

The Anthropology of Enthnationalism : The Politics of Difference

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“मेरा साना दुखले आज्यको मुलुक होइन यो चार बर्ण छ्यात्तिश जात सबैको साझा फूलबारी हो
सबैलाई चेतना भया”
-पृथ्वीनारायण शाह ॥

Abstract

Along with the emergence of Maoist-insurgency in Nepal ethnic awareness pervaded through the society which advanced to the form of movement even it delivered a sharp stroke at the threshold of Constitutional assembly and till it is undertide passion. The project of nation state (re)structuring of federal Nepal is on the progress. This enterprise essentially demands for some common consensus in understanding the contested notions behind the politics of identity versus difference vis-a-vis ethnic nationalism or a liberal concept of civic state before venturing the most controversial debate in searching the federal-strands in order to form a consolidated nation state. Constitutional assembly and the major political parties found largely engaged with talking about people's ethnicity, their culture and languages as the major constructive principles pivoting around at which the federal nations were conceived. While the constitution of Nepal was announced without identification of its federal provinces because of these undercurrent emotions.

Ethnic classifications are rather arbitrary, they are changing over time - today's ethnicities are yesterday's races, and they are different in different countries. While the dubiety on those dimensions to the extent of their nature of fluidity and situational applicability may supply sufficient ground for a clear-cut demarcation of a territorial boundary for any ethnic groups in Nepal. It is equally important to remind to this detail that how the globalized forces of hybridization is taking place. Hybridization is considered a powerful blurring process through which the elements of ethnicity, identity and purity with their boundary limitation becomes indistinct. Further, transnational and supranational context of inescapable globalized processes are of the great significant domains to this concern too.

In this regard, rendering with some common conceptual references of intellectually satisfying literatures, this paper aims to have recourse in searching common unifying and embracing dimensions of an integral nationalism, a collective overarching Nepalese identity

woven within a common national sovereignty through which all the differences and commonalities can be shared, practiced and recognized so that may create pressure to sublimate bare political yearnings and therefore, pleads for the people in public-spheres and the social scientists, intellectuals to broach and share their views.

Key Words : Nationalism, ethnonationalism, ethnicity, identity, hybridity.

Objective

Objectively this article intends to examine and explain historical and fundamental theoretical assumptions underpinned Ethnonationalism and Identity politics that might crystallize the concepts regarding Nepalese conglomeration of ethnic mosaic to be more fortified.

The Significance of the Study

The ideology of ethnonationalism is regarded as the most sensitive issue for peaceful coexistence between the state and populations in a multi-cultural society like Nepal. The problem with the emergence of 'emotional', 'unhealthy' and 'violent' nationalism as conceived by Nikolas (1999) has been felt more critical. Peoples' understanding or the ignorance about what exactly nationalism means might be the root cause beneath the question. There is no deficiency of definitions of the terms in the vast literary world but often these concepts are highly misinterpreted. The proper analytical judgement in the use and consideration of these concepts would justify the problem. Hence, the context here enlightens the significance of the study seems logical.

Research Methodology

This study as such, designed in the framework of qualitative - interpretative approach following descriptive design model of George (2008) as commonly used in the study of literary texts. According to George library research involves identifying and locating sources that provide factual information or personal or expert opinion on a research question. Mostly, in the form of secondary sources, the research data were drawn through E/books, journal articles, media literature and internet sources as relevant to the study. The information gathered was analyzed along through the description and explanation successively by developing arguments in order to deal the concern of the issue and finally the conclusion was drawn accordingly.

Introduction

Nepal as a conglomerate of heteronomous society with different cultural mosaic and of complex ethnic mix (Bista, 1999 [1991] : 2, 3, Pradhan, 2002 : 1), exhibits disparate and inherently different value systems conflicting among the specific ethnic groups. The conflict of Nepalese society, as Bista envisages, should not be seen as an ethnic one. He assumes that, ethnic conflict is not currently a problem for Nepal. Even though, ethnic nationalist passions as emerged along with the Maoist insurgence have been continue to be strong during these days along with the discourse of federalist nation state formation. Delanty and Kumar (2006) believe that, the notion of nationalism once thought to be a declining force. The heyday of nationalism was assumed to be the age between the French revolution and the World War II. In fact, nationalism to some extent, have been considered in terms of

adaptation of political and cultural patterns in the course to form a nation/state, though there are several roots. The burgeoning questions ever discussed in these days are of sovereignty and identity-politics in relation to nationalism. According to Arnason (2006), as Gellner noticed it, Marx and Weber had both been mistaken. 'The decisive world-historical force of the industrial age was neither the class struggle, nor a self-perpetuating rationalizing dynamic: it was nationalism, embodied in nations possessing or demanding a state'.

