

## Subtheme Paper

# Nation Building and Diversity

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### Abstract

“Nation-building” becomes a necessity when the internal social milieu of the “nation” is characterized by diversity. Diversity as a social fact has always existed; it becomes a problem when the groups or communities in the polity are unequal or discriminated.

Nation states of West Europe attempted to create culturally homogeneous polities, which are inimical to the very idea of diversity. Therefore, it is necessary to endorse the notion of the national state which consciously nurtures and celebrates diversity. The demand for nurturing diversity surfaces in national states when minorities are denied security, equality or identity. The distinction between the territorially anchored national minorities and the spatially dispersed ethnic minorities is crucial because the former can acquire striking power to destabilize the state.

The tendency on the part of states to indulge in ethnification and culturocide, processes that are destructive of diversity, in the name of national integration, is widespread. To accommodate diversity states should not only stop ethnification but also nationalize minorities so that they develop a stake in building nations. Decoupling citizenship, an instrument of equality, and nationality, the anchorage of a crucial identity, is the necessary first step. It needs to be emphasized that not only states and cultural main-streams but also minorities, particularly state-seeking national minorities, can be a threat to diversity. Therefore, the ultimate hope of sustaining diversity lies in the combination of a federal state and cultural pluralism.

## 1. Introduction

Nation is not a built but a felt entity, but the intensity of attachment to it varies across nations depending upon the degree of nation-ness. As is well known some “nations” are well integrated and others are loosely knit. One may assert without the fear of being contradicted that the lesser the diversity of the population which constitutes the nation the greater is the possibility of the nation being integrated and vice versa. Diversities are of different kinds—cultural (i.e. religious, linguistic, tribal), social (caste), racial and spatial (regional, rural/urban) to mention a few. In this paper I shall deal mainly with cultural diversity although it often intersects with other diversities.

### 1.1 *The Problematique of Diversity*

Diversity as a social fact always existed in the world-at-large but it becomes a “problem” mainly when it exists *within* the territory of a state. There are two reasons why diversity within the state territory becomes a problem. One, when the social, cultural, or racial differences become the basis of group inequality. Two, when the different groups perceive one another as inferiors or superiors. Viewed thus, nation-building would imply developing an egalitarian society and the creation of a societal ethos which facilitates the dignified coexistence of diverse groups within the polity, that is, endorsing pluralism as a value. This would entail nurturing of both equity *and* identity within the polity.

Two cautionary remarks are in order here. First, the constitutions of all democratic polities promise equality. To translate this ontological equality into reality it is necessary to provide equality of opportunity. While it is relatively easy to realize equality of opportunity in culturally homogeneous societies, differences and disparities based on gender, regions and rural-urban differences are obstacles even in such societies. The situation in societies characterized by cultural, social or racial diversity is rendered much more complex where there is group-based inequality. Therefore, it is necessary to create *equality of condition* so that citizens with differing backgrounds are equipped to compete successfully with one

another. This is a crucial tool of nation-building in culturally, socially and racially heterogeneous societies and yet there is no consensus in invoking this tool. For example, affirmative action in USA and protective discrimination in India remain contentious. And yet such instruments are necessary to accommodate and build diversity within the nation.

The second cautionary remark I want to make relates to the notion of identity which is related to the creation of equality of condition. The polarization between class politics and identity politics is widely discussed. But it is often forgotten that identity groups are often, not always, unequal groups too. Therefore it is necessary to draw a distinction between hegemonic identity and emancipatory identity. The politics of hegemonic identity groups is intended to perpetuate the existing inequalities. In contrast, the politics of emancipatory identity groups aims to bring about equity. If the former is inimical to nation-building, the latter is its facilitator.

## 1.2 *Nation State and Diversity*

Historically viewed the notion of nation-building has undergone radical changes. The avowed objective of the institution of the nation state, which emerged out of the Treaty of Westphalia signed in 1648, was to create culturally homogeneous polities. Nation-building in Western Europe, the cradle of the nation state, was an exercise in the destruction of diversity; the weaker and smaller nations within the polity were denied their identity. In contrast, nation-building in federal states calls for the accommodation of diversity; it is an institutional innovation to govern democratically culturally diverse peoples located under one political roof. The federal arrangement has arisen out of the lack of correspondence between the concept of nation state and the empirical reality it had to grapple with. Three problems are inherent in the institution of the nation state all of which militate against cultural diversity within its territory.

