

## **Turning Curse Side of Nationalism and National Sentiment to Blessing**

Pradeep Kumar Giri, PhD\*

### **Abstract**

*Nationalism and national sentiment could be considered blessing on the one hand and curse on the other understood properly from various perspectives. These notions can be considered blessing in the sense that they arouse the feeling of unity, nearness, oneness and ownness among the conationals or compatriots; they can be understood as curse in the sense that they create borders, divide humans into various different groups and sub-groups which arouses the parochial feeling of conational which sometimes results in conflict, civil war and division of a country. Nationalism, viewed from positive perspective, can be understood as an effective means or a tool that can work to arouse the feeling of unity, nearness, and ownness among the people belonging to a certain nation. In essence, it requires that all individuals belong to a nation for the realization of their true moral worth. As a result, they owe their primary loyalty to their nation over any other sub-groups to maintain the moral value. Viewed from negative perspective, nationalism, mostly the extreme form of nationalism, leads the individuals, their sub-groups, and nation to a dark moment. Racial hatred and ethnic cleansing--consequences of extreme kind of national sentiment--can be considered as some instances. The curse side of nationalism and national sentiment can be turned into blessing by properly handling the spirit of nationalism and national sentiment with positive thinking.*

**Key words:** nation, nationalism, self-determination, boundaries, ethnicity.

### **Introduction**

Nationalism is an overarching umbrella term that encompasses various concepts. In one sense, it refers to a strong feeling of love and pride in one's country. Viewed from socio-political perspective it means a policy based on a strong desire for political independence made by a country or nation that is colonized by another country or is part of another country or nation. Not only a too great love for one's own country or nation but also the quest for identity comes under the concept of nationalism. Moreover, a strong love shown by the people for a certain cultural, linguistic, ethnic, and other

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\*Dr. Giri has earned PhD in English from Tribhuvan University. Currently he is working as the Associate Professor at Trichandra Campus, Tribhuvan University. He has published a number of articles and books in his discipline.

such types of groups to which they belong can also be understood as a kind of nationalism. Thus, many different conceptions and phenomenon come under the umbrella term 'nationalism.'

Nationalist sentiment is an acquisition rather than an inborn quality. It is a thought influenced by emotion. Sentiment is a kind of feeling of kindness, love and sympathy. This type of attitude is driven by feeling. That is why it varies according to how it is taught, and acquired. Sometimes, the sentiment of nationalism is dangerous. The notion of national superiority rests upon a deeply held yet unproven belief that one's own culture, ethnic group, tradition, or history are superior to others.

The objectives of this article is to discuss and investigate the conception of nationalism and national sentiment from various perspectives and prove that the curse side can be turned to blessing. In this research article, I use secondary materials--library, e-library, and internet—to explore the conception of the ideals and prove my argument. This research does not use empirical method; nor does it conduct a field study, data collection, data analysis and interviews. It does not study technique/form and rhetoric of any literature. Using the qualitative method, the article provides a critical and analytical study to prove my claim. This article incorporates the ideas of theorists/writers like Eqbal Ahmad, A. D. Smith, Craig Calhoun. Can curse of nationalism and national sentiment be turned to blessing? How to make nationalism and national sentiments blessing? My hypothesis that nationalism and national sentiments has curse side because they create boundaries and divide people; it can be made blessing by erasing the shadow lines between the nations by promoting the attitude of humanism and we can turn the bleak side of nationalism and national sentiment to boon.

### **Nationalism and National Sentiment: an Overview**

To understand nationalism and national sentiment we have to understand what a nation is. Various nationalists have viewed and defined 'nation' in their own ways. Nations, for some nationalists, are timeless phenomenon. Viewed from another perspective it can be argued and understood as cultural and ethnic community. Another school of thought opines that idea of nations have been awakened for a very long time, though they take different shapes in different points in history. Postmodernists and Marxists also contribute worthy ideas in relation to this topic. The modernization school's scholars see nations as entirely modern and constructed. Talking about built up of nation, A. D. Smith argues that many nations were “built up on the basis of pre-modern ‘ethnic cores’ whose myths and memories, values and symbols shaped the culture and boundaries of the nation that modern elites managed to forge” (Smith 1990: 180).

Nationalism is a term referring to a doctrine or a political movement that holds the view that a nation usually defined in terms of ethnicity or culture has a right to constitute an independent or autonomous political community based on shared history and common destiny.

The principle of impartiality is central to the notion of justice. Will Kymlicka in *Inquiry* rightly puts it to reject the ideal of justice as impartiality is to propose “an alternative to justice, not an alternative account of justice” (Kymlicka 1990: 103). Justice as such must be neutral or impartial, as far as possible, between competing partial standpoints or claims.

