

The Resurrection Of The Unwarranted Sparring Over Rashtra And Nation

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Abstract

These days we see a sparring over Rashtra and Nation in the media and in the academic circle especially after the addition of a new course namely Indian Knowledge system. It has been said that it is to inculcate the feeling of Bhartiya in the hearts and soul of Indians by making them aware of the achievements of Bharat in the history. There certainly is no doubt that we must be aware of our history but the emphasis that is being put over these debates seems to be sticking Indians into past and be conceited about it, rather than achieving and feeling proud about it in the modern era. It seems to be serving the interest of politics rather than of Bharat itself. Nothing seems to be more foolish than doing nothing in the current times and be happy about a dreamy history. The meaning of Rashtra changed during freedom struggle to incorporate a comprehensive meaning. Now politics is being played invoking the nationalist feeling to distract the attention of citizens from more important topic. It follows the old roman saying "Quidquid fiat, panem et circenses date, et numquam rebellabunt" meaning whatever happens, give them bread and circuses and they will never revolt.

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I. Introduction.

Though the term Rashtra and Nations are used interchangeably, it holds similar but different meanings. If we study the history of modern India and the half-baked political thoughts in this contemporary epoch, what we see is that most of the political thinkers have been giving their idea if Nation and Nationalism, which later came to be known as the conception of a Rashtra. This issue came to be highly debated during the early years of the 20th century with the rise of extremist nationalist like Tilak and Sawarkar, who tried to re-write the Indian history to spike the nationalist pulses of the newly-western educated Indian-middle class. Another reason for re-writing of history of India was to liberate the minds of Indians from foreign supremacy complex. It must be considered that most of these nationalist leaders were foreign educated themselves. When our history was being re-written, it conceived the debate *i.e. Rashtra v Nation*. The summit of this debate was till the first decade of our independence. This debate resurrected after the rise of Hindu Nationalism and demand of *Akhand Hindu Rashtra* since 2014, becoming the talk of the academic circle.

Meaning of Rashtra

The term Rashtra was first mentioned in Rig Veda where it says

विशस्त्वा सर्वा वाञ्छन्तु मा तवद राष्ट्रमधि भरशत ॥

May all people desire you (as the Ruler); may no-one rule over your Kingdom.

इन्द्रैवेह धरुवस्तिष्ठेह राष्ट्रमु धारय ॥

Be firm like Indra himself, and uphold the kingdom here.

धरुवं त इन्द्रश्चाग्निश्च राष्ट्रं धारयतां धरुवम् ॥

May Indra and Agni support your kingdom firmly and unwaveringly.

These three shlokas are from the Rig Veda, it was the teachings of the Rajdharma to the King during the royal consecration. It can be inferred that the term Rashtra is used in co-relation with the term Kingdom meaning a geographical area (Janpada) with a King (Rajan). In Atharva Veda as well, the term Rashtra is used for the same (Kingdom).

Rashtra has also been mentioned in different books of Dharmashastra, for instance Manusmriti says

राष्ट्रस्य संग्रहे नित्यं विधानम् इदम् आचरेत् ।

सुसंगृहीतराष्ट्रं हि पार्थिवः सुखम् एषते ॥ 7.113

"In governing his (King) kingdom, let him always observe the rules;

For a king who governs his kingdom well, easily prospers."

स तान् अनुपरिक्रामेत् सर्वन् एव सदा स्वयम्।
तेषां वृत्तं परिणयेत् सम्यग् राष्ट्रस्य तत्-चरैः॥ 7.122

“Let that (man) always personally visit by turn all those (other officials);
Let him properly explore their behaviour in their **district** through spies (appointed to) each.”

While the **Brihat Samhita** of Jyotish Philosophy also mentions Rashtra in

यानं वाहवियुक्तं यदि गच्छेन्न व्रजेच्च वाहयुतम् ।

राष्ट्रभयं भवति तदा चक्राणां सादभङ्गे च ॥ 46.60

When a carriage moves without horses, or does not move when dragged by them, or when the wheels stick in the mud or give way, there is imminent danger to the realm.

Netra Tantra of **Ksemarāja** from Shaiva Philosophy also mentions the term Rashtra and also uses the term Desha interchangeably.

सुतपत्नीषु रक्षार्थमात्मनो राष्ट्रवृद्धये ।

इन्द्ररूपं यजेत्तत्र विजयार्थं नृपस्य च ॥ 19.103

For the protection of sons and wives, and for the growth of one's own kingdom,
The king should worship Indra in that place, in the form of Indra, for the sake of his own victory.

अरिष्टचिह्नितात्मा वै देशो वा तत्सुतादयः ।

ब्राह्मणादिषु सर्वेषु नाशे जनपदस्य च ॥ 19.107

A land (or country), or the ruler's own sons and others, marked by ominous signs,
Including the Brahmins and others — all indicate the destruction of the kingdom.