The first problem is the manner in which the principle of national self-determination, the foundation principle of the nation

state, is practiced. To recall the pregnant words of Ivor Jennings: “The people cannot decide until somebody decides who the people are.” By denying people-hood to several peoples within its territory nation states endanger the principle of national self-determination. The Scottish, Welsh and Irish peoples (who had to abandon their linguistic identity) in Great Britain, the first nation of the world; the Alsatians, Basques, Bretons, Catalans, Corsicans, Flemings and Occitanians in France, the nation which was born out of revolution, are just two examples of the denial of people-hood within nation states.

Second, the nation state ineluctably links citizenship and nationality; citizenship is conferred on the basis of membership in the nation. This practice gravely endangers the possibility of nurturing cultural diversity within the nation state. Cultural diversity within the state territory requires decoupling of citizenship and nationality; in fact the acceptance of the idea of multicultural citizenship makes it imperative. The conceptual distinction between citizenship and nationality was endorsed in the erstwhile Soviet Union but the practice of Great Nation (Russian) Chauvinism endangered its diversity.

Third, nation states relentlessly pursue the ideal of creating culturally homogeneous societies but only a tiny proportion of world’s distinctive religious, linguistic and cultural groupings have formed their own states. Indeed only a precious few of the world’s existing states have approximated the cultural homogeneity conjured up by the label nation state. To put it pithily, the concept of nation state and the empirical reality on the ground vary enormously.

To get out of this impasse and to accommodate and nurture diversity within the territory of the state, we should abandon the concept of nation state and substitute for it the notion of the national state. Charles Tilly defines national states as “relatively centralized, differentiated and autonomous organizations successfully claiming priority in the use of force, within large, contiguous and clearly bounded Territories”. But this conceptualization fits states rather than nations; it focuses on the structure of the state and ignores the sentiment necessary for the population of the nation

to be glued together. Further, Tilly conceives national states as transitory structures; they are nation states in the making.

In contrast, I conceptualize a national state as a multi-national and poly-ethnic state, often a combination of the two, in which cultural diversity is viewed as an asset to be celebrated and not a liability to be “managed”. The difference between nation state and national state is fundamental: if nation states aim at cultural homogenization, national states consciously nurture and celebrate cultural diversity within their territories and endorse cultural pluralism as a value. Cultural pluralism upholds the principle of dignified coexistence of all cultural groups. This provides minorities with a stake in nation-building.

## 2. National and Ethnic Minorities

It is necessary to distinguish between national minorities and ethnic minorities. Although both augment diversity within the polity their striking power to destabilise the national state and contribute to nation-building vary vastly. National minorities have historically legitimate claims to an ancestral homeland; as in the case of Scottish and Welsh peoples in Great Britain or an adopted homeland, as in the case of the French in Quebec in Canada and the Spanish and Portuguese peoples in Latin America. That is, national minorities, like nations, are products of fusion between territory and culture; they are nations without sovereign states.

It needs to be underlined here that national minorities are minorities only when viewed in the wider context of the federal polity but they are usually majorities within their homeland. This gives them the required bargaining power with the central authority of the federal state for the right to preserve their cultural identity, particularly through the use of their language, following customs and practicing religion. Further, national minorities invariably demand their own politico-administrative units. If the federal state concedes this demand it helps to maintain diversity within the polity. But if the federal state attempts to suppress the identity assertions of national minorities, and if the latter transform from a nation-in-itself to a nation-for-itself, the possibility of the demand

for a sovereign state in the form of a secessionist movement is high. If the movement succeeds it would diminish diversity within the national state to which it had previously belonged.

Ethnic minorities are products of the turbulence brought about by migration, within or across polities, which can occur due to a variety of reasons: political and/or religious persecution at home, search for better economic prospects and the like. Irrespective of the cause of migration, a rupture between territory and culture occurs. That is, ethnic minorities attempt to sustain their cultural identity markers outside their ancestral homeland. Being territorially dispersed ethnic minorities neither have the political striking power nor the cultural legitimacy to demand exclusive politico-administrative units within the federal polity. However, they have every right to demand and get their cultural rights. But even if these rights are constitutionally guaranteed they may not be always realized as illustrated by the territorially dispersed Sindhi and Urdu speaking communities in India.

