NATIONALISM AND INTERDEPENDENCE

by
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Wilhelm von Pochhammer was a German diplomat who served in India twice and continued his interest in its history and future long after he retired in 1957. This love for India resulted in a major book on the political history of India which in its English translation is called "India's Road to Nationhood". Reading the book one realises the depth and detail of his knowledge of Indian history. One also sees how the book has been shaped by his equally deep immersion in European history.

A very interesting part of the book is the parallel that he sees between ancient Indian and ancient European history.

He compares the movement of Aryans out of Punjab into the Gangetic plain with the movement of German tribes westward of Aachen towards Ile de France, which came a 1000 years later, and is the basis for the political geography of Europe till today. But he also notes the difference. German tribes had the model of the Roman Empire that shaped their ideas of governance. The Aryans who entered the Gangetic plains did not and initially were organised as 16 janapadas. Later of course the Maghada empire emerged. Here too Wilhelm von Pochhhammer sees an interesting parallel: Maghada, the first great Gangetic empire rises at the eastern edge of the settled area as did Austria and Prussia. His explanation is that the warrior spirit was retained as both faced unconquered peoples to their east. And so also Pataliputra was situated at the south eastern edge of the empire just as Vienna was in the areas settled by the Germanic tribes.

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A very intriguing observation comes when Pochhammer sees similarities between the clan structure of the Germanic tribes and the Aryans. Given the class divides between the aristocracy and the rest he asks why a caste system did not emerge in European society. His answer: the celibacy of the priesthood enforced by Pope Nicholas II at the beginning of the second millennium ensured that a hereditary priestly class, committed to maintaining birth-based divisions, never happened in Europe. But in India the Brahmins enforced the birth-based order.

There is a difference of about 1000 years between the Aryan migration into the Gangetic Plain and the movements westward of the Germanic tribes. This same difference of 1000 years is there in Pochhammer's comparison of the Habsburg empire and the kingdom of Kannauj, which he describes as 'an unnatural attempt to hold together an aging cultural world with the help of younger blood'. A key element in his interpretation of the subsequent histories of the sub-continent and of Europe is his thesis that the kingdom of Kannauj failed to stop intrusions of Arabs because it did not give sufficient support to frontier principalities and lacked of an active diplomatic policy to connect with potential allies like Byzantium and Sassanid Iran to contain the Arabs. He compares this with the European response which stopped the expansion of the Islamic empire beyond Spain and launched the Crusades to take the fight between the two proselytizing religions to the holy land itself. This particular judgement shapes much of the history recounted after the appearance of Islam in India.

I will not go further into the book but hope that this tempts you into reading it.

Given Pochhhammer's interest I have chosen as my theme the relevance of nationalism in the globalising world of today. My focus will be on the global economy and ecology, which is the area with which I am more familiar. But forgive me, if swayed by Pochhammer's history, I spend a few moments on the history of nationalism and globalisation and the spot they have brought us to as of now.

At the outset let me draw a distinction between nationalism and patriotism. We could dwell on this for the rest of the lecture. So, let me limit myself to saying that nationalism privileges my country over others and slips into chauvinism that says other countries are always wrong or jingoism that holds my country right or wrong. Nationalism as an ideology asks you to live and die for it - a fate that the poet Wilfred Owen described as the old lie-dulce et decorum est pro patria mori.

One is reminded of Ernest Gellner's acerbic statement: 'Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it *invents* nations where they do not exist.' The French historian Renan put it even more cynically when he said that: "Forgetting, I would even go so far as to say historical error, is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation,"

Patriotism, on the other hand, in the words of George Orwell means "... devotion to a particular place and a particular way of life, which one believes to be the best in the world but has no wish to force upon other people. Patriotism is of its nature defensive, both militarily and culturally."

The origins of the idea of nationalism are actually quite strange. The word nation, derived from the Latin word for birth 'natio', was used by universities in medieval Europe to designate the residences of students from a particular area. So, the University of Paris grouped its students into four nations: France, Germany, Picardy and Normandy. Since the academic program of these medieval universities was largely theological there was some crystallisation of opinions around these nations. A crucial change took place in the early 15th century when an Ecumenical Council was summoned and met from 1414-1418 and a decision was taken that the voting on issues before the Council summoned by the Pope would be by nations and not by individuals. With the Reformation, which came about a century later, the idea of a nation as a community united around a shared ideology entered the realm of politics and Interstate relations.

