. Abstract idea of nation as imagination and consciousness has come to be reified so much so in contemporary times that it has become an identity marker, a source of exclusion, a space for dissemination of prejudice, pretext for suspicion and justification for violence in developing societies like India.

The world has experienced the tides of narrower and hard nationalism built on the lines of religion and race. But such tides appear again convulsing the plural basis of integration where dominant religion, race and language become constituting aspects of nation. Are such tides merely passing in nature? Are they rather dialectics continuously shaping and leaving blemishes on reason and spirit of human beings?

Idea of nation and nationalism may also be invoked as a clever, deliberate and instrumental action to cover the acts of state either in favour of particular groups or business class or for stigmatizing and suppressing particular groups. What is nation then? Is it just a union of people belonging to same race, religion and language? Focal question of this paper is to examine whether the nation as an idea is intrinsically universal and factor of integration; or parochial and brings schism! This paper attempts to find answers by examining the perspectives of two Intellectuals-Ernest Renan and Emile Durkheim.

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 (Renan, Ernest 1990). Why are nations new in existence? According to Ernest Renan (Ibid), 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 (Ibid), 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 categorized 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 *conqueror* and *conquered*. Though the process of conquering involved violence, it brought order and was accepted. Moreover, the differences between conqueror 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 (Ibid: 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* (Ibid, italics are 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.

Nation as Human Will

But then what is nation? For which 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. He 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 (Ibid).

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 (Ibid: 18)

Renan's Views on Essence of Nation

Renan's views are equivocal here. Nation is a *soul, a spiritual principle*. Two things are essential in making a nation: *Past and Present*. Past consists of *common endeavors, 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'. Renan having delineated the essential properties of nation attempted to define nation (Ibid: 19, italics are added).

A 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 (Ibid, italics are added).

Origin, continuity and decline of a nation is not dependent on any *divine, myth, sacred religious symbols*. It is none other than people who have *desires and needs* who have to be consulted before a province or territory being joined to country. In fact, beauty of his argument unfolds when he observes: 'A nation never has any real interest in annexing or holding on to a country against its will. The wish of nation is, all in all, the sole legitimate criterion, the one to which one must always return.

Renan locates the process of becoming nation in forgetting the schisms and past violence. Nations are considered to be in existence where identities of race, religion, ethnicity, geography and language are

transcended and forgotten. Existence of nation depends on the existence of *common values* and resultant *space of civil society* (Ibid, italics are added).

Scepticisms about Renan's Views

But Renan's position which considers Germanic race and Germanic invasion as responsible factors for the emergence of nation and nationality has drawn flaks. Though Renan's famous lecture on nation delivered in 1882 is praised for its *voluntarist* nature, he was criticized for not adhering to it (Thom, Martin 1990). His view of considering Germanic invasion of France around 5th and 6th century AD and German tribes as sources for the germination and dissemination of idea of nation and nationality is questioned. However, voluntarist and universal is his theory of nation, placing primacy on German tribes and crediting them for the idea of nation has brought to the forefront the issue of tribes and their relative role within the debate of nation.

History of French nationalism is mired in two competing interpretations which try to trace the origin of nationalism in France to German and Roman factors. When Germanic race as a tribe came to be credited with development of nation and nationalism in France and Indo-Germanism as perspective became all pervasive explanatory lens gripping and influencing the minds of scholars, undercurrents of opposition to the superiority of German race emerged among the intellectual circles of France. Critics point at the scanty evidences about ancient Germans in knowing the social and political identity. Discovery of Tacitus' *Germania* in fifteenth century at Italy provides information about Germans and about their qualities, particularly, 'the unsullied moral virtues of the ancient Germans, for example, their disregard for precious metal, the chastity of their women, and their warrior spirit, qualities which earned the praise of almost European publicists, from the time of its rediscovery in the fifteenth century (Ibid:24)'. But Fustel de Coulanges, teacher of Emile Durkheim, demystified the myth of Germanism. Thinkers like Vico, Abbe Dubos, Thierry, Cattaneo and Fustel de Coulanges took a critical view about the question of Germanic Race in France and French nationalism which is in contrast to the views of Comte de Boulainvillers, Renan, Edward Said. The same classical text *Germania* is used to demystify the presence of Germanic currents in French Nationalism. They saw ancient German as threat to 'Rome and its settlements, agriculture, law courts and assemblies of civil order' (Ibid: 26). Illustrating from classic *Germania* itself, Cattaneo attributed the development civilization at Mediterranean region to the urban traditions of Egypt, Phoenicia and Asia Minor.

