

rather than their rejection for ever-newer alternatives or holding on to one at all costs. In this process, disciplinary boundaries will naturally get transcended. The process of ever-transcending paradigms means ever-encompassing levels of abstractions, not through piece-meal, patchwork knitting but moving towards an organic dialectically designed embroidery. If the South Asian encounters to its nation-building challenges spawn a social science knowledge that effectively demonstrates to the world how such a complex plurality can cohere, it would make to the world a lasting contribution.

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Notes

- (1) In the early sixties when T.K. Oommen and myself (without knowing each other) had elected to work for our Ph.D. on the same gramdan (literally, village gift) sarvodaya (literally, welfare-or-all) movements inspired by Gandhian ideology at widely different places, both of us were subject to well-meaning, condescending, good humoured banter by some of our masters in Indian Sociology. Quite clearly we were doing something interesting, but was it sociology was the question.
- (2) Several young faculty in Jawaharlal Nehru University, a premier university in India bemoan that problem-oriented, field work based rigorous research is on decline.
- (3) The Tata Institute of Social Sciences where a regular diploma is offered in Research Methodology, is an exception. Here, its traditional positivistic approach is undergoing change in favour of a balanced mix between quantitative and qualitative methods.
- (4) This point got strongly underscored in the debate that took place in the South Asian Regional Conference of Sociology in Mumbai. A number of case studies of development projects which were formulated by planner economists and handed over to applied sociologists for successful implementation were presented. Inevitably, the drawbacks of implementation were attributed to the limitations of the sociologists. This is precisely the point that was conveyed by Gore, as indicated earlier.

CHAPTER 1 NATION-STATE REFORMULATED: INTERROGATING RECEIVED WISDOM(1)

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Introduction

At the turn of the century when we are poised to assess the rich heritage of Sociology and the Social Sciences, it is appropriate to confront one of the most troublesome set of concepts causing universal disquiet and unease, viz, ethnicity, nation, nationalism, nationality and the nation-state. Perhaps no other field in the social sciences is beset with so much ambiguity, controversy and hence, so little clarity. The concepts and theories are amongst the most politically pregnant and volatile, having serious consequences for peoples, their cultures, their lives and well-being and cumulatively, for the world. Presently, the world, particularly the post-colonial countries, are ridden with the political consequences of this conceptual ambiguity. The level of confusion has reached a point where even the social science literati and political leaders are not yet clear about the political identity of the people with whom they identify in the emergent world political system.

Problematique

"Nation" remains one of the most puzzling and tendentious items in the political 'lexicon', observes Charles Tilly (1975, p. 6). Notwithstanding the truth of this statement, definitions of *nation* can be broadly categorized into, (a) those which conceptually regard the nation as *independent* of the state, and (b) those which regard it as *congruent* with the state.

The first set of views appear to attach a certain degree of *voluntariness* and strong *normativeness* to the concept. Illustratively, Essien-Udon holds the view that ultimately what matters is that there just has to be a 'body of people who feel they are a nation' (cited in Oommen 1997, p. 22; 1962, p. 104). Or, a similar echo which holds that it is sufficient that 'a significant number of people in a community consider themselves to form a nation or behave as if they formed one' (cited in Oommen 1997, p. 22; Seton-Watson 1977, p. 5). Or, the description of a nation 'as a self-differentiating ethnic group' which needed no 'tangible' characteristic of its existence or non-existence (cited in Oommen 1997, p. 21-22; Connor 1994, p. 40-43). Oommen himself defines nation

more exclusively as 'a territorial entity to which the people have an emotional attachment and in which they have invested a moral meaning: it is a homeland - ancestral or adopted ... It is the fusion of territory and language which makes a nation; a nation is a community in communication in its homeland' (1997, p. 3, italics added). For him, quite clearly, the nation exists independent of the state and he approvingly endorses the view that states can exist without a nation or with several nations... nations can be coterminous with the population of one state or be included together with other nations within one state or be divided between several states' (cited in Oommen 1997, p. 18; Seton-Watson 1977, p. 1).