However, until the eighteenth-century political loyalty or more accurately obedience to political authority rested more on dynastic legitimacy than a shared sense of community in the realm.

In fact, in medieval India, as in most countries, sovereignty in the form of the right to make laws, collect taxes, issue currency and to exercise coercive force was widely distributed within a hierarchy of emperors, local kings, satraps and landlords. And even this could be diffuse. Villages would pay their taxes to one raja or the other depending who was most likely to threaten them and sometimes a little to both.

Heads of religious institutions like temples, mosques, viharas, gurudwaras exercised not just religious authority but were also necessary for legitimising secular power. Then as now, in every society the power to constrain other people's actions in everyday life was diffused among bodies representing the authority of local communities (e.g.khaps), clans and tribes(e.g. caste associations), religious bodies, merchants and markets, etc.

The idea of the nation as the source of political legitimacy emerges only when the sovereignty of princes gives way to the sovereignty of people. There were two rebellions against princes which came about the same time–the American

Revolution and the French Revolution. Soon thereafter, early in the 19th century, the Spanish diaspora in Latin America rose against the imperial power to establish creole states, formed and led by people who shared a common language and common descent with those against whom they fought. Brazil is a rather special case because the ruler of Portugal fled there during the Napoleonic wars. None of these early nation states were based on differentiation by language or religion. Nationalism based on differentiation by language and religion emerged later in Europe after the French Revolution.

The early emergence of a sense of nationality based on shared language came in India as a reaction to the central power of the Mughals. One can see the rise of the Marathas and the assertion of Dravidian and Bengali identity in these terms. The North Indian Hindi belt has never had this incipient sense of political unity and has always been split into many separate political communities. But who knows, maybe there are some who are trying to change that!

Geographically defined nations will have a sense of community which may rest on religion or language. But every community defined by a shared language or religion does not necessarily have a defined territory. The most conspicuous example of this are the Parsis of India. I point this out to emphasise that the desire to connect with others with whom one shares a religion or language does not have to translate into territoriality. But when a sense of community leads to a demand for territory, as it did in the case of Israel, then violence is inevitable.

An individual's sense of community will depend on their universe of contact the village or locality where they live and work, the individuals with whom they are socially connected by birth, marriage or friendship. It will be wider when it extends to the universe of concern- the people and places that affect their well-being. The nation or country is just one in a hierarchy of loyalties.

The universe of concern in today's world cannot be limited to the political jurisdictions that we call nation-states. It has to look above and look below and what I now wish to elaborate is what this broader universe of concern should be. Today the economy on which we depend and the ecological system in which we survive cuts across political jurisdictions, local and national. Our challenge is to devise a governance regime that reflects this. But this will not happen if we do not segment our political loyalties so that some rest at the local level, some at the national level and some at the global level.

Yet today, in country after country, we are seeing the revival of a narrow nationalism that focuses on ethnic and cultural purity, privileges some ancient past and denies the contribution of other cultures to the sense of national identity. It is a dehumanised nationalism that treats some national residents as second class citizens. A nationalism that deteriorates into nativism will end up reinforcing sub-national identities. Attack Biharis in Mumbai and you reinforce Bihari nationalism. The same is true of majoritarianism that privileges the religion and language of a dominant but not universal group. That is the sorry spot we are in as far as nationalism is concerned.

What about the countervailing force of globalisation, a force that actually predates nationalism?

Inter dependence in the economic sphere through trade technology and finance flows has been described as globalisation, a term which also is taken to apply to the internationalisation of science and learning. Globalisation in this sense is not a new phenomenon. Historians are always fond of looking for origins of trends and events that shift the paths of history and pushing them further and further back. Now they place the beginning of globalisation to somewhere around the year 1000 AD. There is clear evidence of trade in precious stones, metals, textiles, ceramics and other objects between the ancient civilisations of Mesopotamia, Egypt and the Indus Valley and between the later civilisations of Greece Rome the Gangetic plain the Tamilian South and China. But at the start of the millennium there was a quantum change.

A vibrant and dynamic Islamic world in West Asia became very active as a trade intermediary between the two largest economies in the world, China and India, and the Mediterranean countries that were the remnants of the Roman Empire. Arab traders spread through Eurasia all the way from Spain to Guangzhou in Southern China. The role of these traders and of Islamic scholars in collecting, consolidating, preserving and disseminating widely the classical knowledge of China, India, Greece and Rome has not been widely appreciated in Eurocentric global histories.

