Global Issues and Local Realities: "Nation" in Folk and Corporate Cultures

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Abstract: The present phase of cultural confluence, across the globe, has claimed major shifts in the patterns of human behavior and its socio-political manifestation. Be it the representation through any cultural artifact in particular or the changing geo-political spectacles of the world in general a state of hybridity is clearly visible. As far as the factors shaping the public opinion, distribution of resources and cultural configuration is concerned ,there has never been such shuffling of people and shifting of boundaries, intertwining of histories and overlapping of cultures as observed in the last three decades. The causes are, for this, too many to be enumerated. These may stretch from the emergence of a uni-polar world, increasing trends in power equation and sinister forms of economic colonialism to the satellite networking of regional groups and super expanding world trade. Consequently all the cultures have intermixed, and none has remained single and pure. A panorama of hybridity, heterogeneity and unmonolithic vision is clearly visible. In the contemporary socio-political structure of India two streams of thoughts are flowing side by side - the stream of the corporate/ elite and that of the masses. On the one hand, the poverty line goes down approximately 1$ per day as income, on the other there are classes that spend and earn more than thousands of dollars per day. The perception of the corporate class and common folk on different issues of society vary. The present paper focuses on the concept of nation as visualized by the above mentioned two classes in Indian socio-political structure.

Key Words: Corporate Class, Folk, Indian Socio-political structure, Culture, Nation

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1. Introduction

The present paper is based on a research report submitted to Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi. Its idea - formation goes back to my visit to France in 2010. I was staying at Cité Internationale Universitaire de Paris, France, and looking back home in nostalgia and romantic nationalizing of thoughts. In this state of mind, I came across a group of young professionals from India who were staying in Paris, and shared my feelings on the issues of nation and nationalism, which followed an informal debate with no consensus. Their pleading for the concept of liquidity of nationalism, economic nationalism, cyber space etc. was almost offending my idea of traditional nationalism. It was an interesting duel of ideas where no party won till the end. Coming back , and ruminating upon the issue of 'nation', and language , a research proposal, entitled "*Language and Nation in Folk and Corporate Cultures-A Study of the Communication of the Select Business Executives in the National Capital Region of India and the Common Folks (Masses)in Different Parts of North India*" which was generously sponsored by Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi.

2.Concept of Nation and Nationality:

India has accepted the trend of globalization ,in the true sense of the term ,from the early years of the 1990'. And if we talk abot the socio-cultural milieu, the masses are eagerly looking towards the ways of corporate world . The values and thinking of Gen X has almost given way to those of Gen Y. The socio-cultural set up in India ,when we talk of 2014, is redefining and restructuring itself. In a way, we can say that,"the present time has brought many avenues before human race, and a human being is almost baffled in making a choice " [1]

'Nation' and 'Language' are two issues that need greater attention. The concept of nation and the purport of language are different for the masses and the 'classes' especially in many sub-cultural trajectories. Casting a relook at the feeling of nationalism also needs attention in this regard.

If we analyse the formulation and development of the concept of nationalism, it emerges as a contentious subject. In fact, the history of nationalism, itself, is controversial. Noted thinker on nationalist studies Kedourie has found that nationalism is a doctrine invented in Europe in 1789, which got spread through the French Revolution (Kedourie 1966). The concept of "nation", "nationality" and "nationalism" have shown variegated connotation in the modern world. Their interpretation by different political and ideological leaders has caused upheavals from time to time. The Glorious Revolution of England (1688), The French Revolution (1789), October Revolution of the USSR (1917) and the American War of Independence (1775-1783) speak volumes on it. These interpretations stand liable for the making of not only the states

concerned but also the making of modern Italy, Germany and Japan. India and other colonial dependencies of the worlds, too, have got impetus from these facts. Charles Downer Hazen's remark on the issue of nation is quite appropriate for an introduction of the fact:

> The history of the modern world is a record of highly varied activity, of incessant change and of astonishing achievement. The lives of men, have, during the last few centuries, become intensely diversified, their powers have been greatly multiplied, their horizons have been enormously enlarged, amid all the bewildering phenomena the determination of the race to gain a larger measure of freedom than it has ever known before, the freedom in the life of the intellect and spirit, freedom in the realm of government and law, freedom in the sphere of economic and social relationship. [2]

He adds, "not that this passion was unknown to the... ancient Hebrews, the ancient Greeks and Romans... and the men who made the Renaissance of the fifteenth century and the reformation of the sixteenth.... But it is in modern times that the pace and vigour, the scope and sweep of this liberal movement have so increased as unquestionably to dominate the age." [3]

If we go through the contemporary concepts of nationalism in democratic set up, we find it quite controversial. Nationalism has many elusive connotations that are hard to pin down. Its definitions and purports are ambiguous and diversified. Due to its flexibility, the liberals, the conservatives, the Marxists, the Nazis and the Fascists etc. have molded the concept to serve their purpose. A majority of scholars have held nationalism, as a specific concept, beginning with the French revolution (1789) and spreading throughout Europe in the nineteenth century. Many other scholars have traced the history of nationalism back to the great process of nation building that has carried on in the early modern world when the European nations like France and England were under the process of consolidation. Of course the development of the nation state in the preceding centuries had prepared the way of its emergence as a full-blown political-ideology at the end of the eighteenth century but that the development of the nation-state in the preceding centuries had prepared the way for its emergence.

