

The idea of india: modern changes



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People far from our shores show a lot of optimism regarding our economic figures, but the tumult of domestic politics and debates, which makes the dream of a possible “ India Shining”, very fragile and bleak, makes it a harsh reality to accept, that India’s weaknesses are all deep rooted from within. The very notion that our country is an idea held together keeps getting challenged now and then through the entire course of the ongoing struggle in a bid to define and direct our future ideas and policies for better governance for India. Sunil Khilnani puts his thoughts very aptly on this issue when he says that “ As India prepares for economic take-off, its post-independence elite are leaving the political stage. But it bequeaths a rich democratic heritage in which traditional and modern ideas compete to define Indian identity.” Since its inauguration in the midst of the intense drama, excitement and terror of 1947, the public life of an independent nation that is India has offered a “ wide array of vivid collective spectacles and formidable individual characters. But what is it all about? Imperialists, post-imperialists and nationalists have their own answers for this question. Post imperialists narrate a story of decline and fall-a slow yet inevitable corrosion of the Raj legacy, a revival of the fervour of religion and community, thus providing a heady concoction of historicist nostalgia-that without the support of imperial authority, things tend to fall apart easily. For nationalists, however, 1947 heralded a thrilling movement towards a brighter future, where a defined version of India, in all its maturity would come to preside over its own destiny.

Pre independent India was the golden era of nationalism when the nation was led by luminaries like Nehru, Ambedkar, Gandhi among others.

Independent India presents a sorry picture of shattered nationalism. There is a weak centre in the country that has the support of many smaller 'nation states' within itself. This loose coalition of states has worked well ever since independence. Every state and their people maintain their unique identities and get to call themselves Indians without getting "Indianized". It has been proved that the support for Hindu nationalist parties like BJP is very high among upper caste Hindus and very low among Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes and illiterate people. The so-called champions of nationalism are dead against regionalism. In the first twenty odd years post Independence, the primary reason for a united India was the residual feelings towards the Independence movement and trust in the Congress party. Later, the wars against China and Pakistan did bring Indians together for brief intervals, nevertheless it was a tenuous unity. Salman Rushdie has called India "carnavalesque" in its differences beginning from elaborate surnames to caste differences. With the introduction of economic reforms, India's fragmentation has grown more and more complicated as the various regional parties grew stronger. In the 1990s, the rightist BJP formed a strategic alliance with smaller state-based parties and garnered power by mobilizing people against Muslims and Christians using Hindu-centric rhetoric. The central governments ever since have been coalitions propped up by regional parties. The erstwhile true leaders of India wanted to put an end to "categorizing, separating, classifying, enumerating and granting of special concessions." However, the present leaders of such community based parties align themselves to the interests of not just the state alone but primarily to the benefits of the particular caste and religious and cultural communities within it.

However, the dream that every Indian nurtures is yet to be transformed into reality. The prospect of yore (Sone ki Chidiya) is long forgotten and instead it is only abject poverty that rules. This very concept embodied renunciation once, but now it signifies corruption and deprivation. It implied tolerance and diversity once whereas now it is synonymous with Muslim-bashing and communal massacres. Continual and steady degradation of inherent principles, practices and policies has marred the image that the idea of India used to bring to people's minds earlier.

According to the Preamble of the Indian Constitution, India claims to be a "sovereign, socialist, secular democratic republic" in the truest sense of the terms. However, the socialism that Jawaharlal Nehru swore by has lost all meaning considering the rise of widespread death due to starvation in the poverty-stricken districts of Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh. The harsh irony of fate is such that in a 'democratic republic' like India, power has moved out from the hands of the people of the nation into the hands of selfish political leaders and army and police. 64 years of independence and still counting, yet there is a visible dark side in the bright picture that India's booming economic prowess and progress fails to veil. India as the birthplace of spirituality and as a melting pot of diverse culture and traditions is sadly giving way to communal hatred, riots and terrorism. The very idea of India is pleading for mercy so that the country gets rid of the numerous political challenges amidst the constant strife between nationalism and counter nationalism. When issues of national importance considering the well-being of people in general become rallying points, that

is when vested interests get over emphasized and homogeneity of a nation is put to threat.