The lead actors in the story of globalisation change after the middle of the second millennium. The European nations, invigorated by the Renaissance and later the Enlightenment, become major global players with their voyages of discovery and the big trading companies that competed with and soon displaced the Arabs and the other indigenous Asian traders. The European advance in Asia rested also on

their access to silver from the lands they had conquered in Latin America which allowed them to pay for the spices, textiles and other products they wanted from Asia whose economies dominated the global economy.

The next big change comes with the industrial revolution and colonial expansion that decimated Asian manufacturing and plundered its treasuries. This is a story that we know all too well in India.

Fast forward to the end of the Second World War, decolonisation, the thirty-year boom to the mid-seventies, the failure of the socialist experiment in Russia and we end with the triumphalist declaration about the end of history and victory of liberal, globalising capitalist system. The post Second War world did see a rapid rise in the role of trade in the world economy as the trade to GDP ratio rose from 24% to 58% between 1960 and 2017. But the contributors to this growth changed over time. In the thirty-year boom till the mid-seventies the growth came mainly from the recovering war-ravaged economies of Europe and Japan and in the post oil crisis years after the early seventies from the East and southeast Asians. None of this seriously challenged the dominance of Western control over the institutions that set the rules of the game for global trade and finance. Free trade remained the dominant mantra of the West. Then in 1980 China entered the global trading game in a spectacular fashion and a decade later India did, though less dramatically than its northern neighbour. This is what has changed the game as the West now pleads for fair trade and the Asians argue even more vigorously for free trade.

Nations have used trade policy as a political instrument for centuries. In an unequal world the intrusion of nations in global trading systems may not be a bad thing as it will constrain the exercise of market power by the bigger players, whether they be companies or multinational corporations. A Walmart constrained by national legislation on trade is safer for long term development than a Walmart free to wipe out local competition. However, globalisation is driven by the ideology of free trade and the rise of protectionism in the West is a huge threat.

Mercantilism was the dominant ideology in Europe during the years when nationalism emerged and Louis XIV's minister Colbert famously argued that state should rule in the economic realm as it did in the diplomatic, and that the interests of the state as identified by the king were superior to those of merchants

and of everyone else. We are seeing this now in President Trump's threats to China. Globalisation of trade is going into a retreat.

The rise of protectionism in the West and the make in America demand is also a threat to the outsourcing of manufacturing to locations with low labour costs and a disciplined work force. But mercantilism in the West is not the only threat to export led industrialisation in the emerging economies. Technological developments are making out sourcing less attractive and global value chains are shrinking as Western companies pull back to their home countries. Foreign capital flows will now be driven more by the attraction of rising demand in the emerging economies.

The growth of global finance and capital flows came mainly after the first oil shock that created a vast pool of liquid funds looking for investment opportunities globally. That and the revolutionary development of communications and information technology that facilitated cross border deals led to the rapid development of financials centres like New York, London and Frankfurt and created a hyperactive global financial system. But the crisis of 2008 has put a major spanner in the works.

In earlier times trade contacts flourished because the rulers saw in them a source of revenue for themselves. In our times globalisation rests on a type of market fundamentalism – the belief that the outcome of market forces is morally acceptable. The market organises relations between persons in terms of the equality of worth of the goods and services exchanged. Even fundamentalists would recognise that in some cases the underlying conditions for the efficient operation of markets do not hold, for instance when there are externalities, or the goods exchanged are public goods. But even here the fundamentalist would seek procedures that simulate a relationship that mimics the market. A contrary view would argue that there must be space for altruism and solidarity, for loyalty and responsibility and for custom and tradition in relations between persons - not just in familial relations but also in social and political relations and in the exchange of goods and services. That contrary view got lost and the net consequence of globalisation was a sharp rise in inequality, particularly in the developed world. A part of the reason for the backlash that we see now is this rise in inequality and, in some countries, the rise of a virulent nativist nationalism.

A more important reason for the backlash is the retreat of the welfare state which reflected a social-liberal consensus on which capitalism rested. In the industrial

countries, there is some disenchantment with large centrally driven welfare programmes. The erosion of individual and family responsibility attributed to welfare and the growing economic difficulties of the social security system due to the high rates of unemployment and the rising proportion of the aged in the population are the reasons most frequently advanced for this. But the disenchantment is also part of the opposition to "big government".