Several questions arise: (i) Can the identification and definition of *nation* be as arbitrary and normative as to be left to the subjective feeling of collective self-consciousness of a group? (ii) Is the nation and *emic* identification or an *etic* construct of the scientist? (iii) How many cultures and peoples in the world have any equivalence of the Anglo-Saxon western concept of nation in their own languages to be able to self-consciously feel that they constitute nation? (iv) How does one empirically identify the *territorial homeland* of a people? What if the settled national population don't accept "settler-ethnics" who have adopted the new homeland? They do not constitute a nation according Oommen. (2)

The concept of the *state-independent nation* does not appeal as a powerful analytical tool. In the burgeoning body of literature in this field no clear distinction between the ethnic group, ethnicity, nation etc. is visible. For example, what is *ethnie* to Smith, is *nation* to Oommen. (3) But Oommen appropriates the concept by eliminating territoriality from it. The *nation* for Connors, Seton-Watson, Essien-Udom and the like is practically indistinguishable from the *politically self-conscious ethnic community* of Brass, which for him is *ethnicity* (Connors, 1994; Seton-Watson 1962; Essien-Udom 1962; Brass 1991).

Each of these concepts pale into each other in different hands so much so that one is set wondering as to whether or not the single-most important consideration that lies behind endowing cultural groups with nation and nationalism, is the manifest or latent anxiety that the steam-rolling nation-state in its homogenising operation will crush their identities. But contemporary history bears testimony to the fact that the modern nation-state has in fact facilitated the proliferation of ever-new cultural groups rather than stifled them. The critical variable that needs to be addressed here, it seems to me, is to the *form* of the modern nation-state, whether this is *democratic* or *totalitarian* or *fascist*. It is this variable, more than any other, to my mind, which relates to the absence or presence of homogenising threats. It should be clear that 'defining a nation by its members' consciousness of belonging to it is tautological and provides only an *a posteriori* guide to what a nation is' (Hobsbawm 1990, p.7-8). One of the most serious limitations of an ethnicity - oriented definition of

nation is that it precludes other structural bases of nation formation, like class, gender, "secular" interest groups and so on. Man/woman does not survive by ethno-culture alone. Ethno-based conceptualizations of nation may carry within it the potential seeds of fascist ideology. In an age in which large shifts of population have taken place all over the world, very few, if any, territories today remain ethnically homogeneous in any absolute fixed sense of the term. Therefore, majoritarian ethno-nations could become prone to intolerance of minority ethnic groups leading to their subjugative existence. The culturally 'emancipated', can turn, perpetrator of the same oppression from which it had emancipated itself.(4)

The other set of formulations on nation are paradigmatically different as the background assumptions are different. It argues that the nation-state is a product of recent history marked by the process of industrialization and the development of capitalist production, on the one hand, and a series of wars culminating in the two World Wars, the League of Nations, and United Nations, on the other (Gellner 1983).

Sources of Anxiety

One of the principal sources of anxiety in the first orientation, to my mind is presumably embedded in the dangers perceived in homogenising, assimilationist and melting-pot formulations associated with industrializing modern nation-states. Both Marxist and capitalist versions seem to converge here. Marx and Engels regarded the modern nation as a historical phenomenon that had "to be located in a precise historical period of the ascendance of the bourgeoisie as a hegemonic class, which at the same time [was] the period of consolidation of the capitalist mode of production" (Nimni 1985, p. 62). Gellner too predicted that mature industrialization, involving increased social mobility, a standard high culture facilitated by a uniform mode of communication, will result in the homogenization of the society. In such a dynamic, most of the folk-cultures will opt for the high culture. Those which will not, would be considered as "counter-entropic" and would either remain a problem, or could develop a parallel high culture out of the folk- culture and form an autonomous state (1983, p. 61).

Such propositions are problematic for the culturally plural states like those of South Asia. The counter reaction to this kind of perceived threat of homogenization of the modern industrializing nation-state, has led almost to the denial of this socio-political entity by the protagonists of the first orientation. At the same time, emergent nation-states are going ahead with their nation-building project. South Asian countries have experienced one partition and one secession, even so they are confronted with serious ethnic strifes which can only be ignored at the cost of far-reaching consequences.