The subsequent history of nationalism testifies to its power and variety. Nationalism has developed in a number of different directions, and it has been used by a variety of political actors in the forms of the communists, fascists, liberals, conservatives, imperialists and anti-colonialists. In fact, nationalism epitomizes certain general traits of adaptability which characterizes ideologies. The French Revolution, on its outset in 1789, had borne liberal political credentials by calling for the representative government, and respect for individual rights. At the same time it was claimed that sovereignty was vested in the nation; dynastic authority yielded to rule by the nation. The French Revolution had set off a series of nationalist revolts in Europe. The association of nationalism with liberal ideas, however, is not inevitable. Ideologies change according to the circumstances of time and place.

In this regard the view of Benedict Anderson is quite appropriate, who says about nationality that:

> It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. Renan referred to this imagining in his suavely back-handed way when he wrote that, "*l'essence d'une nation est que tons les individus aient beaucoup de choses en commun, et aussi que tous aient oublié bien des choses.*" With certain ferocity Gellner makes a comparable point when he rules that 'Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist.' The drawback to this formulation, however, is that Gellner is so anxious to show that nationalism masquerades under false pretences that he assimilates 'invention' to 'fabrication' and 'falsity', rather than to 'imagining' and 'creation'. In this way he implies that 'true' communities exist which can be advantageously juxtaposed to nations. In fact, all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined. [4]

Thus we find that Benedict Anderson focuses the construct of an imagined nationality .Citing his another remark ,we find that "the nation is imagined as *limited* because even the largest of them encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic boundaries, beyond which lie other nations. No nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind. The most messianic nationalists do not dream of a day when all the members of the human race will join their nation in the way that it was possible, in certain epochs, for, say, Christians to dream of a wholly Christian planet." [5]

It is not easy to devise a universal concept of nationalism. The concept of nation and nationality shows the trends of liquidity. Its connotations are expressed in a variety of ways. Power and impact stand as the major catalysts in determining the patterns of nationality and nationalism. Economic, political, ideological and cultural parameters easily contribute towards its development and shaping qualitative attributes. The pervasive trend of liberalization, privatization and globalization has greatly influenced the context and connotations of Nationalism. The increasingly global nature of trade, commerce, education and culture has ushered in a cult of supranational political initiatives which has both remolded the feeling and concept of nationalism positively and negatively both. They have wonderfully opposed and promoted nationalism like a prism.

Howsoever, we cannot deny the existence of nationalism . It has been established as a powerful construct. Being tremendously theorized from time to time ,it stands as a powerful force in social and political life. Its conceptual and historical linkage to the politics of states and the practice of democracy underlines its significance in the political world. Its linking with the state also suggests that it is linked to power and force, and therefore, it remains an ideology which is not to be underestimated or ignored. Its lofty and simple rhetorics,in conjugation, heightens the appeal of other ideologies such as socialism and conservatism. The twenty-first century has refabricated almost every mode of socio-political life not only in India but across the world. Many a new cultural configurations have emerged with the global shuffling of people and shifting of

boundaries. History has given way to histories,and Culture to cultures. The cultures are intermixed in such a way that none of these has remained single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous and unmonolithic.

Yet every culture retains something of its own identity, its own flavour and distinctness and that is why it makes a culture . It is within this context that a rebuilding of cultural cartography has been at work in some forty fifty years of recent past. Nowhere is this phenomenon better articulated than shown in the literatures of different people and regions. If we discuss the concept of nationalism in India,in the words of Ashis Nandy,we find that,since the mid 1980's, there are three major concerns that has infected our view of nationalism. First being the diminishing role of the sacred in daily life, even though India is seen as a country flooded with religions and rituals. The traditional religious sensitivity has weakened up since people move from villages to cities, from state to state and from one linguistic zone to another. This uprooting has created a need for a generalized version of faith, in which a person who moves from Kerala to Uttar Pradesh can continue to believe that he is a part of his religion. So atlast secularization of life has accentuated the fear of losing one's faith" [6]

Folk Culture:

Folk culture has significant stamp over here. A feel of folk culture can be sensed by looking at the behavioral patterns of its members and also through the the folk literature which is an entity of traditional knowledge, wisdom, convention, practices and ways of the people as collected and continued through oral tradition. Folk literature combines the sense of "literature/ knowledge" and "people". Folk literature connotes the raw, non-cannonical, agrarian, popular and mass cultures.Folklore is a significant paradigm of folk culture Kennedy attempts a definition of folk lore as following :

> Folklore includes songs, stories, myths, proverbs, and any rituals, customs, medicines, etc. that have a putative origin in the mythic past of the "folk". For some, this means that folk lore signifies a world of ignorance and pseudoscience, captive to bias and prejudice; for others, it signifies an authentic expression of agrarian or village life. In either case, folklore offers rich material for cultural and anthropological analysis, and literary specimens of folklore such as folk ballad, and folk epic have had a profound influence upon genres of high art. [7]

In the contemporary shades of postmodernism ,it is equally important for the nations . Folk culture and literature, handed down through the generations, consists of a rich body of creation; myths, folk tales, animal stories, rhymes, songs, riddles and proverbs where the spoken word is closely connected with specific pictures of story-telling, dance enactment, song cycles, symbolical acts and plays.

Folk culture is exceedingly significant for a nation like India where cultural plurality is the real indicator of national identity. If the search for national identity or the quest for the 'self', or we set unity in diversity as an authentic goal to achieve, and not merely a ritualistic slogan, we have to take cognisance of the voices coming from the regions as well as from the centre.

Simon Frith defines folk culture in the *Dictionary of Cultural and Critical Theory* as:

> "Folk culture" is a term which only make conceptual sense by reference to a particular interpretation of "industrial culture." As Shiach (1989) shows, the idea of the "folk" was developed in the context of industrialization, and can only be understood by reference to the critique of industrial society developed by Romanticism. Folk culture described the culture of preindustrial (premarket, precommodity) communities, and was therefore taken to be organized around a number of characteristics: the oral transmission of songs, tales, and history; aesthetic authorization by tradition; the integration of nature and culture, body and mind; expression through ritual, in the collective deployment of symbols. [8]

Thus Frith finds in folk culture a greater learning towards nature.It has a special learning towards the bare necessities of life. His statement touches the role of economic needs in shaping the construct of cultures.The interstate movements for the sake of livelihood and other human requirements do affect the paradigms of culture abridging regionalism.He further writes :

> There are obvious similarities between such descriptions of European folk cultures and anthropological accounts of communities in Africa and Asia, but "folk" is not an anthropological term. It is an ideological construct; it necessarily includes a critique of "modern" societies. The idea of folk culture has in fact served a number of different political and cultural ends (see Harker, 1985). As an aspect of nationalist ideology, folk culture is taken to be expressive of the true spirit of a nation, of its underlying beliefs and values, as articulated in specific forms of dress, speech, music, story telling, cookery, design, etc. [9]

3. Corporate Culture: Corporate Culture, in general, is a collective term comprising the external traits and certain soft policies adopted by different companies' working in the business environment. Dress code, hours of business, office set up and decorum, welfare of employees, business turnover, employment policies, client services, behavior of company's employee, and corporate social responsibility etc form the bases of corporate culture. On the concept of corporate culture, Ivy Wigmore finds that "Corporate culture is the pervasive values, beliefs and attitudes that characterize a company and guide its practices. To some extent, a company's internal culture may be articulated in its mission statement or vision. Elements of corporate culture include a company's physical environment, human resources practices and the staff itself. Corporate culture is also reflected in the degree of emphasis placed on various defining elements such as hierarchy, process, innovation, collaboration, competition, community involvement and social engagement. A corporate culture that reflects the broader culture is usually more successful than one that is at odds with it. For example, in the current global culture, which values transparency, equality and communication, a secretive company with a strictly hierarchical structure may have a public relations problem." [10]

It is very difficult to find a universal definition of corporate culture. In this research, I mean by corporate culture- the thinking, behaviour, and outlook of the people from established and bigger business class.

4. Hypothesis and Methodology:

The above discussion makes it clear that folk culture can be associated with the culture of masses .It has quite distinct features ,ad it stands ,if not completely ,up to certain extent in opposition to corporate culture .In the light of the above , this research study was undertaken .It is also because of my interest in the studies of folk and corporate behavior, and also because of the unavailability of studies in this field. As far as I have explored, no full length research study has been carried out on the research in question. However certain publications and ideologies make the mark in the area of 'language', 'nation', 'folk culture' and 'Industrial culture'. Chinua Achebe's 'The African Writer and the English Language' (1954) in *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, and Ngugi wa Thiongo's *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* are the significant works in this line. The hypothesis behind the work was that there is yawning gap between the corporate (industrial) culture and folk culture. Their perception on the issues of lifestyle and thought differs. When we analyse their patterns in professional and general communication, and their views on 'Nation' and 'language', we find quite different and astonishing results.