In the developing countries there is no welfare state and hence no retreat from welfare. If anti-poverty programmes and public spending on health and education are under pressure that is not because public support for them is declining but because public budgets are unable to cope with the scale of the needs.

Basically, the triumphalist vision has been lost. A liberal capitalist economy run by a benevolent West is not the future that we see. The West and Japan are struggling to recover even a decade after the 2008 crisis. Their technological lead is under threat in areas like artificial intelligence and electric vehicles. Yet the global economic governance system shows no signs of reform. That is the spot we are in on the globalisation front.

Let me now bring in a third element which is much more disturbing-the growth of ecological interdependence and ecological threats that all countries face and that an obsession with national sovereignty cannot resolve.

The roots of this emerging ecological crisis lie in the rapid growth of energy and material consumption after the industrial revolution, first in the West and now all over the world. The lifestyles of upper classes that were only sustainable in an unequal society are becoming the consumerist model with democratisation, growth and a reduction in inequalities. Yesterday's luxuries have become today's necessities.

In the final analysis these demands have to be met from what nature regenerates every year and from exhaustible fossil resources of energy and materials. One measure of the growth in demand is the shift in what has been called Earth Overshoot Day. This marks the date when humanity’s demand for ecological resources and services in a given year exceeds what Earth can regenerate in that year. We meet this deficit by liquidating stocks of ecological resources and accumulating waste, primarily carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. In 1970 Earth Overshoot Day was 29th of December. This year it was 29th of July. This means

that humanity has increased the ecological debt that it is leaving for future generations by 40% or so of its consumption this year.

Earth overshoot day is a useful publicity measure that is not fully accurate in measuring our demands on nature. It does not take into account some qualitative dimensions like land degradation and water pollution. When we take into account more disaggregated measures like species loss, the scale of interventions in the hydrological system, the human impact in the ecological cycles of elements like carbon and nitrogen and in the depths of our interventions in genetic processes, the ecological threats that we are passing on to our children and grandchildren look even more alarming.

Many of these threats are global in nature and we have sought to tackle them through the traditional process of negotiations based on each country trying to protect its national interest. These have failed to deliver, and the net result is that the human interest in survival and prosperity is being sacrificed at the altar of national sovereignty.

Take the threat of climate change for example. The negotiating process aimed at securing commitments for mitigating the emission of greenhouse gases is caught in a battle between the West (including Japan) arguing for more vigorous action by those who will be responsible for future emissions and the Rest, more particularly China and India, arguing for more substantial commitments by those responsible for past emissions. The climate negotiations started in 1990 when the developed countries accounted for 85% of the cumulative emissions of CO2 since the Industrial Revolution. By 2017 that share came down to 71% with a corresponding rise in the share of developing countries driven by a large increase in China's share from 5% of the global total in 1990 to nearly 13% in 2017. But what is most alarming is that the cumulative the emission of carbon dioxide since 1990, when we had accepted that there is a problem, is as large as the cumulative emissions from the start of the industrial revolution to 1990.

The main difficulty in the climate negotiations is that a negotiating culture founded on the classical model of reciprocal quid pro quo concessions that proved useful when we were dealing with potential benefits, as in the trade negotiations, does not work as well when we are dealing with the sharing of costs.

We speak of common but differentiated responsibility for tackling the threat of climate change. We can interpret the word responsibility as liability and place the

burden of adjustment on those who have been responsible for the cumulative emissions that have brought us to the present pass. Or we can interpret responsibility as a common duty of all who are affected and differentiate by their capability to meet the costs and provide the technological capacity to address the problem.

More broadly we do not have a political process that allows us to take into account the rights and obligations that arise because of cross-border externalities. Decisions taken in one political jurisdiction may affect the life chances of citizens in another political jurisdiction. Should they not have the right of participation in these decisions? Within a country constitutional arrangements allow such external effects to be taken into account in different ways in the legislative, executive and judicial processes. However, the practice of democracy today stops at the national level. But there are many decisions taken at the national level which affect citizens of other countries. In the absence of a global constitution and a global government this has to be handled through cooperation in a multilateral framework. The spirit of democracy requires that any such a global framework must be based not on the oligarchy of power but the right of any country, big or small, rich or poor, powerful or weak to participate and influence the decision-making that addresses the problem of interdependence. This is the real challenge of a multinational democracy, when we get one.