This unease and anxiety affected our national leadership since the time of our anti-colonial nationalist struggles. Living in an era devastated by two World Wars, which bared the ugly side of western nationalism, neither Tagore nor Gandhi wished "their society to be caught in a situation where the idea of the Indian nation could supersede that of the Indian civilization, and where the actual ways of life of Indians would be assessed solely in terms of the needs of an imaginary nation-state called India" (Nandy 1994, p. 3).

Notwithstanding these anxieties the fact is that the civilizational base of the Indian nation of Gandhi and Tagore's perceptions gave way to two nations, one based on *religious-ethno-nationalism* and the other, on a more broad-based *civic-secular nationalism*. Pre-colonial Indian sub-continent was characterized by a multiplicity of kingdoms and chiefdoms with ever-changing political boundaries over time. Post-colonial sub-continent in its historical evolution presented its new configuration of states. The difference between the pre-and post-colonial political configurations of the sub-continent lay in a transition from the fluid monarchical-feudal-patriarchal political entities to the more stable modern nation-state, now part of the international "system of states acknowledging, and to some extent guaranteeing, each other's existence" (Tilly 1975 p. 45).

It is important to describe very briefly the constellation of social and political forces that made up the Indian National Movement (INM), if only to understand the secular content of civic nationalism that provided the basis for independent India. Desai in his seminal contribution identifies five phases in the historic evolution of the INM. These five phases of the Indian national movement indicate that class and ethnic mobilizations provided the civic-secular content unique to the freedom struggle of independent India (Desai 1976).

Nation-State Reformulated

No matter how many varieties of attributes by which ethnic group/ethnicity has been defined, '*cultural commonality*, differentiating one group/category from another, emerges as the attribute common to all definitions, making it *the* distinguishing feature of an ethnic group/category... the objective cultural markers for such commonality could be *any* cultural attribute(s), singly or in combination' (Mukherji 1994, p. 23). I now propose the following theoretical framework:

1. The logic of identification of an ethnic group lies in the internalization of cultural attributes and/or values, by its members, since birth or through long socialization. The cultural attributes so internalized are available through ancestry or history - real, imagined or invented - for delineation as boundary markers for ethnic categories/groups (categories refer here to statistical aggregates, whilst groups, to members within it formed by a sense of consciousness of kind). These factors of *ascription* and/or *long socialization*

can be regarded as the least common denominators of the phenomenon of ethnic groups. Thus we are born into a language, race, caste, even region and into religion (or converted). Eriksen quite pertinently observes "only in so far as *cultural differences* are *perceived* as being important, and are made *socially relevant*, do social relationships have an ethnic element" (Eriksen 1993, p. 12).

2. The politicization of an ethnic group/category leads to its ethnicisation and ethnicity can become the basis for mobilization of ethnic movements, such movements can be broadly categorized as (a) those which target their change objectives within the framework of the nation-state, as opposed to those, (b) which seek to establish a new nation consistent with a sovereign state.

3. It will be clear that in this conceptual scheme, nationalism can exist prior to the establishment of a nation-state, whilst 'a people' constitutes a nation only when it becomes congruent with a sovereign state. This view does not subscribe to the theoretical position that ethnicity is the sole basis of a nation if it is culturally 'homogeneous' enough to make interest/corporate group demands for its members, even when its objective is not sovereignty. There are three fallacies associated with this view. It does not recognize that (a) within the same so-called culturally homogeneous ethnic group (in a polyethnic society), there are strong possibilities that it will be further culturally differentiated, such that members of the group will have multiple intersecting ethnic identities, each of which having the potential of weakening the existing ethnicity in favour of another; (b) the ethnic group is additionally, in all likelihood, structurally differentiated in terms of class inequalities and exploitation, which again could generate contradictions undermining the apparent cultural integration of the group; and finally, (c) non-ethnic factors are relevant or critical to the concept of the nation. Sterling examples are that of inter-ethnic differentiation of religious and caste ethnicities in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, the ethnic-class differentiations of class and ethnicity in Bihar and Gorkhaland in West Bengal.