There has been some confusion between the use of the terms like nation and state. The term 'nation' carries ethnocentric (primordial or instrumental) sentiment of indigenous identity while 'state' is considered to be the idea of western (foreign) led political (liberal-civilian or military) institutional administrative arrangement.

Nationalism is taking a wide variety of forms and is more fluid than static in this age of 'transnationalism', 'long-distance-nationalism' and 'supranationalism' due to the rigorous globalized process of hybridization. People's claim at this end is to becoming a global citizen. Nationalism has been transcended beyond the territorial limit and therefore not sequestered or confined within the so called historic land. In our case, for example, we can take NRN and other expatriates and equally to the people of so called non-indigenous territorially non-associated. We may need rather a new definition in this concern. As I believe, nationalism (how we understand), would be the pivotal term of reference in framing a state, which would rather be a major leading or guiding principle for us so as to embark on the project of (re)structuring federal Nepal. It is because that *nationalism* has been the most important political doctrine which holds that humanity can be divided into separate, discrete units called nations and that each nation should constitute a separate political unit – a state.

Nationalism

'There is no nation without national consciousness, i.e. an awareness of membership in the nation, coupled with a view that this membership is an inherently valuable quality' (Hroch 2000 [1984]: 12) – cited in Arnason (2006).

The multifaceted notion of nationalism as arose with the rise of political subjectivity may mean many things as - a movement, an ideology or discourse of nationhood - and there are different traditions of scholarship too.

Before venturing into the vague arena, I would prefer to go along with some root terms that may help in making sense to the discourse of nationalism.

Ethnonationalism

The realization of the term 'Nationalism' in common parlance, absorbed as the blend of the concepts like nation and state. The term Ethnie is also found compared and equated to the term nation. In everyday life even the media consume nationalism often in reference to ethnonationalism. Whereas, ethnonationalism emphasizes the greatest importance and superiority of one nation above the others in contrary to civic or moderate nationalism. Ethnonationalist passion assumes that each nation has an ethnic core, common ancestry or blood, and a territory as the constituent elements of nationalism. According to Connor (1994), 'Ethnonationalism (also called "ethnic nationalism") connotes identity with and

loyalty to a nation in the sense of a human grouping predicated upon a myth of common ancestry. Seldom will the myth find support in scientific evidence. DNA analyses of the patrilineally bequeathed Y chromosome attest that nations tend to be neither genetically homogeneous nor hermetical, and analyses of the matrilineally bequeathed mitochondrial DNA customarily attest to still greater heterogeneity and transnational genetic sharing. However, the popularly held conviction that one's nation is ethnically pure and distinct is intuitive rather than rational in its wellsprings and, as such, is capable of defying scientific and historic evidence to the contrary'.

Ethnicity

The common usage of the term *ethnicity* refers to the process of identification of a group on the basis of a perceived cultural distinctiveness (that may be expressed in terms like - language, religion, values, mythologies, art, rituals, food, family life, public life and many other artifacts and material culture) which makes the group into a people. Wikipedia refers the terms *ethnicity* and *ethnic group* as derived from the Greek word *ethnos*, however, translated as *nation*, which originally meant 'heathen' or 'pagan' to the words of R. Williams as Eriksen (1993) quotes. 'It was used in this sense in English from the mid-14th century until the mid-19th century, when it gradually began to refer to 'racial' characteristics. The modern usage of 'ethnic group', however, reflects the different kinds of encounters - industrialized states have had with subordinate groups, such as immigrants and colonized subjects; 'ethnic group' came to stand in opposition to 'nation', to refer to people with distinct cultural identities who, through migration or conquest, had become subject to a foreign state'.

The Weberian concept of ethnicity resonates to 'those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization and migration; this belief must be important for group formation; furthermore it does not matter whether an objective blood relationship exists' (<http://en.academic.ru/dic.nsf/enwiki/64277>-Retrieved: 7th, Oct. 2009).

The most primordialist thinker Smith, (1989) observes ethnicity as having at least six dimensions of ethnic characters of a historic community what he calls an '*ethnie*', includes:

- A common myth of descent
- A sense of solidarity (overrides class and other divisions)
- A shared collective name
- A shared culture, especially language and religion (creates sense of separateness from others)
- A shared history – this unites successive generations
- An association with specific territory

Hastings's understanding of ethnicity is known as a group of people with a shared cultural identity and spoken language. It constitutes the major distinguishing element in all pre-

national societies, but may survive as a strong subdivision with a loyalty of its own within established nations (Hastings, 1997: 2-5).