तदा नीराजनं कार्यं रा(ज्ञा)ज्ञो राष्ट्रविवृद्धये ।

पूर्वबद्धजनं कृत्वा कलशेनाभिषेचयेत् ॥ 19.109

Then, for the prosperity of the kingdom, the king (or the wise) should perform the **Nirājana** (a ritual of waving sacred flames). Having prepared the preliminary ritual (Pūrvabadya-jana), he should perform **Abhiṣeka** (ritual anointing) with a sacred pot (kalasha).

From the above all references from Vedas and other ancient texts, it can be inferred that the term Rashtra was coterminous with Kingdom, a mere geographical realm with a polity. `

But, during the freedom struggle we needed to glorify our symbols and our ideas through narratives. For instance, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay hoped that memories would be helpful in generating the nationalist feeling. He felt that the main reason for the lack of nationalist feeling has been because the ‘Hindus’ have not been serious in writing their own history. He wanted to reclaim the past which would provide a stimulating narrative. Such a narrative would have the power of welding a common history. It is true when it is said that a nation cannot acquire greatness if it is oblivious to its past glory. Bankim gives the examples of how Europeans took great pride and were obsessed with history writing, so much so that even if they went out for shooting birds, a history of that event had to be written. In writing the history free from supernatural elements, he sought to re-establish moral, cultural and religious traditions of ancient India.

History writing from the viewpoint of the Indians was necessary to make them aware of the greatness of the nation, this required the writing of annals of even the smallest detail. Bankim scornfully remarked that even if we yawn, the act should be acknowledged as one of immortal glory of this world and hence duly recorded.’ And thus, glorification of the term Rashtra.

The interpretation of the term Rashtra changed when the Indian intelligentsia such as Aurobindo, Upadhyaya and others tried to give a different meaning to the term Rashtra altogether giving different definitions of Indian Nationalism and Bhartiya Bhumi.

- Aurobindo talked about spiritual nationalism. Nationalism is immortal. It cannot die, because it is not a creation of human beings. but is created by God. If one wants to be a nationalist, one must work for his nation. Nationalism in his opinion was a deep and fervent '**religious sadhana**'.
- Upadhyaya talked about **Chiti as the soul of the nation**. About Chiti, he says “If there is any standard for determining the merits and demerits of particular action, it is this, Chiti; from nature whatever is in accordance with 'Chiti', is approved and added on to culture. These things are to be cultivated. Whatever is against 'Chiti', is discarded as perversion, undesirable, is to be avoided. Chiti is the touchstone on which each action, each attitude is tested, and determined to be acceptable or otherwise. 'Chitti' is the soul of the nation. On the strength of this 'Chiti', a nation arises, strong and virile if it is this 'Chiti' that is demonstrated in the actions of every great man of a nation.

An individual is also in instrument in bringing forth the soul of the nation "Chiti". Thus, apart from his own self, an individual also represents his nation. Not only that, but he also mans the various institutions that are created for the fulfillment of the national goal. Therefore, he represents these too. The groups larger than nation such as "mankind" are also represented by him. In short, an individual has a multitude of aspect, but they

are not conflicting; there is co-operation, unity and harmony in them. A system based on the recognition of this mutuality complementary nature of the different ideals of mankind, their essential harmony, a system which devises laws, which removes the disharmony and enhances these mutual usefulness and co-operation, alone can bring peace and happiness to mankind; can ensure steady development.”

What we see, when we study the nationalist thinkers, they came up with as part of nationalism, be it Tilak, Aurobindo, Upadhyaya or any other nationalist leader of the freedom movement. They defined nationalism with addition of a different aspect that is spiritualism. Which separates the Rashtra from the western concept of Nation.

Meaning of Nation.

Various definitions of the term Nation have been given so far, and none of them are comprehensive enough to include all the nations of the globe.

Various definitions of Nation

Ernest Renan came up with voluntaristic definition of Nation based on ‘Will, memory and consciousness.’ His definition of nation had two characteristics.

1. It viewed nation as being formed through the *Forces of History*.
2. It rejected the notion that nations are formed by natural boundaries such as rivers, oceans and mountains.

Instead, they were formed by subjective factors such as will and consciousness.

Talking about the existence of nation. He says “Nations are not something eternal. They have begun; they will end. They will be replaced in all probability, by a European confederation.” Further on the importance of nation he says “But such is not the law of the century in which we live. At the present time the existence of nations happens to be good, even necessary. Their existence is a guarantee of liberty, which would be lost if the world had only one law and only one master.”

Renan’s definition was/is very subjective while the definition given by

Joseph Stalin, the *communist dictator of USSR*, was particularly objective. 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.” Though it is the biggest crime to disagree with a dictator, but you can do it if he is not from your country or he is dead leaving no predecessor. So, Stalin’s definition only accounts for the physical or materialistic features of the nation and thus his definition was not comprehensive either.

There also exists a third idea about the concept of nation, which believes that first nationalism came in existence and then nation came into being. We find this, if we carefully examine the definitions of nation by **Benedict Anderson** and **Ernest Gellner**.

Anderson says “a bond between people that comes to exist when the members of a nation recognize themselves and their compatriots to be part of a nation.” And Gellner defines it as “if and when the members of the category firmly recognize certain mutual rights and duties to each other in virtue of their shared membership. It is their recognition of each other as fellows of this kind which turns them into a nation.”