4. When the basis (for mobilization) for contestation of the nationalism of the existing state is ethnic, the resulting phenomenon is ethno-nationalism. This is not to say that this is the *only* form of nationalism that contests the nationalism of an *existing* nation-state, nor is it the case that ethno-nationalism provides the ideological basis for *every* sovereign state. *Civic (non-ethnic) nationalism* can be distinguished from ethno-nationalism.(5) For example, as observed earlier, whilst religious ethno-nationalism provided the foundation of the state of Pakistan, civic nationalism provided the spirit of the Indian Constitution.

5. Ethnic and ethno-nationalist movements are grounded more firmly in cultural particularistic values, whilst class and civic (non-ethnic) nationalist movements are, generally speaking, cultural-universalistic. However, members of no ethnic movement, however 'parochial' are wholly particularistic in their

orientation, nor is it the fact that members of 'secular' organizations or movements are wholly universalistic. *Every member of ethnic or 'secular' group is a complex of particularistic and universalistic values, in different ratios.*

6. The other domains can broadly be identified as: class, power, gender and eco-environmental. Embedded in each of these domains are structures of asymmetrical or competing relationships, both social (as in the case of ethnic, class, power, and gender), and as between the social and the physical (as in the case of the eco-environmental domain).

7. Contradictions can be antagonistic or non-antagonistic. The presence of contradictions whether antagonistic or not, does not ipso facto give rise to social conflicts. However, the fact of social conflict can inevitably be related to the contradictions which give rise to it.

8. The type of social movement - whether ethnic, class, gender, eco-environmental, or one arising out of sheer oppression - can be identified by the locus of its principal/primary contradiction in their respective domains. Conflicting/competing *interests* associated with the conflict, facilitate the location and identification of contradictions.

9. Given that a social system can be defined in terms of interrelated and interpenetrating structures of asymmetries of the domains, assuming that the 'whole' social system is greater than the sum of its domains and their structures of asymmetries, we can attempt to describe a social system as a constellation of contradictions characterizing the social system. It follows, that a social movement arising out of primary contradiction(s) in any one (or more) of the domains, will necessarily have *interfaces* with other contradictions within the same or other domains. Thus an ethnic movement may have a class/power/gender interface, whilst a class movement may have ethnic/power/gender interface and so on. (Example: Naxalite movement, Naxalbari peasant revolt, Bhojpur movement, Gorkhaland movement, Ayodhya phenomenon).

10. Primary contradictions are never deterministically fixed to any given domain. Therefore, social movements arising out of primary contradiction in any one domain, may be overtaken at a later stage, by a contradiction within the same or a different domain, which then becomes primary, changing the character of the movement, or giving rise to a different one. Thus, an ethno-religious movement can be overtaken by an ethno-caste movement, and vice versa, when they are in opposition with each other. It is also possible for oppositions to reach political accommodation (as the recent occurrences in Uttar Pradesh would seem to suggest). This is the theoretical articulation of a non-deterministic dialectic.

11. It follows that the study of social movements as case or category isolates will have limited yield in terms of explanation or understanding, unless an attempt is made to *relate* different varieties of movements within the overall macro perspective of the nation-state and its construction. Thus the study of

ethnic movements in isolation from other movements is likely to prove inadequate for the study of ethnic movements themselves.

12. In this perspective, state formation and nation-building are two analytically separate processes, with different historicities. The formation of a state does not, ipso facto, necessarily mean the establishment of a crystallized nation-state. It does mean, more often than not, the beginning of a *crystallizing nation-state*. The process of transition from a *crystallizing* to a *crystallized nation-state* is the task of nation-state building. *The nation-state covers the whole range of non-linear, zig-zag stages through which the crystallizing nation-state attempts to crystallize as a nation-state.*

13. This period, of the process of crystallization of the nation-state is generally characterized by internal strifes and conflicts, sometimes fierce and violent and at other times non-violent, leading to accommodations, adjustments, new syntheses or ruptures. *Social movements and conflicts, ethnic and non-ethnic can be regarded as the solid building-blocks of a strong and crystallized nation-state.*

14. The processes and conditions leading to the crystallization of a pluri-ethnic nation-state is marked by an overwhelming majority of its people, representing different cultural identities, with competing and conflicting interests and values, internalizing an evolved, shared set of values, which then provide the legitimate basis for its major societal institutions - economic, political and social.

