

Understanding India

India, a land of multiple culture and multi-religious country had seen many foreign invasions for decades. Interestingly, it has always been successful to adopt itself to new cultures and religion which has diversified this sub-continent. The post imperial era saw the decline of the imperial sand-castle with the rising tide of India's amiable past, thus reviving the community structure and redefining religion and caste. The nostalgic understanding of India has always been 'incredible India' 'eternal India' etc. The post independent India can very sharply be seen as the history of a state, one of the most poorest and largest of the many countries created on the ebb of falling imperial rule after the end of Second World War. In order to understand India we need to focus on the shift of imperial rule to a democratic state structure and the emergence of complexities within the state structure and most importantly the difference between an European state structure in comparison to India.

The arrival of modern Indian states in the past century brought along stability and growth of India. The decentralization of power from a sovereign authority to the state, building up territorial boundaries-an ability they learnt from the British. It also learnt to preserve the domestic authority and the physical security of its citizens, to work as a machinery of economic development and finally to provide social security to its citizens. Indian history since 1947 had undergone a period of outburst of political idea: democracy, no longer people were bound by moral and kinship ties but by the divisions produced by the exigencies of industrial production and commercial exchange.

As Sunil Khilnani puts it "Democracy is a type of government, a political

regime of laws and institutions. But its imaginative potency rests in its promise to bring alien and powerful machine like the state under the control of human wills, to enable a community of political equals before the constitutional law to make their own history” democracy is basically the outcome of colonialism. When the colonial oppressions were becoming unbearable the Indian intellectuals thought of reviving India’s past as the weapon against the foreign Raj. In this process they first came across the idea of a nation and state, wished to build a state of their own similar to the other states of the world. The concept of state was replete with administrative and military technologies, its claim to rule over a precise territory, its determination of social reforms with changing texture of community. The power gradually and decisively rested with the sovereign state. The obvious result of this was the language of representative politics which entered through utilitarian filters. The interest of Indians, according to British could never be as individuals which was very much evident during the 1909 Morley-Minto reforms where separate representation was given to different communities. Thus the administration of demarcated territories represented societies not individuals. The politically represented groups were identified as ‘religious communities’ with immutable interests such as Hindus, Muslims, Parsi communities, an eternal element of Indian society. Defined as majority and minority.

In a democratic state elections are a process of assigning a set of rules under the authority of the state. But in India it is a medium of fulfilment of societies aspiration to control its opportunities. In such a democratic set up the political parties often try to muster their support. Recent democracy has shown the tenacity of community identities to compete forming themselves as majorities to establish their rule at the center. These religious identities often tend to bend the democracy to suit their own purposes. In commonly available understanding of democracy,

people choose their representatives to pursue their own interests. But in India the equation between the representative and the represented works in slightly different manner based on trust. Democratic politics seems to require that identities and perception of interest be stable. However, they do not have any pre-political existence but are created in the process of politics. Thus the identities always seek their own political goals rather than seeking the goals for the nation.

Indian modernity is very much different from the nationalistic aspirations. It is of a split and discontented one, full of darker and mixed potential. "They have become spawning grounds for contrary conceptions of what India is: on the one hand an hyperbolic parochialism, a bleached cosmopolitanism on the other hand, both far distant from the tolerant Indian cosmopolitanism that the nationalist elite has proposed." Colonialism's new ruling instruments has altered the urbanism of India. It encouraged elite migration towards cities with expanded perception of social scale of communities who lived in far distant corner of the country, felt as a single entity thus generation of the **idea of a nation**. On the other hand categorization of religious and caste based communities, introduced by British through separate electorates solidified the communal lines. Ties of kin and caste operate on a more vast terrain in cities and through elections the particularistic groups try to enhance privileges and protection for themselves rather being on an universal tone.

Identity consciousness among Indians is the product of British effort to numerically label each section of the society that is census. People became aware of the numeric strength of their community and thus the race of survival to the fittest began. The wave of nationalist outburst during the late nineteenth century compelled the leaders to unite the people of India through divergent religious community. Nehru however sought to focus on the cultural interconnections. There was no such

need of a national identity prior to nineteenth century, people preferred to venture around the neighboring locality and remain oblivious of the greater world that is beyond.

With the orientalist effort to show the susceptibility of Indians to change gave a new direction to Indian discourse. James Mills assertion of Hindu past was enough provocation for Indian intellectuals to construct their own history. V.D Savarkar's genealogical equation between the Hindu and the Indian, the members of Indian political community were united by geographical origin and racial connection and a shared culture based on common language of Sanskrit form majority community. This obviously left significant a significant section of muslims, tribals and the christans into an awkward secondary position.

European nations are land of singular culture with a high number of literate population bound together by ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity thanks to the renaissance and reformation. They believe in reason, logic and justice to deal with the religious atrocities committed by the church, and due to influx of wealth due to various reasons like invasions, boom in trade etc the middle class were successful in acquiring a handsome wealth thus question the higher authorities, it was always the mass against the imperial power. This neutralized the power structure there. However in India level of literacy has always been under question since religious communities were at fight against each other as to how it should be taught whether vernacular or through medium of English. Moreover not until the arrival of Gandhi it became a mass movement, otherwise it was always an elitist movement.

The peculiarity of India is that it is a state of 'interconnected difference' the divergent cultural communities though claim to have a monopoly but the fact is they are depended on the other for their survival. The multiculturalism has opened a wide range of possibilities. We need to

see India from two perspective the elites for whom there has always been a thriving opportunities and the middle and the low castes who fight every occasions to curve out their own opportunity. Thus there is not only one India as a nation but a layered Indiannes.

India throughout its past has tried to put itself in the gown of the west. But in the last century the engagements attained great heights. The ideas of state, nation, revolution, democracy, equality, economic growth etc are not only definitions of west but has also reconstituted itself in a localized accent. The evident urban disjunction created opportunities for different political sentiments to thrive, with unanticipated and darker potentialities, but has also released positive results through inventiveness and experimentations. There has always been struggle in the past between various ideas to reconstitute India's future, and it is this struggle that constantly encompasses these various ideas of what India is.