According to Eric Hobsbawm (op.cit) nation cannot be explained completely either on the basis of objective factor or subjective grounds. Both the strands attempt to eschew from the constraints of a priori objectivism. He dismisses the attempt to define nationalism on consciousness and human will. Though he advocated the necessity of overcoming '*a priori definition* of what constitutes nation (Ibid:08), his own working definition of nation could not overcome the very limitation he raised. Hobsbawm working assumption of nation which reads as '*any sufficiently large body of people whose members regard themselves as members of a 'nation'*, will be treated as such' (Ibid, italics are added) is itself rooted in subjective criterion and consciousness.

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, Martin.op.cit:35)'.

In main stream literature of sociology, Durkheim's views on social reality and society are recognized 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 (1931) 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 (1931:87)

Nation and Durkheim's Ontology

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 nest 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 (Ibid:93) observed as 'economic anarchy equivalent to Hobbes' description of the state of nature (Ibid)'.

To check the growing anarchy, Durkheim found panacea in *spirit of association and extensive regulation of individual* along with new ideal which arouses and keeps high the spirit of self-sacrifice and devotion to overcome the problems of *moral misery and suicide*. Organizational restructuring and moral discipline are an important integrating aspects (Ibid, italics are added). Professional organization and Nationalism are the two sources of realizing the integration. He advocated the formation of professional groups on the basis of reorganization of occupational groups, which could function within the bound and limitations of the state. Specialized functions would be carried out by them which state is incapable to perform. Such organizations consisting of the persons from same occupation would fill the void between individuals and nation. By extending educational, economic and recreating facilities 'with its own manners, traditions, rules and obligations', professional organizations would bestow '*social and moral, as well as an economic milieu* (Ibid:95, italics are added).

Is Nation a social fact?

Durkheim's project of scientific sociology is intimately connected with his philosophy of nationalism. For him, Social fact to be treated as things external to individuals with coercive power and society is an all-encompassing entity not only including family, the clan, the tribe, but also *city-state, nation, religious group, occupational groups, etc* (italics are added). Nation as such is one of the forms of collective being 'with personality distinct and superior to that of its individual members (Ibid: 96)'. Then, what is the nature of nationalism as reflected in his writings? Durkheim considers nationality as the basis of state. He explicates:

A Nationality is a *group of human beings*, who for ethnical or perhaps merely for *historical reasons* desire to live under the same laws, and to form a single state; and it is now a recognized principle among civilized peoples that when this common desire has been persistently affirmed it commands respect, and is indeed the *only solid basis of a state* (Durkheim, Emile: 83-84, as cited in Marion Mitchell, Ibid:96, italics are added).

Nation is the extension of the scope of society as it is basically a group of human beings and superior to its individual members, which is built on shared understanding. Consensus built on such shared interests keeps the nation intact and serves as the source of state. It is observed that whether its nation, people, society or *la patrie*, Durkheim synonymously used such terms to denote a single thing, that is *collective being with personality distinct from and superior to that of its individual members* (Mitchell, Marion op.cit:96, italics are added). Social Facts, Society and Nation are the different points on same plane of collective being. Underlying them are the collective habits which take the shape of '*political, moral, legal or religious institutions and collective sentiments*' manifesting in the forms of '*maxims, laws and language of the group*'. Cultural aspects are foundation of 'national society'. Mitchell Marion observes 'constituent elements of his national society were, therefore, *cultural*, and his nation was largely the product of *customs, traditions and beliefs* derived from a *common historic past* (Ibid: 97, italics are added).

Basis of National Integration

What holds the nation-society coherent and intact? *Spirit of association and regulation* were the instruments in this regard. How to achieve them when moral isolation is the order in new times of organic solidarity? Durkheim found the answers in professional groups connecting between the anonymous individuals and state.