Alternatively, Barth, (1969) assumes ethnic groups not formed on the basis of a shared culture, but rather through the social processing of formation of groups on the basis of 'cultural differences'. He focuses on the concern that boundaries evolved as a replacement for 'cultural differences'. Ethnicity is regarded as a matter of social organization of 'cultural difference'. According to him, 'it is the everyday actions, choices, situations and conditions in which each individual finds himself or herself, and with which they choose to identify, which makes a difference in how ethnic groups are made up'. He states that ethnic groups and their features are produced under particular inter-factional, historical, economic and political circumstances. For Barth these features are highly situational and not primordial. Similarly, Wolf, (1982: 381) also claims ethnicity as a product of social interaction rather than reflecting essential qualities inherent to a human group.

Cohen's observation on the other hand, assumes ethnicity as a fluid concept by which members distinguish 'in-groups' from 'out-groups,' and which can be in a state of constant change due to various situational applications – 'a series of nesting dichotomizations of inclusiveness and exclusiveness' (Cohen, 1978). That is, we can see similarity to the concept of constant social 'interaction' of Barth and Wolf through which identity and boundary are constructed however, Cohen's argument differs in the point that this boundary also remains fluid along with members changing identity at their will, sometimes multiple times within a lifespan; and this occurs as a result of a change in location. Cohen further argues that, ethnicity can be narrowed or broadened in boundary terms in relation to the specific needs of political mobilization. This may be why descent is sometimes considered as a marker of ethnicity, and sometimes not: which depends generally on the political situation.

In the similar fashion, anthropologist Joan Vincent (in Academic dictionaries and encyclopedias) also observes that, ethnic boundaries often have a mercurial character which are always in flux (<http://en.academic.ru/dic.nsf/enwiki/64277>- retrieved on: 7th, Oct. 2009).

The most fundamental fact of ethnicity, as investigated by anthropologists, is the application of a systematic distinction between 'we' and 'the others' it is therefore, Eriksen (1996: 4) agrees with Barth and Cohen, A., to observe it as a kind of politics rather a natural phenomena. Eriksen (1996: 7-10) assumes ethnicity, to be appear along with the moment a group comes into contact with other groups, through which a perceived cultural differences makes a social difference to the ends 'us' and 'them'. He states that minority is relational and if the boundaries change, so does the relation between minority and majority populations. These distinctions therefore, are more fluid, more situational and overlapping, and on the whole less clear-cut where a definite boundary is to be drawn. Eriksen's understanding on these interconnections of ethnicity includes 'objective' as well as 'subjective' aspects, and ethnicity, whether studied as contrasting identities or as political organization, must in today's world be viewed in relation to globalization processes. 'The

question should not, therefore, be framed as ‘what is ethnicity’, but rather as ‘how can we most fruitfully conceptualize ethnicity?’

Identity, Hybridity and Transnationality:

From the perspective of a culture, Clothier, (2006) proceeds that the Latin root of hybrid as the term *hybrida* does not carry a positive meaning instead it connotes as ‘the bastard child of a Roman and a slave’. Hybridity had been a term of abuse in colonial discourse for those who were products of miscegenation and mixed-breeds. It is considered as the colonialist discourse of racism and equally referred as the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization. Hybridization takes many forms including cultural, political and linguistic. Similarly, for Bhabha, (1994), ‘the social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation.’ The concept of hybridity thus occupies a central place in postcolonial discourse. It is the notion that ‘any culture or identity is pure or essential is disputable (Ashcroft *et al* in Meredith, 1998).’ Meredith, (1998), promotes the value of hybridity in the words of Hoogvelt as it is to be ‘celebrated and privileged as a kind of superior cultural intelligence owing to the advantage of in-betweenness, the straddling of two cultures and the consequent ability to negotiate the difference.’ For Bhabha, again Meredith, (1998) illustrates, ‘hybridity is the process by which the colonial governing authority undertakes to translate the identity of the colonized (the *Other*) within a singular universal framework, but then fails producing something familiar but new’ known as the ‘third space’. The third space thus, is a mode of articulation, a way of describing a productive, and not merely reflective, space that engenders new possibility. It is an ‘interruptive, interrogative, and enunciative’ (Bhabha, 1994) space of new forms of cultural meaning and production blurring the limitations of existing boundaries and calling into question established categorizations of culture and identity. According to Bhabha, this hybrid third space is an ambivalent site where cultural meaning and representation have no ‘primordial unity or fixity’ that is, on which ethnic distinctions become fuzzy. It is in the emergence of the interstices - the overlap and displacement of domains of difference - that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated (Bhabha, 1994).’ Hybridization by its nature makes blurred the ethnic distinctions and at the same time it transcends the boundaries of ethnicity and hegemonic monocultural limits and thus promotes transnationalization along with the rapid emergence of global forces.