15. The maturing of a crystallized nation-state does not signal the end of contradictions and conflicts. It only means the nation-state is much less vulnerable to dismemberment and disintegration. *The ultimate loyalty of the people to its state, in an affective-emotional-cultural sense, is strongly internalized.*

16. A nation-state once having been institutionally crystallized, need not remain settled for all times. Social changes can be generated through endogenous and/or exogenous sources, introducing new contradictions, unsettling the erstwhile legitimacy of its institutions and institutional mechanisms. *In this sense, nation-state building is not a one-shot affair, it is a continuous process.*

17. Conceptually, the 'state' is the discrete 'structure' relative to the 'nation', which is a 'cultural' variable. When the state finds its congruence with the nation, or, nationalism finds its congruence with the state, we have a crystallizing nation-state. For the developing countries at the "periphery" with a colonial legacy, the state-centred nationalist project is a structural imperative for it to survive and resist the exploitation from the institutionalized nation-states at the "core", and that of the trans-national formations which have their locus of power at the 'centres' of economic dominance.

18. Just as the state-centred nationalist project can crystallize into a nation-state, ethno-nationalist project too can culminate into a sovereign state. Ethno-

nationalisms which do not culminate into sovereign states, could very well constitute stages in ethnic incorporation and legitimation in the dialectic of state-centred nationalist projects.

Nation-State: South Asian Concern

The South Asian states with varying political systems, are among the late entrants into the institutionalized international system of sovereign states which has evolved historically since the seventeenth century. They are crystallizing nation-states each with their own project of crystallization for their nation-states. They are in one sense or the other, engaged in the *task* of nation-state building.

We have observed in our paradigm that the task of nation-building is not confined to the management of ethnic aspirations and competing ethnicities, it includes no less, constant accommodations of class, gender, eco-environmental and projects related to the shaping and sharing of power, and more. None of these domains stand in isolation from the others. Ethnicity and ethno-nationalism are, hardly restricted to preserving just *cultural symbolic traditions* of a group under real or imagined threat, it generally appears in combination with the *instrumental* aspects related to material and other (non-cultural symbolic) deprivations as Oommen has suggested. Every crystallizing nation-state has its own configuration of contradictions with which it has to engage.

Given India's unique complexity of culture and structure it would be surprising if it has an easy passage into becoming a crystallized nation-state. There are many simultaneous contestations of ethnicity and ethno-nationalism, of class interests, of gender issues, over eco-environmental dangers, of sheer concerns of state and non-state forms of repression that are seeking their resolutions. We are experiencing secessionist insurgency movements (Kashmir and the North-East), movements related to development and displacement, farmers' movements, scheduled castes and tribal movements, backward caste movements, gender movements now for parity in power sharing, eco-environmental movements which stand vigil on degradation of nature, and so on. India has experienced the process of ethno-nationalisms stabilizing as incorporated ethnicities resulting in structural elaboration of the socio-political system.

Through social movements and conflicts the Indian nation-state is going through a continuous process of *societal differentiations and integrations*. Democracy in India is more than the sum total of its democratic institutions, its vitality lies in allowing for the *constant creation of democratic space*.

I would hazard observing, Pakistan has failed to negotiate with Bengali linguistic ethno-nationalism that resulted in Bangladesh, but its process of ethnic incorporation of the Baluchis and Pathans seems to be moving in the

direction of the process of integration (Phadnis 1990, p. 175-190). The recent trend towards evolution of the democratic institutions is a healthy signal of social transformation which is likely to facilitate the class, gender, eco-environmental and other contradictions to find their place in the task of nation-state building.