The existential conditions of national minorities favour the flowering of cultural diversity if the state pursues an appropriate policy, but the existential conditions of an ethnic minority call for extra efforts on the part of the state to preserve and sustain cultural diversity. However, the state policy may often be destructive of cultural diversity if it indulges in what may be designated as ethnification or *culturocide*, that is the systematic dismantling of cultural identities.

### *2.1 Ethnification and Destruction of Diversity*

Ethnification is a process through which the link between territory and culture is attenuated, and the possibility of a nation sustaining its integrity is put into jeopardy. There are at least six types of ethnification. First, a national minority may continue to be in its ancestral or adopted homeland and yet it may be ethnified by state-sponsored colonization, particularly by a native dominant collectivity. That is, the link between territory and culture should not be viewed merely as a physical phenomenon.

There are three main variants of this: (a) Transforming the original inhabitants of a territory into a minoritized and marginalized

collectivity. The most obvious example of this is the First Nations in the New World; although they continue to live in their ancestral homeland, they have been dispossessed of it. (b) Labeling a collectivity in such a way as to imply that it has no moral claim over its ancestral or adopted homeland. This is precisely what analysts do when, in labeling some collectivities, they ignore their nationality and invoke their religious identities instead. The Muslims of Bosnia, the Hindus of the Kashmir Valley and the Jews in Europe are examples of “ethnified” collectivities that have been created by wrong labeling. (c) Some nations are subjected to ethnification as a result of a division of their ancestral homeland into two or more state territories, thereby endangering their integrity as nations. This is the case with regard to Kurds, Basques, Nagas, Mizos and several others.

A second type of ethnification is the denial of fully-fledged participation in the economy and polity to an immigrant collectivity which had adopted the land into which it has migrated as its homeland. The case of indentured Indian and Chinese labour brought to the plantations and mines in colonial societies exemplifies this. It is not enough that immigrants are willing to become nationals in their new homeland; their claim and aspiration ought to be respected not only by the state, but also by the original and earlier inhabitants so that their ethnic identity is transformed into a national identity. But this may not always happen. The Fijians of Indian origin, in spite of adopting Fiji as their homeland and having become citizens, are not yet fully-fledged nationals. A similar situation existed in the case of the Jews in Europe.

A third, is the tendency on the part of a settler collectivity to identify with its ancestral homeland even after several decades, sometimes even after centuries, of immigration. This is manifested in the United States of America when collectivities refer to themselves as Anglo-Americans, Asian-Americans, Afro-Americans, and the like. It may be noted that the dominant ethnies’ self-definition connotes only a symbolic identification with their ancestral homeland. In contrast, the dominated ethnies experience collective alienation because of continued discrimination and oppression in the land to which they have been brought, and where they have

been assigned a subordinate status and a stigmatized identity. While the dominant ethnies may not question the internality of the dominated ethnies, as both are immigrants, members of the latter may not completely identify with their adopted homeland. This self-externalization is the route to their ethnification. The persistent tendency on the part of the erstwhile African slaves in the New World to describe themselves as Afro-Americans, Afro-Brazilians and so on, should be viewed in this light.

Fourth, ethnification also occurs when a state attempts to “integrate” and homogenize the different nations in its territory into a common “people”. The mechanisms resorted to are physical uprooting, creation of artificial politico-administrative units, state-sponsored colonization of the territory of the weaker and smaller nations, prevention of the use of their mother tongue, and the distortion of a people’s national history. Both socialist multinational states and capitalist nation states have resorted to this, although their ideological motivations and strategic weapons have differed vastly.

Fifth, if those who migrate to alien lands are denied citizenship rights even when they become eligible for them, they are ethnified in that they are treated as strangers and outsiders. The situation worsens when they are denied human rights which ought to be available to all irrespective of citizenship status. The cases of guest workers in Western Europe, particularly those from ex-colonial countries, and immigrant workers in the Middle East from Asian countries and the like belong to this category.