The term transnationalism is considered to be evolved during the decade of 90s. in the process of defining the transnational immigrants and their communities. As Kivisto, (2001) observes, it was in 1990 that cultural anthropologists Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch and Christina Szanton Blanc organized a conference on transnationalism. Glick Schiller and her colleagues argue in a way that historically, there is something qualitatively different about immigrants today compared to their late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries’ counterparts. They contend to the view that the earlier era’s immigrants as having broken off all homeland social relations and cultural ties, and thereby locating themselves solely within

the socio-cultural, economic, and political orbit of the receiving society. However, by contrast, today's immigrants are 'composed of those whose networks, activities and patterns of life encompass both their host and home societies. Their lives cut across national boundaries and bring two societies into a single social field.' Thus, Glick Schiller *et al.* as Kivisto, (2001) invokes, have offered the term *transnationalism* as 'the process by which immigrants build the social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement by maintaining a wide range of affective and instrumental social relationships spanning borders.' Per se, we can take several examples of expatriates like a small group of Nepalese immigrants living in San Francisco, US. They have formed a transnational organization called 'Kartabya' and collaborating in different development projects along with Nepalese counterpart as their homeland.

In articulation of the term transnationality which evidently concerns to the social relations of transnational migrants, Kivisto, (2001), refers Steven Vertovec (1999), and summarizes the key aspects of human relations that carry the notions as :

- a social morphology focused on a new border spanning social formation;
- it consists of diasporic consciousness;
- a mode of cultural reproduction variously identified as syncretism, creolization, bricolage, cultural translation, and hybridity;
- an avenue of capital for transnational corporations (TNCs), and in a smaller but significant way in the form of remittance sent by immigrants to family and friends in their homelands;
- a site of political engagement, both in terms of homeland politics and the politics of homeland governments vis-a-vis their émigré communities, and in terms of the expanded role of international non-governmental organizations (INGOs); and
- a reconfiguration of the notion of place from an emphasis on the local to the translocal.

The concept of transnationalism thus implies the transcendence of national boundaries. Koirala-Azad, (2008), understands that the nation is as a *confined space*. According to her, confined space is a term derived 'from labor-safety regulations that refers to an area whose enclosed conditions and limited access make it dangerous. A confined space is any space that has limited or restricted means of entry or exit.' Koirala-Azad proceeds her research with the Nepali community that relies upon the deconstruction of *national* and *nationalism* for an understanding of transnationalism. 'Nationalism and the values connected to it create some of the most important challenges for Nepali immigrants seeking to experience relocation. Many communities remain emotionally, physically, socially, and culturally bound by the concept of nation and the value of nationalism.' Koirala-Azad, (2008) invokes Robert in the words of Veblen that these conceptualizations lead us to develop towards '*trained incapacity*: the inability to see what is there because of how we have been trained to look.'

Nation and Nationality:

The concepts of the terms nation and nationality are found the most contentiously defined by different anthropologists. Tolz, (2004) writes that, there have been several definitions of 'nation' existed in Russia since the late eighteenth century.

The most controversy begins with the understanding of 'nation' as its timeless notion attached with primordial sentiment fixed with its ethnic origin and the view associated with modernity, industrial society and democracy. The 'nation' as perceived by the ethnicists is known as a natural evolutionary phenomenon developed out of *ethnie*. Smith (1994) appears with the view that the roots of nations are to be found in pre-modern ethnic communities and hence nationalism succeeds by discovering the ethnic past of a nation. 'For nationalists themselves, the role of the past is clear and unproblematic. The nation was always there, indeed it is part of the natural order, even when it was submerged in the hearts of its members.' Hastings (1997) differs with Smith in a way that, ethnicity is more parochial concept rather than that of nation which do not constitute the right to demarcate political boundary. As he concludes, 'a nation is a far more self-conscious community than an ethnicity, formed from one or more ethnicities, and normally identified by a literature of its own, it possesses or claims the right to political identity and autonomy as a people, together with the control of specific territory.' Whereas, in understanding nationalism, Hobsbawm (1990) and Gellner, E. (1983), to some extent, reflect similar view, that holds that both the political and national unit to be congruent. Hobsbawm regards the *nation* neither a primary nor as an unchanging social entity. 'Nations as natural, God-given way of classifying men and as an inherent political destiny are all a myth; nationalism, which sometimes takes preexisting cultures and turns them into nations, sometimes invents them, and often obliterates preexisting cultures: that is a reality. In short, for the purposes of analysis nationalism comes before nations. Nations do not make states and nationalisms but the other way round.' He goes with Gellner by stressing the elements of artifact, invention and social engineering which enters into the making of nations. It is therefore, a making or constructed to the extent that merges with the views of Anderson (1991) which holds that 'a nation is an imagined political community. It is an imagined political community - - and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. In fact, all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined.'