### Discussion and Finding

Despite a number of dark sides of nationalism like division of the people into various nationality groups we can get many rays of bright sides in it. Furthermore, we can turn these curse sides to boon with our cosmopolitan attitude among all the human race arousing the feeling that all the people living on this earth belong to a single community no matter where one resides, which religious and cultural group one belongs to. As the term 'nationalism' has variety of meanings, it is commonly used to describe two phenomena: (1) the attitude that the members of a nation have when they care about their national identity and (2) the action that the members of a nation take when seeking to achieve self-determination. The former raises question about the concept of nation or national identity, which is often defined in terms of common origin, ethnicity or cultural ties. An individual's membership in a nation is often regarded as involuntary. The latter raises questions about whether sovereignty demands the attainment of full statehood with complete authority for domestic and international affairs, or whether something less than statehood would be sufficient. Craig Calhoun, talking about diversified nature of nationalism, says:

Nationalism is too diverse to allow a single theory to explain it all. Much of the contents and specific orientation of various nationalisms is determined by historically distinct cultural traditions, the creative actions of leaders, and contingent situations within the international world order. (Calhoun 1997: 123)

Calhoun's view makes clear that no single, universal theory of nationalism is possible as its conception has a wide range of coverage like culture, region, religion and ethnicity. The term nationalism does not agree any attempt of single definition. It is doubtful that nationalism can ever be defined in one coherent way. It must rather be given various characteristics depending on where and when the term is used.

To give a description of people and activities engaged in aggressive and expansionist politics is one of the thrusts of nationalism. “Can you have patriotism

without nationalism?" (Ignatieff 1993: 141). Ignatieff's this idea in interrogative form clarifies that the dichotomy of patriotism and nationalism is misleading; it is as false as the one between civic and liberal nationalism on the one hand and ethnic and closed nationalism on the other hand. These two dichotomies, in the real sense, largely overlap.

Defining nationalism, which has multiplicity of meanings, is not a simple and easy workout. Ignatieff rightly defines nationalism as, "not one thing in many disguises, but many things in many disguises" (9). It would be fair, however, to argue that nationalism can be viewed from various different perspectives such as ethnicity, religion, and culture. Various theorists of nationalism have expressed their notion in important dogmas and pointed to nationalism which might be called as its ethical claims. Describing some of the ethical claims, as a political doctrine, nationalism demands that the peoples of the world are divided into nations. Moreover, it seeks that each of these nations has to be granted the right to self-determination, either as self-governing entities within existing states or stand-alone nation-states. Talking about development and the view of nationalism, Hans Kohn presents its historical development:

From Hebrew and Greek ideas the age of nationalism drew many of its initial and fundamental inspirations, but from Jerusalem and Athens shine also the eternal guiding stars which lift the age of nationalism above itself, pointing forward on the road to deeper liberty and to higher forms of integration. (Kohn 1944: 576)

Despite the difficulty that lies in favoring a general definition of nationalism or nationality, various endeavors are made at it. Incorporation of various meanings have made it vague to define on the one hand and widened its scope and coverage on the other:

A portion of mankind may be said to constitute a nationality if they are united among themselves by common sympathies which do not exist between them and any others - which make them cooperate with each other more willingly than with other people, desire to be governed under the same government, and desire that it should be government by themselves or a portion of themselves exclusively. This feeling of nationality may have been generated by various causes. Sometimes it is the effect of identity of race and descent. Community of language and community of religion greatly contribute to it. Geographical limits are one of its causes. But the strongest of all is identity of political antecedents; the possession of a natural history, and consequent community of recollections; collective pride and humiliation, pleasure and regret, connected with the same incidents in the past. (Mill 1977: 359-360)

Mill, here, presents his view regarding the feeling of nationality and its causes like language, religion, culture and ideology.

There is another kind of nationalism known as civic or liberal nationalism which is an alternative to exclusivist type of nationalism. In this type, membership in the nation is based on the equal right of citizenship — irrespective of color, race, religion, ethnicity and so on — of a community that donates to a shared set of political values and practices. Some nationalist theorists have called this model of nationalism as moderate patriotism. Its distinction from ethnic nationalism depends fully on the lack of justified exclusiveness. It accepts the ideal that one may care more about or have greater obligation to the compatriots or fellow citizen in comparison to the non-compatriots. Eqbal Ahmad classifies nationalism as “ideology of difference” and “collective identity built on the basis of the Other” (Ahmad 2000: 75). In crux, it requires that all individuals belong to a nation for the realization of their true moral worth. As a result, they owe their primary loyalty to their nation over any other sub-groups to maintain the moral value.

The moral debate on nationalism reflects a deep moral tension between solidarity with oppressed and colonized national groups on the one hand, and hatred in the face of crimes committed in the name of nationalism aimed for the retreat of the repressed on the other. Moreover, the issue of nationalism points to a domain of more problems having to do with the treatment of cultural and ethnic differences within a democratic polity. In a country or state practicing democratic form of government, different cultural and ethnic groups come up with various demands of their cultural and ethnic interest and start giving pressure to the government to make their demands fulfilled. In such a situation issues of collective interest of all nationals of the country which should be put on the top from the viewpoint of priority remains in shadow. Cultural, linguistic, religious and such types of other nationalities, thus, create borders and divide human beings in different groups that become a cause of tension in the society and among the societies. We can discuss some instances of the conflicts occurred due to narrow-minded feelings and irrational type of actions of different nationality groups in different parts of the world such as in Rwanda, and Sri Lanka.

