The Quest for Decolonization: Reimagining Politics, Nation State and Identity in India

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Abstract

Was the liberation movement really for liberation? Did the nationalist movements betray the multitudes, the common of the society? Was the liberation of South Asia only a shift of minorities (from native to national minority) and unequal dynamics of power ('Strongmen' ruling the weak)? Almost every nation state shares the same attributes. The Empire's colonists and native are the nation state's national majority and national minority, Mamdani (2020) argued. The study uses Mamdani's theoretical framework of nation state to understand the plight of India's national minorities. Minorities of the nation state are struggling to belong and find a space of identity in the land of their ancestors. Mamdani, through the example of Apartheid South Africa, proposes that nation state's

violence can be curbed through decolonizing the governing apparatus of state narratives that shapes the identity of the people for its own benefits. The people should not buy into the state narratives based on differences that spread violence for its own strategic and political purposes. But they should reassemble and redefine their subjective truths to reshape their identity, to regain the power of inclusion not exclusion, and to contribute to the land of their ancestors. As Amartya Sen argued, freedom is also the primary objective of development. The struggle to freedom must be fought on all fronts.

Keywords: Nation State, Decolonization, Identity, Indian Politics, Minorities, Colonialism

Introduction

The idea that India perpetually struggled to feed its diverse, multiethnic people with a vast area needed to be governed properly was propagated by the coloniser's loyalties. Whereas, India was generating 25 percent of worldwide manufacturing and was reckoned as a fertile and the most affluent region globally in every aspect (Chatterji, 2023). Corporations carrying the agenda of greed have been the main source of violence, ruthless exploitation and maltreatment of the Global South that provided the foundation of empires and colonial projects (Stern, 2023). But, history has been shy of documenting indigenous and marginalised resistance mainly from these non Europeans and people of Global South the way they

encountered this hegemony and dominance with their indomitable spirit, adding a layer to the overall narrative of colonial expansion (Veevers, 2023).

Politics is usually discussed in terms of power: soft power and hard power. The proponent of the term "soft power", Joseph Nye argues that "the world is neither unipolar, multipolar, nor chaotic — it is all three at the same time" (Nye, 2011). However, politics involves creation of a public space where people deliberately engage in meaningful discourse (Arendt, 2013) so as to create a society with an equitable legal system rather than turning it into a "commodity only the rich can afford'' (Ansary, 2009).

Autonomy is "the capacity of people to organise their lives in terms of their projects, desires and needs without having to submit to whatever rules are established by institutions'' (Castells & Kumar, 2014). That also has been the political dilemma of the world that the autonomy of choosing its governing structures regarding the will and determination of its people was neither acknowledged before by the colonisers and nor respected now by the neocolonial capitalist states and organisations. The realist paradigm of power has prevailed that focuses more on the threats and dangers posed by the differences of cultures therefore superior civilizations must lead the way of shaping the future of the world as their sacred duty to subvert the "clash of civilizations'' (Huntington, 2003). But why did Western civilization "not simply spread of its own accord" and why from the "last 500 years or so they are aiming guns at people's

heads" in order to suffocate them to adopt it (Graeber & Wengrow, 2021, p. 493)?

The resistance was always there in any scale against the oppressor in these lands of India and Pakistan. The tribals who were suppressed and not acknowledged and accepted by many rulers of India throughout the history even resisted against East India Company in 1859, 1861 and 1862 (Mathur, 2004) when these British colonists were usurping the land of these natives. There is also the resistance against "Americanity" (Quijano & Wallerstein, 1992) which is an essential element of modernity and coloniality that does not rely on colonialism but rationalises imperial expansion and interventions (Mignolo, He, & Xie, 2012). In this context, decolonization transforms into a resistance to own the right to choose the methods of governance and development organically rather than adopting from the "correctional facility'' (Cho, 2021) of the West. This resistance stems from theorization of "sociogeny", a term associated with Frantz Fanon where human beings are defined in a larger cultural context rather than merely in biological fashion (Marriott, 2011).

Following the hegelian concept of the historical struggle of humans, the debate of identity originates from the clash between the true inner self and the societal rules that endangers the dignity of the individual. Fukuyama argued that this has started the 'politics of resentment' (Fukuyama, 2019, p. 9, 10). Hegel argued, peace can be

brought through mutual recognition (Hegel, 2018). This lays the groundwork for the theory of recognition.

Addressing this historical struggle including the effects of colonialism in the nation state is through recognition, but can the "deficit model of recognition" (McBride, 2013), where the recognition is about "adjusting and accommodating" the people, or accepting previously held pattern of recognition akin to the Hegelian master recognizing the slave's "dignity" on its own terms rectify the wrongs done by the colonial masters and now the rulers of the nation state? (Mcintosh, 2022). The concept of "mutual recognition" only perpetuates more oppression, violence and injustice for subaltern communities in a nation state of hegemonic power dynamics (Coulthard, 2014). Is this unending struggle at the stage of unequal power dynamics (Sartre, 1995)? No, the multitudes must be acknowledged and recognized on their terms where they redefine their subjectivities through the process of decolonization.