It is believed that nationalism is a recent phenomenon, probably born with the French Revolution sometimes criticized as a modern religion. It is thus, have been flawed by some basic contradictions. In the words of Carnegie, C.V. (2002), 'reconstituting nationalism calls for the adoption of an expansive hegemonic ideology to replace what, for the most part, is a diversity-stifling, transformist one. A shift so radical cannot occur in circumscribed nation-state contexts only, but must involve a simultaneous transformation at the global level' as Koirala-Azad, (2008) quotes. In the similar fashion, Delanty and Kumar (2006) assert that 'the idea of the nation encapsulates social issues, such as solidarity and we-feeling, which are often eroded by the general tendency towards the transnationalization of the state whereby the state disengages itself from the nation. It pervades the global and the local dimensions and can even take cosmopolitan forms.'

Conclusion:

In understanding the term nationalism, often questions are found pivoted around the dichotomy as Western versus Eastern as well Civic versus Ethnic conceptions of nationhood. Delanty *et al* (2006) understand nationalism as a 'global phenomenon, demanding treatment in a global perspective. Many kinds of nationalism are products of transnationalism.' The modernist's claim of nationalism is understood as a relative congruence of a political unit of a people who see themselves as having observable sovereignty and identification along with their culture housed within a cohesive nation-state. The nation-state is considered to be a power body in which community and political units come together.

The ethnicist's notion of nationalism is based upon the cultural roots carried out by the *ethnie* (i.e. the ethnic elements of a people that differentiate them from the other) when it becomes politicized and characterizes as nation. That is what Nikolas (1999) observes it as a perennial feature of nationalism though the politicized *ethnie* as he understands is not a nation but a component of a culture and so of a nation and subsequently it is the subjective elements of nationalism. According to his understanding, the objective and subjective elements of nationalism are; for *nationalism* symbolizes its subjectivity and alternatively, *nationalism* signifies its objective elements in the exercise of it. He suggests that the objective features of nationalism constitute those elements 'determined by the existence of a state and its features that includes economic resources, population size and make-up, infrastructure, etc.' Similarly, the subjective elements are those made up of emotional and sentimental characters having 'distinctive qualities' of a national community includes, 'memory, value, myth and symbolism.' It is considered that the subjective elements are more dependent upon people's understanding of them even though ethnic components - the subjective elements of nationalism are regarded to be more vulnerable to emotion and conflict. Appealing to the emotions of people would be the most direct route to generating popular mobilization. Nikolas (1999) elevating his argument concludes that 'it is the subjective features that expose a stronger relationship to political conflict than the objective. This would account for the accusations of ethnicity, a predominantly subjective element, leading to conflict or more generally, ethnic nationalism being regarded as the more violent nationalism.'

Nikolas (1999), alternatively puts forth the civic nationalism as a smooth and good nationalism that evolves along with the emergence of civil society however he considers it a modernist propagation as a dichotomous version of ethnic one. For a stable and strong society there should exist a civil society which is 'less likely to be vulnerable to change' as it becomes a link between the state and culture and therefore, it is 'unlikely to be present in a weak society' too. Similarly, Yack (1998, in Arnason, 2006), asserts that civic nation is more rational, liberal and universalistic alternative to the ethnic one. A civil society, according to Gellner (1994) as Nikolas (1999) represents, is a 'set of diverse non-governmental institutions which is strong enough to counterbalance the state and prevent it from domination and atomizing the rest of society.'

What is observed here is that civic conception of nationality in this context, provides a congenial environment for the emergence of such a society that would have access to knowledge and information about the social, cultural and political processes of the society having ability to organize autonomous institutions free from government surveillance (Ramet, 1995 in Nikalas, 1999) would also be the first step towards the project of (re)structuring the nation in our context. However, it requires an educated public - backdrop of higher culture of education and a culture of listening the voices from below –public spheres.

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