Durkheim (1960) observes:

A nation can be maintained only if between the State' and the individual, there is intercalated a whole series of secondary groups near enough to the individuals to attract them strongly in their sphere of action and drag them, in this way, into the general torrent of social life (Ibid: 27).

Second was education. Moral discipline underlines both the paths. It is through education that continuity of the society is ensured and best from individuals can be brought out in terms of values and human dignity.

Education irrespective of the diversity and specialization can inculcate certain ideals and aspects essential for the integration of nation. Durkheim, hence, advocated for the state control of education. Then what was the nature of education as reflected in the writings of Durkheim? Certainly it was not a revivalist of narrow nationalism; instead it was a blend of discipline, love for justice and respect for reason and science vital to any democratic system. Education for Durkheim 'was to be a rational entirely exclusive of ideas borrowed from revealed religion. But above all, individuals must be taught attachment to the group (Marion Mitchell, op.cit: 102)'. Hence, school is a miniature of society, agency of continuity and instrument for bringing the integration of a nation.

For Durkheim, character and content of education should be essentially *secular* in keeping up the national spirit. 'The moral and intellectual reform of France was, he believed, in large part to be achieved through education... (Martin, Thom op.cit:36)'. Particular race, tribe or religion was never a focus of Durkheim's perspective on the making of nation. Though his ideas were collectivist and structural in nature, it was not any particular bunch of factors accorded importance such as family, as quintessential properties in the constitution and continuity of nation. Its rather the individuals who were given primacy. As Martin Thom observed: Durkheim used Kant's *categorical imperative* in order to found a theory of the sacredness of the individual as abstracted from his particular race or class (Ibid: 38, italics are added). Individual here is not either oppressed or constrained; rather they are bound by the values and not by material contacts which sounds caution against the organic analogy. Hence, Durkheim's theory of nation is pillared on secular education which binds every one irrespective of the identity to which individuals belong, according importance to individuals who could be the same in their abstract and ideal qualities irrespective of the region and culture, and the bond that exists between them are based on ideal ties.

Durkheim's theory of nationalism sounds more voluntarist in character converging with Renan's theory. But it also differs from Renan's theory by not accepting the superiority of any particular tribe in the making of nation. Hence, *ethnology* has been given more priority over *history* in Durkheim's scientific sociology and illustrated the universal significance of values cherished by Australian tribes in his *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* to firmly imply that they could exist outside the

Europe. Existence of values, however, universal and noble need not be confined to particular tribe, nation or continent. Hence, celebrating the uniqueness of German race and relationship between conqueror and conquered were rejected as explaining factors in the formation of nation and nationalism. Durkheim views on nationalism are not only voluntarist but also rejection of parochial factors disguised in the form of appreciating particular tribe or race as unique.

CONCLUSION

Nation and nationalism have emerged not only as the instruments of mobilization 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 mobilizing 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 phenomena 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 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 characterized 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.

For Emile Durkheim, nation is one of the things that could be subsumed under collective entity which is above the individual. Nationalism is an instrument of integration for societies in process of *organic* solidarity where people are liberated from their traditional collective nests and experience moral isolation. National society is the result of cultural aspects such as customs, traditions and beliefs sharing common past. Common past and interests bind the people. Spirit of association, which is through professional organizations, and secular education integrates the people. Education is not based on any of the revelations of established religions. For Durkheim, individuals moulded by education are rather abstracted from identities such as religion, race and language and are bound by values. Just as the powers of society is celebrated through religion in simple societies, nation and nationalism are the integrating factors of anonymous and atomized individuals in societies traversing through the process of organic solidarity.

Nation in Renan and Durkheim's perspectives is above the religion, race, language or any other factors which vertically divide the people. It is the *common interests* in Renan's theory and *common past* in Durkheimian perspective are the constituting factors of nation and nationalism. Essence of nationalism as reflected in Renan and Durkheim's perspective is a qualified, meaningful and rational one with no space for parochial elements and schisms. But the present which is being lived finds its existence in not forgetting the past. Aggressive and excluding variants of nationalism have become medium for interpreting the past events through the lens of prejudices born at modern times, that is, fixing the responsibility to present generation for the past mistake that they have not committed. If people

do not forget the conflict and violence associated with the past, can they become nation?

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