Objective of the Research

In India, everyday there is a new terror and violence based on political anxieties ultimately starting new nomenclature and classification in the list of endless other groups. The objective of this research is to provide a different lens and to offer a decolonized alternative to colonial ruling practices and the governing structures prevalent in the nation state of India. As, Alain Badiou answered to the question about the true life, "a life in which the subject

constitutes herself as a subject" (Badiou, 2016). And as Foucault said that the mission of today is "not to discover what we are but to refuse what we are" to deal with the "simultaneous individualisation and totalization of modern power structures" (Foucault, 2020, p. 336).

Theoretical Framework

Mamdani (2020) argues that Eurocentric narrative of the rise of modern nation state in 1648 Peace of Westphalia often sidelines the fact that intra-European conflicts paved the way for European colonial expansion, highlighting the interconnectedness of secularisation through domestic religious tolerance and peace and the global colonisation project. For Mamdani, the process of national state started in 1492 in Iberia by the two developments, namely ethnic cleansing of Moors and Jews and the other was usurping control over colonies in America. This later consolidated the idea in 1648. So, he concludes that nationalism and colonialism are connected to modernity (p. 2).

Empires categorised people into colonists and native, but the nation state did that in nationalist majority and nationalist minority. Rulers and governors of independent states are still carrying the legacy of their colonisers. Rather than returning the land to the natives - the true owners- nation state unfurls the road further for new capitalist exploitations. Here, national minorities face nationalist violence whether its religion, language or race because in a nation state

identities are politicised through various nationalist agendas and the nation state, as a sole acceptable state system, strengthens the hegemonic structure that inks the route for capitalist operations. Methods of mobilization- restrictions on movement, too have been an unrelenting feature of nation-state as was of imperial state.The rules of entering and working in a nation state and rules of migration are a part of nation building in it.

Freedom, as Sen argues, is the primary requisite for societal development (Coatbridge, 2002). "Substantive human freedoms" must be given precedence over economic stability, mental satisfaction, or societal processes (Sen, 2000). He argues that freedom is both constituted by development and in turn is instrumental in its growth. Different kinds of instrumental freedoms include political freedom, economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency, and security. "Development consists of the removal of various types of unfreedoms that leave people with little choice and little opportunity of exercising their reasoned agency'' (p. xii).

Political and social movements compliment each other. The political is directly linked with the social and vice versa. Therefore, decolonization would entail transformation at community and institutional level. If decolonization does not include decriminalisation of justice addressing problematic structures of nationalistic violence, it will fail leading to facilitating another form of political violence because ''the challenge facing anticolonialists is to reimagine the political community" (p. 328). Quoting the

example of Apartheid policies in South Africa, Mamdani argues that they defeated the nationalist violence by depoliticizing their identities by reshaping their subjectivities defined by the nation state and accepted diversity. But this decolonization process was not completed at all fronts, so they were rendered vulnerable to xenophobia.

Nation State of India

Minority rights has been a contentious issue of the nation states. Minorities have faced political manoeuvring since the creation of the postcolonial nation State of India. Defining and redefining the identity of the people has been a constant feature of the nation states with the changing political dynamics. How minorities have been accommodated, facilitated and contested have also defined the trajectory of the nation states (Fazal, 2014).

This section will explore Mamdani's concept of nation state using India as an example. India has been the hub of multiculturalism and inclusivity since times immemorial. The formula of 'unity in diversity' was popularised by Nehru and is considered the Indian motto to indicate a society that allows equal rights to every citizen (Viswanath, 2014). The motto becomes dubious in light of the evidence that shows the treatment of religious and ethnic minorities prevalent in India.

Since its creation, the Indian nation state has created many national minorities in different states based on religion, caste, ethnicity and

indigeneity. The world's largest democracy has been failing its people for some time now. Hailed as a secular nation state, religious extremism was always there (Zaheer & Hayat, 2023). The question is whether the Tocquevillian doubts of democracy turning into anarchy are rising in the governing system of India.

In the second decade of the 21st century, the rule of 'strongmen' has resurfaced in the political arena. Modi came with its national goal of Hindutva, "the sword that is now chopping off the hands of the people of this country" (Hussain, 2018, p.37). A 2022 report by the United States Commission for International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) considers India among the countries of which there are concerns because of a rise in curbing religious freedoms. With every year passing, the space of religious tolerance and freedom is being eliminated with the discriminatory policies in the past again and again. Muslims suffered mainly in case of inter-relationship, hijab wearing and cow slaughter. Christians, Sikhs, Dalits, and Adivasis also became victims of Hindutva cleansing ideology. The intolerance is caused by a religion-based exclusionary national identity. (United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, 2023).