It can be inferred from the definitions of both the scholars that when people come together in solidarity with the other people of the same community, culture or territory and accept them as their own then they form the nation. This does not apply on the already existing developed nations since they create their justification through the ideology of nationalism.

If we apply this on the idea of India as a nation, what we see is that India was not one, but was subdivided into various sub-regions for example Madras, Bangal, Bihar, Maratha, Rajputana or Garo, Khasi, Jintia or Naga. But when all of them come against the British Imperialism they felt the idea of oneness, that was the Indian Nationalism. And when India became independent it was becoming a nation. As it was said “India is a nation in making.”

The Rashtra v. Nation Debate

We have seen debates over Rashtra and Nation happening in India. It happened to boost the ego of Indians and make them mentally capable of rejecting the subjugation of the British Imperialists. Who, Indians along with Britishers thought, were superior race and thus their superiority was accepted in all the aspects, *i.e.* culturally, economically, educationally, mentally, physically, socially, politically and all the other aspects of a civilization. Indian nationalist through a narrative gave Rashtra a better meaning adding spiritual context and for its legitimacy related this meaning coming from Vedas and Upanishads, while it only meant Kingdom – a mere combination of territory with a polity.

India is certainly not nation, since it does not fit in the frame of any definition but then the Indian nationalists would say that we are a Rashtra which is better than a nation. We shall first ask the question that

“Are Rashtra and Nation really different?” There is not much of difference between a Rashtra and a Nation. So, what is the difference? The only difference between a Rashtra and a nation is that Indian nationalist talked about spiritualism in nationalism and thus differentiating Rashtra from Nation. Rashtra in its old sense was no better than a Nation. Rashtra was coterminous with state.

It had nothing to do with a nationalist feeling. The Bhartiya identity was a *supranational identity*. Kings had nations, a citizens belonged them but they were Indian as currently a person is French, German, Italian or Spanish but they also identify themselves with a European identity. There is various similarity between European and Bhartiya identity.

- Both are geographically a sub-continent.
- Neither have/had a central authority.
- Neither have a common history, culture, society, geography, economy, consciousness.
- Neither are/were under the same authority (state) but Identify with a common identity.

The Rashtra is nothing but a carefully cultivated theory getting its base on the identity of Indian sub-continent. It is not natural, since any of its features are not coming to be true. First and the foremost feature of it is unity despite of huge diversity, diversity such as of religion, race, language, tribes, culture, region and other such differences. But none of them come to be true. We see constant riots and religious conflicts, we see demands of Khalistan, we see racial discrimination and conflicts for example the Aryan and Dravidian conflicts; where Dravidians demands their own nation and Aryans emphasize their superiority. We see people are being beaten for not speaking Kannada in Karnataka or Marathi in Maharashtra, or people rejects other's language. Tamilians rejects Hindi and Hindi speakers rejects all the Dravidian language. In fact, Tamil speaking people demand their own Tamil Zanga. We see insurgence in North East, where all the tribes have their Militancy outfit. Nagas have NSCN-K, NSCN-IM; Manipur have United Nation Liberation Front (UNLF), People's Revolutionary Party of Keigleipak (PREPAK), People Liberation Army (PLA) of Manipur, Kuki's have Kuki National Organization (KNO), United People's Forum. Mizos had Mizo National Front. While In Meghalaya, Garo National Liberation Army (GNLA), Achik National Volunteer Council (ANVC) and Liberation of Achik Elite Force (LAEF) demands a different nation for Garo tribal peoples. Hynniewtre National Liberation Tribes (HNLT) represents Khasi-Jintia tribes while National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) talks about Bodo country. While the same goes for Tripura Upjati Juba Samiti (TUJS) and National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) is for Assamese. They do not want to live with India with a Bhartiya Identity, Militancy in Kashmir all this situation occurred because the Bhartiya Rastriya identity is not natural. We see a rise in discrimination against the northeastern people South Indian in North India and vice-versa.

Rather than finding a way to actually uniting the disintegrating country and not with the iron law and fist of the state, we see a *resurgence of these debates*. It was needed to boost the ego of Indians so that they get the courage and mental strength to go against British colonizers but now *why are we having a debate on this? why do we need to prove only in our country that be are better than Europeans?* We are having this debate to fill the hearts of people with jingoism so politics can serve its interest.

II. Conclusion

We must learn our history and feel proud about it. But we must not stick into history. It shall be our contemporary achievement that shall make us better. We shall be asking better questions such as *how can we hold political leaders accountable in the era of A.I. as they can term evidences against them as deepfake? Why government was silent on Manipur? Why do states and tribes demand a different nation? Why they don't want to live with us?* or having debates over the topic of *impact of Artificial Intelligence on politics, or Failure of political opposition in the country or delay in judgements of the Supreme Court, waning trust of citizenry on the judiciary or lack of accountability in Judiciary and so many more*. It does not really matter what is better Rashtra or Nation it is upon us, what can we make better. We can make India better and chose to adopt the identity and that identity will itself be better.

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