Nandan Nilekani fosters the hope that India's multiple divides could be overcome similar to the heady days after independence. He agrees that the present generation has borne witness to the denigration of politics into an appalling spectacle as our politicians fight it out over petty issues of caste, religion and region. Columnist Aruna Roy's views make perfect sense when she claims that " Pitched between science without humanity and religion without compassion, India has swung from one extreme to another...What determines scientific temper is not whether the issue is related to science, but that the approach is rational-whether it is Roop Kanwar's sati, the atrocities on Dalits and minorities, the burning of brides, the rape of innocent women, or the jingoism of dropping bombs on ' enemies'. It has become more important now in the present day scenario to be a " backward caste", a " tribal", or a religious sectarian than to be an Indian. This is particularly ironic because one of the early strengths of Nehruvian India - the survival of the nationalist movement as a political party, the Congress Party serving as an all-embracing, all-inclusive agglomeration of the major political tendencies in the country - muffled the regular process of contention over political principles." The India that came into existence in 1947 was in a very real sense a new creation: a state that made fellow citizens of the Assamese and the Tamilian, divided Punjabi from Punjabi and asked a Keralite peasant to feel brotherly love for a Kashmiri Pandit ruling in Delhi, all for the first time.

However all this happened in due course of time at the expense of geographical fragmentation of the once single state of India. When Jinnah set the train of thought running amongst the Indian Muslims, the necessity of having a separate state for the Muslims, it gradually strengthened and was given a territorial element later on. For years, Gandhi and his followers struggled to keep Muslims in the Indian National Congress. Some historians believe Jinnah intended to use the threat of partition as a bargaining chip in order to gain more independence for the Muslim dominated provinces in the west from the Hindu dominated centre. Pakistan was carved out of British India to allow the people of Muslim-majority regions to shape their own nationhood in a separate geographical territory. While addressing his last meeting with the Muslim League in Delhi the Quaid asked the Muslims of India to live as loyal Indian citizens after having declared Pakistan to be a state of all its peoples, irrespective of their religion. Rather than basing Pakistan's entity in conflict with India, he vowed to have friendly relations with India. Such was his vision. As opposed to Quaid's democratic vision, the nation building took a dictatorial course to allow the domination of Mohajir-Punjabi interests over others, on the one hand, and stronghold over civil society, on the other. Pakistan was neither an anomaly of history, nor a by-product of British conspiracy, as perceived by pseudo Indian secularists. In fact, it is based on solid foundations of its people, who wanted to have a separate homeland, and therefore Pakistan was created out of the mutual agreement of the epochal forces that decided the fate of the subcontinent in its struggle for self-determination. In a bid to divide Hindus and Muslims, the separate state of Pakistan was formed with the help of separatist politics, triggering a counter nationalist series of events into progression. It all began

when the Indian Hindu nationalist movement of the early 1900s refused to represent the interests of Indian Muslims, according to the then common religious sentiments. It's true that this widened a rift until, as independence from the British Empire drew near, it was impossible for them to share a single nation. Even Jinnah propounded this fact. Muslims had a justifiable fear of being ruled by the more numerous Hindus. Yet partition of British colonial India into the free nations of India and Pakistan did not solve the problem; Hindus and Muslims are still at loggerheads — through their nations — the focal point of the strife being the disputed territory of Kashmir. Not only did a territorial divide take place, but also the newly formed government in Pakistan was highly unequipped to deal with migrations of massive magnitudes. Border squabbles were expected and in the wake of this fanaticism, Gandhi was assassinated soon after. The creation of the state of Pakistan also led to a new bone of contention, that being the state of Kashmir. In the province of Kashmir, the Hindu ruler was hesitant in deciding whether to join forces with Pakistan or India, but when the Muslim-majority populace protested violently against this, he chose India. Within a year of gaining independence, India and Pakistan were at war in Kashmir. Even after numerous peace talks, the rivalry between the nations of India and Pakistan did not reduce. The Kashmir controversy is a major reason for the present conflict between India and Pakistan. The stakes have been raised because both countries are not parties to the nuclear non-proliferation agreement and have developed nuclear arsenals.