The democracy of India has been in three stages, (i) conservative democracy (ii) democratisation of democracy and (iii) ethnic democracy. India is in the third phase using religious and cultural factors and producing violent nationalism (Jaffrelot, 2021). Modi was elected as prime minister in 2014 after his successful victory of

the Gujarat Model based on the massacre of Muslim in 2002 when he was Chief Minister of Gujarat. His party Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won the election with an absolute majority. The elements of populism and Hindutva were at play and that meant, Muslims as 'the other ', and as 'national minority' of the nation state of India, while revitalising The Hindu nationalism based on the principles of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Modi was seen as a 'strong man ' fit to rule the population of more than 1. 3 billion. That shifted the political landscape of India.

BJP found a Political space during the 1980s, especially during the Ayodhya Movement. Congress was falling at a popular front. So, BJP and RSS manipulated people using religious sentiments polarising the nation calling congress a Muslim party (Ashutosh, 2019). They also entered Kashmir removing its special status. What the people of India didn't realise was that Modi and RSS wanted time and people elected them again and again. Their agenda proliferated. And they created national minorities at will. Raising the concerns of majoritarianism in the World's largest democracy (Patel, 2022). The biases are so rampant in the administration of the governing Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and have infiltrated into autonomous institutions, including law enforcement and the judiciary, enabling nationalist agenda of BJP to intimidate, victimise, and assault religious minorities without facing any charges. Delhi riots were an example of how a peaceful protest against discriminatory citizenship law of 2019, was targeted and

more than 50 people were killed. 40 were Muslims (Human Rights Watch, 2019). The Indian Supreme Court warned about such attacks carried by Hindu mobs as the "new normal".

There are several impediments to a successful implementation of democracy in a decolonized sense. A large number of Indians live below the poverty line. Economic boom in the country has deepened the already present class divide. Political dissent is suppressed by the neoliberal state. Ethnic and religious minorities are treated unequally. Sections 124A and 120B of the India Penal Code outlaw sedition and criminal conspiracy, both of which are legacies of the colonial system. These laws are used to silence any critics of the state. Due to the dominance of Hindu policemen in numbers, the Indian police system is biassed towards Mulsims and Christians. Therefore, in case of any religious riot or conflict, the police tend to side with the Hindus. The police are protected by higher state functionaries (Basu, 2018). Number of legal and judicial issues are also faced by religious minorities in India. The anti conversion laws have been promulgated in more than half the states. Institutions have reserved quotas for only lower caste Hindus but not for lower caste non Hindus, which prevents willing conversions by making them forceful conversions. Intentional conversions are termed as 'propaganda'. The terms used in the article are so vague that almost any form of conversion would fall under forced conversion. Moreover, there are many legal loopholes and ambiguities which

allow anti minority actors to exploit the law and harass non Hindu minorities (Bauman, 2016).

In a nation state where minorities are confronting various kinds of exploitation and violence, Muslim were also blamed to spread COVID-19 pandemic India and were targeted by lynching mobs. Religious freedom has shrinked further after the second successive election victory of the Modi government. Since then ethnic cleansing has been the main danger for minorities. The 'secular' status of the constitution and its laws are compromised greatly (Ahmad & Zulkiffle, 2022).

Conclusion

The dialogue of politics must be for creating harmony between the people through mutual understanding and pluralism. The social fabrics have never been shattered like this before in South Asia, especially in India. The recent populist regimes with autocratic tendencies spreading exclusionary political narratives have harmed the societies at large.

The horror of the nation state continues to persist in India. Neo-colonialism or 'modern colonialism' (Nandy, 2009) has sustained because it established hierarchies against traditional order that had more space for the common than it has in the nation state . Decolonization is a process of re-creating these spaces of belonging rather than exploitation. The sense of identity can be assured through dismantling the 'tool of the masters' (Blanchard, 2013).

Mamdani's parallel of the power dynamics in the nation state and imperial states based on violence resonates with the challenges faced by the minorities in India. The solution of evil in a political dialogue must be removing the evil rather than "consolidation into statehoods" (Ahmed, 2003). Challenging state narratives that create power hierarchies on different social and political levels through critically analysing the elite narrative at the grassroot level is inevitable. This struggle is not by just one of national minorities, but it is an interconnected struggle of the whole society to challenge this inequality. Selective historical narratives should be strictly dealt with. This can also be done through intellectual public discourse to redefine social and political Identity through mutual understanding of the multitudes to emphasise the importance of inclusive policies. Justice can also be demanded through revisiting the culture of harmony before the colonial masters to challenge the modern exclusionary narratives of "define and rule" (Mamdani, 2012).

The way forward for the Indian state will be to acknowledge and address the historical injustices carried out by the BJP government and they must be held accountable against the rights of minorities. Equal access to resources and opportunities at the large political stage should be facilitated for the just and democratic representation. All the laws and regulations based on discrimination should be renegotiated to restore the structure of welfare society.

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