In the present research work, for testifying the hypothesis, a survey has been carried out to study the communication of the select business executives in the National Capital Region of India and that of the common folks (masses) in different parts of North India. After observing the facts and figures, a modest data of approximately 200 respondents from each of the group has been collected, and later conclusion has been drawn after their interpretation and generalization. The questions were asked with the help of two pre-planned questionnaires that have been set:

(i)   to study the opinion of the corporate professionals (average elite) and also that of the masses, in general; regarding their sense of nationalism in the present phase of economic liberalization and globalization;

(ii)   to study the relationship between language and nation in the present milieu, especially of the North India;

(iii)   and, to study the pattern of communication prevalent among the elite and the masses, both inter and intra these two classes respectively.

The respondents were asked to choose any of the three optional replies given against each of the question. Each question is devised to examine the attitude, temperament and inclination of the respondents, on the proposed hypothesis, individually. The responses of the respondents are classified, analysed, examined and evaluated. The findings are deemed to prove the hypothesis set in the beginning of the present research study. An explanatory description of both the questionnaires is given. The first questionnaire; *Bhasha Aur Rastra* (Language and Nation) has been used to procure the data from the common folks (masses). For a ready reference the questions are given below. Although the original questionnaire has been designed in Hindi,

keeping in mind the understanding and the language of communication of the common folk, yet for the general understanding of the readers of this report, the questions have been translated into English.

Question No. 1: If you are given somewhat better facilities at other place, than those available to you at your village/town/inhabitation, would you like to go, then, to inhabit that place, leaving your own?

Question 2: You are farmer/farm labourer/worker; if you are offered the vocation of a modern shop-keeper, and in this way a little better life-style is ascertained in the alternation, would you prefer this vocational substitute and that upgraded standard of living to that of your earlier occupation?

Question 3: What is your mother tongue? Do you feel difficulty in communicating/ transacting business in the national language Hindi?

Question 4: If you have any substitute to learn any other language than your mother tongue, which language would you like to learn in that contingency?

Question 5: Should language be changed according to one's vocation and also in accordance with the pertinent circumstance?

Question 6: Do you change your language/dialect and are not much worried regarding its accuracy?

Question 7: Does the knowledge of foreign language makes a person successful and developing?

Question 8: The development of a nation is not possible without the national language.

Question 9: Should there be only one language in a nation?

Question 10: National boundaries/limits sometimes, create obstacle in the development of an individual?

Question 11: Has in your view the modern times become the age of post-nationality, that is to say, nationality has no so much meaning in the general life, as the personal space of the individual?

Question 12: Can over pondering over the nation and the nationality germinate fascist notion in the individuals?

The next questionnaire given to those from the corporate culture had the following questions/statements (with 03 alternatives to select from "Yes", "NO", "NOT DECIDED" :

(1)   Would you prefer to join a foreign establishment in case it offers better perks and benefits than an Indian establishment?

(2)   Indigenous /indegeneity make a negative aspect.

(3)   Issues like "nation" or "nationalism" are detrimental to the free flow of economy and a person's economic growth.

(4)   This is an era of post-nationality where we believe in the idea of transcending the national boundaries (psychological, cultural, physical and legal).

(5)   We find a trend of weakening of nation-state, which is relative to not only global economic forces, but also relative to the citizen.

(6)   The boundaries of nation become irrelevant to the actual flow of corporate needs and economic activities.

(7)   Today nationalism is more "economic nationalism" rather "political nationalism".

(8)   A continuous change in language is a healthy sign.

(9)   A good communication should be preferred even at the cost of the rules of grammar.

(10)   Language and Nation are associated terms.

5. Conclusion

On the basis of the answers of the respondents, the following findings have been drawn, which proves the research question and helps to understanding how the global issues are affecting local realities.

   i.   For corporate the entity of nation may be seen as "nation within nation". For common folk (masses) we may find "community within nation".
   ii. The concepts of diasporic identity, foreign country, visit etc. are also the issues of debate in folk and corporate cultures. The corporate (masses) have the concept of "*Pardeshi* Diaspora", while the corporate /elite have the concept of hopping Diaspora. Folk Diaspora aspires and adores the land while corporate uses it as a tool.
   iii. For corporate, many times nation is an imagined identity, or surreal, for folk (masses) most of the time this is the local identity which is real.
   iv. Generally the corporate remember nations when they face corruption enjoy sports, face some political crisis, brain storm for the solution, and when they go abroad.
   v.   Folk visualize nation while asserting for their rights, getting into legal procedure, claiming some welfare scheme, and in day today living practices.

These statements give us adequate cues to understand nation in mass and corporate cultures, and my own inferences drawn in an earlier paper that "with the advances of India towards being a developed nation, flattening divide between Metro India and rural India ,seepage of liquid nationality and many more factors," are visible , prove true..

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