Sri Lanka is beset with the challenge of ethno-nationalism. Its historicity clearly suggests how material and political factors have combined to sharpen the ethno-nationalistic contradictions. It remains to be seen how the dialectics of the ethnic opposition will work itself out (Phadnis 1990, p. 190-206).

In passing, the Indian experience is of some value. No matter how severe has been the threat perception of ethno-nationalism, whether this has been the past history of insurrections in the North East or the current problem in Kashmir, India has not sought a solution through ethnic swamping of these areas by other ethnic groups to offset demographic advantages of ethno-nationalist aspirations. Secondly, the attempt has always been to extend the democratic institutions to facilitate the sharing of power by the alienated and aggrieved groups. The third important strategy of state craft has been to address to the economic development of these regions through the democratic process. Finally, cultural articulations of their distinctiveness have been allowed fuller expression and national recognition through a variety of symbolic and substantive channels.

I have observed elsewhere that *'in the Indian context ethnic identity and Indian national identity are not necessarily mutually antagonistic or exclusive, the former is often a necessary condition for the latter'* (1994, p. 48).

The term Indian civilization has become a narrower concept in the present times. It is more appropriate to speak of a *South Asian civilization* of which we all are sharers. It sounds reasonable to suggest that not only for India, but for all the South Asian countries, South Asian civilization perhaps would form a firmer basis for their nation-states. This could provide a new perspective which could open up and enable the natural channels of intercommunication and cooperation between the peoples of SAARC countries, as co-sharers of a common civilization, to take place unhindered with mutual respect for each other's sovereignty. A millennia-deep civilization is an immense repository of cultural resources from which competing and conflicting values can draw their symbolic inspirations, play out their contradictions within the broad paradigm of unity of opposites.

Notes

(1) The last Programme Committee meeting of the International Sociological Association witnessed yet another round of inconclusive debate on the inefficiency of the Anglo-Saxon (American) concepts and the urgent need to replace these by *indigenous* ones. While, the Latin American sociologists from Peru argued forcefully on

this, Piotr Sztompka expressed the incredibility of such a proposition which would put to nought a century old heritage. I suggested that we could regard concepts to be in *motion* (just like societies). If a given conceptual-theoretical framework constructed out of a given historical situation lacked a goodness-off-fit with reference to a different historical situation, then, consistent with the logic of history and philosophy of science, it was necessary to try and alter it such that in the reformulated form it satisfies the explanatory, causal or *verstehenian* conditions of both the situations. In this way, we could move towards greater universalization of concepts and theories. Failing this, scope for an alternate framework with paradigmatic implications would open up.

(2) According to Oommen, "...to become nationals in a territory into which a group immigrates is not simply a matter of that group's choice, but also its acceptance by the earlier inhabitants" Oommen 1997, p. 20).

(3) *Ethnie* as defined by Smith has six characteristics : collective name, a common myth of descent, a shared history, a distinctive shared culture, an association with a specific territory, a sense of solidarity. Oommen regards the six characteristics as actually making the *nation*, and only when the attribute 'territory' is removed from it does it become an *ethnie*. On this basis of re-appropriation of the concept *ethnie*, he elaborates a theory, in which a person or group oscillates between a nation and an *ethnie* depending upon whether territorially the person/group is in or out of its ancestral or adopted homeland (Oommen, 1997, p. 20).

(4) Hobsbawm refers to this as the "dangerous element" incorporated in the late nineteenth century democratization of politics which "implied (and imply) the break up of all large pluri-ethnic and pluri-lingual states and, since humanity is not in fact divided into neatly separable pieces of homogenous territory, the forcible homogenization of ethnic-linguistic nation-states. The methods for achieving this have, since 1915, ranged from mass population transfers to genocide" (Hobsbawm, 1996, pp. 270 - 271).

(5) I came across an almost identical conceptual distinction made by Jack Snyder : "*Ethnic* nationality is based on the consciousness of a shared identity within a group, rooted in a shared culture and a belief in common ancestry. *Civic* nationality, by contrast, is inclusive within a territory. Membership in the national group is generally open to everyone who is born or permanently resident within the national territory" (Snyder 1993, p. 7).

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