The first Kashmir war ended on a compromising note, but war sparked up again for a short time in 1965. Both the new countries' economies suffered

extremely from the social upheaval. Also, there was major political instability in both the new countries. The two areas of Pakistan – East Pakistan and West Pakistan, were 1,600 km separate from each other, with India in the middle. Apart from the myriad ethnic and cultural differences, the East Pakistanis were under represented in the Pakistani government and ended up being less developed than West Pakistan was. The government was slow to send aid when East Pakistan was hit by a devastating cyclone in 1970, and in 1971, when East Pakistan (being more populous than West Pakistan) gained a majority in the National Assembly, President Yahya Khan delayed its meeting and sent troops to quell protests in East Pakistan. As a ‘fitting’ response, East Pakistan declared its own independence on March 26, 1971, and became Bangladesh. Civil war obviously followed, and lasted until the end of that year, when, in December, India entered the war and aided Bangladesh in freeing itself of Pakistani troops. The second partition of Bengal left behind a legacy of violence which continues to this day. As Bashabi Fraser put it, “There is the reality of the continuous flow of ‘economic migrants’ / ‘refugees’ / ‘infiltrators’ / ‘illegal immigrants’ who cross over the border and pan out across the sub-continent, looking for work and a new home, setting in metropolitan centres as far off as Delhi and Mumbai, keeping the question of the Partition alive today”.

As if these examples weren’t enough to provide evidence regarding the ill effects that counter nationalism has had on India and its socio-political fabric, there are also instances of Sikhs demanding a separate state for the Sikhs, called Khalistan. The struggle to create a Sikh homeland began as early as the 1947 Partition of India, but received strong support during the

1970-80's as political activists pushed the Indian government towards recognition of a separate state. With the rise of digital communication technology like the Internet - and now social media - Khalistan's fight expanded onto a worldwide stage. Early Sikh militancy fizzled in favor of the new concept of a " virtual Khalistan," to the point where Khalistan now exists more as an idea than a set of distinct territorial claims. This concept of existence of hybrid nations removes the very notion of the monochromatic vision of the nation that people should strive to achieve, in a pure nationalist point of view. Virtual communication strengthens the Khalistan movement by giving every Sikh irrespective of geographic location a sense of unity with the ephemeral idea of a Sikh homeland.

Since India's independence, many tribal communities in the north eastern region of India, with some Chinese support, attempted to establish separate independent states. In the 1960s, rebellions from Mizoram even declared independence. The Indian army somehow suppressed these uprisings and the rebellion leaders were made to sign peace treaties with the Indian government. The Indian government created autonomous states for the different tribes in this region within the Indian Union. These states were created by detaching parts from Assam. This caused major discontent among the Assamese and even they demanded to separate from India. In the 1980s a terror organization was established which included rebellions from the seven north east Indian states and they worked together against the Indian government. Such military upheavals occurred in the name of counter nationalism and destroyed the peace of a nation and again challenged the idea of a strongly held together and united Indian nation.

Hyderabad is an integral part of Telangana and a Telangana State without Hyderabad as the capital is inconceivable. However, the militant rhetoric of some political parties had made people of other areas feel unwelcome, creating an air of mistrust among the Telugu-speaking people of various regions. This was not only constitutionally illegal but also extremely foolish as the image of Hyderabad as a state got tainted because of this. Two issues that formed the bone of contention between the two regions of Andhra Pradesh were the future of Hyderabad and the repercussions in terms of the sharing of river waters from the completed and planned irrigation projects after the division of the State. The movement for a separate Telangana state had been fuelled by the argument that people from coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema to be precise, have “occupied” agricultural lands, denying the local farmers the opportunity to till their fields. The real estate too “fell into the hands of the settlers”, who jacked up the prices to unrealistic levels. These reasons were taken up by the politicians of the state, for their selfish interests of garnering votes by sympathising with public sentiment.

To protect the holistic spirit of India as a nation, it is of utmost importance to stand together and fight against the continual political challenges that our country faces from various fronts. To ensure that, a sound and stable government system needs to be present in the country, free from the evils of corruption and the likes so as to enable the idea of India not become a forgotten one, under the throes of the ill effects of counter nationalism that has been plaguing the country since its independence, the seeds of some which had been sowed long before that.