Today's system of global governance, whose formal institutions treat all nations as equal, has a democracy deficit. Hegemony is the name of the game. Pax Britannica gave way to Pax Americana, which now is being challenged by a putative Pax Sinica. Moreover, hegemony at the global level encourages regional hegemonies. There are serious compliance deficits with treaty obligations being violated and a coherence deficit because of the multiplicity of global and regional institutions and agreements.

A global government to which national governments surrender some sovereignty will not come any time soon, and perhaps only when some aliens from outer space attack the world! Till then we have to work to increase the engagement and impact of those whose global concerns are centred around issues rather than national interest. This has happened to some extent in areas like environmental management, women's rights, children's rights and so on. The influence of issue-based lobbies is particularly strong in the institutions dealing with trade and finance. In climate change negotiations for instance national governments can be influenced by mobilising beneficiaries of compliance e.g. solar industry, and

victims of non-compliance e.g. small island citizens and people in flood prone areas. Global meetings and negotiations also play a certain socialising role as the ministers and even the Prime Minister's and Presidents who attend these meetings start worrying a little about how their words and actions will be perceived by their peers abroad.

What one would like to see in a global negotiating process is charmingly captured in a zoologist's observation about Mbuti pygmies in the Ituri Rain Forest in E. Congo. A group of hunters had killed an elephant and as word spread people came from all around to share in the spoils. The description then continues: "The noise was cacophonous, but amid the din, patterns of negotiation became discernible. The hunters and those with immediate rights to a share of the carcass were told to honour the obligations of kinship and give meat to their relatives. Old debts and favours were settled in exchange for meat; new pledges were contracted. The talking went on for hours, doubtless reinforcing a long-standing web of reciprocal obligation, that was fundamental to the social order of the region" (John Reader: Africa the Biography of a Continent, Alfred A Knopf, New York, 1998 pp.107/108) That is the international system we need - not one based on the clash of national interests but one that recognises the web of reciprocal obligation.

I have focused attention on moving away from a narrow nationalism and market fundamentalism towards solidarity and ecological responsibility to secure better global governance. This movement is also required for better governance within nations. In fact, one can argue that these national level changes are even more necessary as without them the global changes will not be possible.

The ideals of what a nation should pursue have never been better expressed than in the French Revolution slogan of liberty, equality and fraternity. They are also the ideals that should drive our search for effective global governance.

Democracy is the expression of the first ideal. But electoral compulsions drive governments towards short-term solutions for long-term problems. Moreover, their manifestos and promises are driven more by today's voters than the unborn voters of tomorrow. We need a democracy that is capable of factoring in the interests of the unborn and does not take the soft option of leaving them with an inheritance of economic and ecological debt. There are other distortions which can be corrected with a truly independent election authority, effective freedom of expression and constraints on the exploitation of incumbency advantages.

When it comes to equality, the crucial test is the political rights of all residents. We must restore the principle of civic nationalism that considers all who are domiciled legitimately in a territory, regardless of their religion or ethnic origin as citizens of that territory. It is under threat in our country and even in the United States, that standard bearer of civic nationalism. Beyond that guaranteeing effective equality of opportunity, if necessary, through affirmative action is as important.

Liberty and legal equality are not enough. We live in societies with a long inheritance of injustice. That is what the ideal of fraternity should address and go beyond procedural equality to provide positive support to those who have fallen behind in the journey of social and economic progress. Bärbel Bohley, a Third Way activist from the erstwhile East Germany put it succinctly when she said some time after German unification: Wir wollten Gerechtigkeit und bekamen den Rechtsstaat. We wanted justice and got rule of law.

We have all grown up as nationalists and some of us as believers in the virtues of the market. Every day when we open the newspaper or watch television, we have been persuaded to become consumerists. We need an epistemic change in the way we view ourselves and our place in the world, so that we look:

- beyond interdependence and accept that our obligations to each other cannot be defined solely by mutual interests but require mutual responsibility or solidarity;
- beyond a rampant consumerism towards a style of living that protects the natural systems so essential for our survival
- beyond market fundamentalism into creating space for unrequited transfers of goods and services and value-based bounds on the outcome of market-based relations.
- beyond cultural chauvinism into cultivating a culture of diversity that relishes differences not just tolerates them.
- beyond individualism that looks at progress not just as individual advancement but as the advancement of the common good of the community; but above all,
- beyond nationalism and recognise the realities of interdependence and the need to reflect this in partnerships within and between nations.

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