Finally, even when immigrants are accepted as co-nationals by the host society, the former may not want that identity and might wish to return to their homeland. This ambivalence emanates partly from their assessment of the impossibility of complete acceptance in the host society, and partly from the prospects awaiting them back home. For example, in the 1950s and 1960s Italy was a “sending” country, but by the 1970s and 1980s it became prosperous and a “receiving” country. Italian guest workers who had been readily accepted in some of the affluent Catholic countries of West Europe gradually started returning home. On the other hand, the prospects for guest workers in Europe from Tunisia or Turkey,



even if they wish to settle down, are limited, because the chances of their being accepted as fully-fledged members in Western Christian countries are slim. In other words, the process of transformation of an ethnic minority into a national minority calls for a change in the attitudes and value orientations of both collectivities, namely, the immigrants and the host society. This transformation is vital for building authentic diversity.

It is of great importance to emphasize the following points here. While in all the different varieties of ethnies there is a weakening of the relationship between territory and culture, in most cases it is both physical and psychological. But in some cases it is only a psychological phenomenon; those ethnies are aliens in their own homeland. Further, most of them are deprived collectivities, both in symbolic and material terms.

## *2.2 Ethnies, Nationals and Diversity*

The above analysis should not be taken to mean that there is no possibility of an ethnie transforming itself into a nation. There are several possibilities. An ethnie may assert its identity as a “nation” at the point of its arrival if it acquires sufficient resources—economic and political. Thus, European settlers in North America became the first “new nation”: the United States of America. However, at that early stage the USA became only a polity and not a nation, as most settlers still looked to Europe as their homeland. A second possibility is that an ethnie that was spatially dispersed, even for centuries, may recover its nationhood by returning to its ancestral homeland, as exemplified by the Jewish case. But such a possibility is very slim if a dispersed ethnie is not in a position to stake its moral claim vis-à-vis any territory. This is the case even now with the gypsies who are scattered in Europe. Finally, the liquidation of an earlier basis of identity (say race) and the acquisition of a new basis of identity (say culture) is possible through race mixture. Mestizos and ladinos in Latin America are products of miscegenation, and their identity is now anchored to culture rather than to race. They gradually became part of the cultural mainstream and came to be completely identified with Latin America.

If the transformation of an ethnîe into a nation is a matter of subjective perception on the part of the collectivities involved, acquisition of citizenship is a legal and individual act between particular individuals and two states, one at the point of departure and another at the point of arrival. Clearly, this condition is not applicable in situations of colonization and conquest. In such cases, the state and government may be absent at the point of arrival (as when Columbus and Captain Cook arrived at America and Australia respectively) or may not be legitimate as was the case of colonial governments in Africa and Asia. In the case of inter-state migrations, acquiring citizenship at the point of arrival is a matter between the individual migrants and the two state apparatuses. Even when one has acquired citizenship through due process, that is, by renunciation of the old citizenship if required at the point of arrival, one may encounter prejudices and discriminations from the host community. Legislation is not an appropriate or adequate instrument to cope with such a situation, but education in the broadest sense of the term is. The sources of prejudice and discrimination are both a matter of visibility (physical appearance, dress pattern, etc.) as well as a product of interaction, as religious faith, style of speaking the local language or dietary preferences are soon revealed.

In the final analysis, ethnification is a process through which some collectivities are defined and perceived as outsiders. This has nothing to do with facts of history, length of residence, or degree of assimilation. There are at least four contexts in which this happens. The first is when the mainstream cultural community in a multinational or poly-ethnic state asserts that it constitutes the nation, and that others should assimilate in the interests of the "nation". Waspization in the United States, Russification in the former Soviet Union and Hanization in China are examples of this. Second, even when a collectivity belongs and lives in its homeland, it may be perceived as cultural outsider because of its actual or attributed association with conquest and colonization. This is why Hindu nationalists view Muslims and Christians who are natives of India as cultural outsiders, and not as a part of the nation. A third instance is when descendants of a people may be defined as aliens and driven out, even after they have been in a country for several centuries.

This was the case of the Turks in Bulgaria. Fourth, a people may be driven out of its ancestral homeland because their religion is different. Examples of such types of ethnification are that of the Zoroastrians and Baha'is of the Persian Gulf earlier and the Hindus of Kashmir Valley recently. This process is referred to as "ethnic cleansing" in the media and even in social science writing. However, in terms of the conceptualization I propose in this paper that it is an incorrect description, because what is actually happening is the de-nationalization of a people vis-à-vis their ancestral homeland.