Various definitions of nationalism given by different people verify the claim made in the beginning of this wright up that nationalism is an overarching umbrella term encompassing many concepts. Frantz Fanon saw the nationalist resistance of colonized groups against the imperial power as a beautiful and splendid necessity. He believes that nationalism which Gandhi mobilized against British rule in India, for example, was designed to counter what was seen as unjust government by a foreign power.

Another concept about nationalism is the belief that groups of people are bound together by territorial, cultural, and sometimes ethnic links. Although nationalism was developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and was led to the formation of the nations of Germany and Italy, it was the cause of some of the most dramatic events of the 20th century when a group of people of the same race, language, culture, and with the same history wanted to form an independent country.

Liberal nationalism, according to Kymlicka, is a form of nationalism that affirms the general nationalist thesis that all states including liberal ones should promote and indicate a sense of shared nationality among citizens. Kok-Chor Tan's ideas in this connection deserve a mention:

While justice may constrain personal pursuits in the domestic setting, global justice cannot constrain national pursuits for the reason that global justice claims cannot be determined independently of national commitments. . . . On their view, nationalist commitments properly understood are not subordinated to global demands in the way liberal nationalists hope. (Tan 2004: 187)

The liberal nationalists allow for special obligation only within the term of global justice whereas communitarian nationalists are of the view that the term of global justice should not be impartially defined, as cosmopolitans urge.

All the definitions discussed above help us conclude that, though paradoxical, nationalism has probably been more deeply successful because it has no coherent genuine doctrines and neither is it possible to understand its meaning through a single definition and meaning.

Max Weber, the German sociologist, defining 'nation,' in the early twentieth century, viewed that ethnic groups are like nations; they believe in commonalities of physical appearances, customs, culture, historical experiences, and so on. What the pro-nationalist thinkers believe is that nationalism is particularly noticeable with groups that do not yet have a state. If a nation- a group of people- becomes able to form a state, the loyalties of the group member might be civic in nature. At the other extreme, nationalist claims are focused upon the non-voluntary community of common culture, origin, language, and so on. In the classical view an ethno-nation is a community of origin, cultural, language, custom etc. Philosophical discussions and definitions of nationalism are highly concerned to its ethno-cultural variations. The relationship between nationalism, culture, and ethnicity is close from nationalist notion. A group of people seeking to nationhood on this basis will be usually called "ethno-nation" in order to emphasize its ethno-cultural foundation. Basis of the determination of one's membership in the community becomes the ethno-cultural nationalist. Membership of the people depends upon their origin and early socialization. They cannot choose to be a member of a community that they like.

Fredrik Barth, argues, “What make ethnic distinctions emerge in an area has much to do with the fact that each ethnic group can be “associated with a separate range of value standards” (Barth 1969: 18). The cultural content of this social unit may change its boundaries, as defined by these value standards. But the feeling of need of nationalist sentiment is to absorb the unusual series of slight differences existing in any community. If, it is believed by various nationalist theorists, cracks occur in the national sentiment, due to one or another reason, nationalist systems are bound to continue unity by force rather than agreement.

In the history of the world, we can see 'national awakening' struggles for political independence made by colonized countries and sometimes struggles made by ethnic, racial or some other groups colonized within their own country by the ruling class, are both heroic on the one hand and inhumanely cruel on the other. The formation of a recognizably national states often respond to deep popular nationalistic sentiments, which sometimes bring, may be unwillingly, inhuman consequences such as violent throwing out and cleansing of non-nationals.

### **Conclusion: All the People Belong to a Single Community**

By enhancing the feeling of unity among diversity - diverse nationality groups-despites nationalism's both good and bad aspects and similarly national sentiment's two sides of pros and cons, it is possible to turn bleak sides to bright sides. Both these ideals have relative relation and meaning to the society and people. As a moral ideal, nationalism is an ethic of heroic sacrifice in which one becomes ready even to justify the violence in the defense of one’s nation against enemies. Nationalism requires and focuses that one must be deliberately ready to put nation first, even to sacrifice life, in the time of need for the nation; it is only because of the strong feeling of the national sentiment.

The individual or group within a national group has to do inter-group co-operation and help. This type of co-operation is easier for those who are part of the same ethno-national group. Ethnic ties like common language, customs, and expectations in a multiethnic state help him/her a lot in finding his/her ways in new surroundings. After the establishment of the ties he/she becomes part of a network. It is rational to go on co-operating and ethnic sentiments secure the trust and the firm bond needed for smooth co-operation. While welcoming a newcomer in a multiethnic state we should not forget a possible extreme of ethno-national conflict. In such a situation, we have to end crisis of trust in both the sides which tend to see the other as being inimical. The parochial feeling of compatriots as nearer to non-compatriots and the members of a nation have special obligation to each other creates a view of us/other among the human beings which we can shadow and ultimately erase by enhancing the cosmopolitan feeling. The

dichotomy of us/other created by the narrow nationalism and parochial nationalist sentiment is possible to bring to the end replacing it by creating the humanitarian and cosmopolitan feeling among the people with the view that all the people living in this earth belong to a single community and the whole world is our common home.

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