The reverse of ethnification is nationalization, which happens when an elective affinity develops between the people who are believed to be ancestral kin. Thus, if Germans who have lived outside Germany for several decades or centuries declare that their ancestors were Germans, they are instantly acknowledged as nationals. When they arrive in Germany, they are given the status of returnees or refugees. Whether or not they speak the German language and pursue the local lifestyle, they are German nationals because their nationality is defined by blood. This is also true of Italy and Japan, perhaps to a lesser extent. Both the German and Italian states reinforce this conception of nationality by conferring citizenship on those who claim to be Germans or Italians by blood. Thus, those who are in reality ethnies are unhesitatingly transformed into nationals and citizens.

### ***2.3 Dynamics of Transformation: Nationals and Ethnies***

It would be rewarding to examine at this juncture, albeit briefly, the processes involved in ethnies becoming nationals, and nationals being transformed into ethnies or marginalized as minorities. Often immigrants (not to be confused with those who migrate for employment for brief periods, or students, etc.) initially have a sojourner's attitude; they hope to return to their ancestral homeland. Whether or not the sojourner orientation persists depends upon a variety of factors, the most important being the motivating factors behind migration and the existential conditions at the points of departure and destination. As long as ambivalence about one's homeland,

ancestral or adopted, persists one is clearly an ethnic. That is, ethnicity is an outsider status, either because one is considered as such by the nationals at one's point of arrival, or because one has not made up one's mind to become a settler.

Becoming a citizen often facilitates the process of overcoming the sojourner attitude, but it does not follow automatically that citizens instantly become nationals. To put it differently, to be national is not a matter of formal definition and legal entitlements, but one of isomorphism between one's self-definition and other's definition of the self. Viewed thus, it would be easy to understand why quite a sizeable proportion of sojourners are citizens but not nationals, a trend accelerated by globalization. In order to become nationals they are required to eschew their sojourner ambivalence and view the territory into which they have migrated as their new homeland; that is, they should become nationals. This process may be legitimately designated as nationalization. In contrast, the act of terrorizing and flushing out people from their ancestral homeland is ethnification, a process through which nationals are transformed into ethnics, and through which insiders are forced to become outsiders. This variety of ethnification entails de-territorialization of the nationals.

What I am suggesting is that the processes of nationalization and ethnification should be clearly distinguished, as the former fosters diversity and the latter destroys diversity. More importantly, the implications for the collectivities subjected to these processes vary enormously in terms of achieving equality and maintaining identity. The ethnification of First Nations of Americas and Australia implies robbing them off of their ancestral land; they are in their ancestral territory but not of it. The nationalization of immigrants entails a process of acquiring identification with the land on which they have settled. Either way the link between territory and nation is clear.

The crucial importance of territory as a social fact has been perceived as eroded substantially in recent times in the context of the much-heralded process of globalization. Territory needs to be rehabilitated as a crucial social reality if we are to build diversity within national states. It takes a few generations for a relocated

collectivity—be they voluntary migrants, refugees, exiles, exported labour, colonizers or conquerors, that is, an ethnic group—to feel at home as settlers. For first generation migrants, perhaps, this never happens, and they invariably look towards the ancestral homeland with nostalgia. Conversely, it is difficult for nationals, be they marginalized First Nations or those who have been flushed out of their territory, to get reconciled to the fact that their legitimate claim over their ancestral homeland has been eroded. They persist with their moral claim, even as their legal claim has been usurped. Nations are not simply territorial entities but consist of communities to which their members have a sense of belonging and an intense emotional attachment. When a collectivity develops the feeling that it does not belong or is treated as an outsider because of its specific identity, it becomes an *ethnie* which is an obstacle to nurturing diversity. Citizenship in such cases can provide at least partial succor to *ethnies*, because it is essentially an instrument of equality.

### 3. Minorities: Threat to Diversity?

It is not only the state or the cultural mainstream which can endanger diversity; national minorities in federal polities too can do this. There are two types of national minorities: state seeking minorities and state renouncing ones. Most of the national minorities in the contemporary world are state-renouncing in that they do not aspire for a sovereign state and opt for only provincial states within the federal polity which they perceive as an adequate condition for nurturing their cultural identity. However, the proclivity to seek sovereign states is not altogether absent among national minorities. But this aspiration sits uneasily with the principle of sustaining diversity within the federal polity. It needs to be recognized here that the tendency on the part of national minorities to demand exclusive sovereign states usually surfaces because of one or more of the following reasons, often a combination of them: (a) denial of adequate level of political autonomy, (b) absence of economic equity between different federal units, and (c) the impossibility of cultural groups upholding their identity markers within

the polity. If both the federal polity and the national minorities appreciate each other's needs and aspirations the possibility of accommodating and nurturing diversity is substantial.

National minorities are by and large linguistic minorities with an identifiable homeland and a common language. This is also true of tribal communities. But the main problem in the case of tribes is the size factor; majority of them are too tiny and lack financial and administrative viability to have their own provincial states and for pursuing development. In such cases structures below the provincial states such as Autonomous Regions and Local Self Governments are feasible arrangements. Thus, in a federal polity the state should be conceptualized as a layered system consisting of federal government, provincial states, autonomous regions and local self-governments. But in the formation of these layers the cultural factor needs to be accepted as crucial.

If linguistic and tribal communities are natural candidates to be national minorities, religious communities tend to be ethnic minorities because of their de-territorialization. This is not to suggest that religious communities cannot be national minorities; if they have an accredited homeland and a common language they can be, as exemplified by the case of Sikhs in the Indian Punjab. By the same tenet Sikhs outside the Punjab can only be ethnic minorities.

Broadly speaking there are two types of religious communities viewed from the perspective of their territorial attachments. Proselytizing religions such as Buddhism, Christianity and Islam are necessarily geographically dispersed and their attachments to territory are tenuous. But even non-proselytizing religions tend to get spatially dispersed as exemplified by the Jewish case. Further, in so far as a particular religious community cannot lay an exclusive claim to a specified territory it cannot be the only national community in that territory. For example Jews, Christians and Muslims have legitimate nativity claims in the territory of Israel. Similarly, Hindus, Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs are perceived as "national" communities in India, Hindus being a majority and the rest minorities. However, Muslims and Christians are defined and viewed as ethnic minorities, that is, as cultural outsiders, by a section of Hindus.

Here the question of the time period for the nativization of a religious community, for its transformation from an ethnical to a national community or minority, becomes pertinent. But the question is relevant only for immigrants and if they adopt the territory to which they have migrated as their homeland they become a national community or minority gradually. This is the case with Christians in the New World—the Americas, Australia and New Zealand. But those who embrace a religion alien to their homeland are also nationals because nationality cannot and should not be defined on the basis of religion. Thus Muslims and Christians of India are national minorities as they are converts from local castes and tribes. But some sections of the Hindu majority tend to define them as outsiders thereby subjecting them to a process of ethnification as noted above, endangering the process of accommodating diversity.

Embracing a new religion by a section of citizens often brings cultural diversity to the polity; which may range from food and dress to legal system and education. Following the first set, namely, food and dress can become contentious only if they are insisted upon by the religion in question and only if objections are articulated against them by others; eating beef in India and putting on the veil by Muslim women in public places in France are examples of this. Resistance to a Uniform Civil Code by some of the religious minorities in India and preference for Madrasa education (which nurtures Islamic identity) by a section of Muslims in India exemplify the second set. Accommodation of cultural practices specific to religious minorities is an expression of accepting cultural diversity within a federal polity. But this can only be done if these practices do not compromise citizenship values and human rights.

#### **4. Conclusion**

National states may often be composed of religious, linguistic and tribal communities some of which are national or ethnic minorities. To accommodate and nurture them political federalism is an imperative. Therefore, the essence of federalism lies not in the constitutional or institutional structure but in the underlying society itself. Federal Government is a device through which the federal qualities

of the society are articulated and protected as Livingston argued five decades ago. Federal institutions facilitate nation-building in a diverse society, and therefore an examination of how different forms of federation contribute to the accommodation for the different kinds of diversities outlined in this paper is an important task of nation-building.