

Essay on The Problem of Nationalities in India

The British always denied that India was a nation because they did not like people to develop a sense of national unity. What semblance of unity of the people had, they said, was due to the influence of the British. They went so far as against this, the finest minds of India nationality was a production of the British language. As against this, the finest minds of India vigorously maintained that India had always been a nation that underlying the manifold diversities of the race of language, there had always been a sense of fundamental unity. As this contradiction of opinions gives rise to many perplexing political problems, it is necessary to get a correct idea of what constitutes a nation.

On the subject of nationality, it is commonly held that nationhood depends on a vague feeling or sentiment, that it has no objective reality. A people become a nation when it feels it is one. But this is too vague and almost begs the question.

Against this *Dr. Rajendra Prasad* quoted with approval Stalin's authoritative pronouncement. "A nation is historically evolved, stable community of language, territory, economic life and psychological make-up manifested in a community of culture". This definition is comprehensive and based on a recognition of objective realities.

The problem in India is that the country has a geographical or territorial unity, a historical and cultural continuity, an economic inter-dependence, but without pronounced psychological unity and without linguistic homogeneity. Thus there is on the surface, a good deal of difference between a Punjabi and a Madras, or between a Bengalee and a Parsi. Stalin pointed out that of the four bases of

common language territory, economic life and psychological makeup the absence of anyone will prevent the growth of a nation. Certainly, the nationality of India is not a fact indubitable enough to ensure an easy solution to our national problem and it would be well to regard her as a multi-national state.

Language has been the intractable barrier to the fusion of our people into a homogeneous nation. Therefore, the cry has been systematically raised for replacing the administrative units which the British created by linguistic states. The Congress party had all through its struggle for independence recognized the necessity, but now it fights shy of implementing in for fear of encouraging dangerous fissiparous tendencies. This fear is reflected in the constitution that it has grown up. Instead of a federal type in which each state is guaranteed maximum internal autonomy, it has created a unity type of constitution with powers reserved at the center, and with Hindi as a common state language, to be gradually used as the medium of instruction. The policy, even at this stage, when only a few tentative steps have been taken, has created serious difficulties. Demand for linguistic states is growing; inter-state jealousies are making themselves felt, and unless something is done about it in time, the situation may get out of hand in the years to come. Thus the very thing that was expected to promote unity artificially bids fair to lead to disunity. So the problem is – how to deal with this question of nationalities in the best interest of a peaceful and co-operative growth of the country.

The first point is that full recognition of the regional languages must be granted. The idea of a state language has always savored of a sort of imperialistic domination. The Moghuls tried to use Urdu for the purpose but it never became the language of the people. A common state language for the whole country can be contemplated only by a government that thinks in terms of administrative unity and not of

the unity with peoples. There should be no insistence on any language is the common language for all states. On the other hand, the study of one or more state languages should be freely encouraged, though the basic language of every state should be its own. This means the formation of linguistic states, each state having its own university and educational system, based on its own language.

The second this to Rembert is as Dr. Rajendra Prasad pointed out that the concept of a multi-lingual state offers no inherent contradiction. The voluntary association of nation in a co-operative federation is rendered easier if the influence of the vested interest can be overcome. For example, one of the main difficulties in the way of re-shaping the boundaries of beagle and Bihar has been the opposition from the vested interests, particularly mining and metallurgical interests. The emotional integrity of a multi-national state will always be opposed by a group of interests who fear that the new set-up may jeopardize their interest in the future. A striking instance of the solution of the multi-national problem is provided by the soviet constitution based on Stalin's thesis on the national question. In that constitution, every state has been guaranteed the fullest autonomy, even with the right to secede from the union of Soviet republics. Such was the confidence felt by the author of the constitution in the states is a sure guarantee of unity than artificial unity imposed from without.

There is, of course, one problem that has to be faced. What should be medium of inter-state communication? There are two alternatives. First, Hindi should be that language. This seems to be not feasible, for the fear of domination by Hindi-speaking people is real and must not be disregarded. The other is English, which, being the language of the smallest minority-the Anglo Indians – precludes the possibility of domination. This may continue until the study of the language evolves a common medium in the long years to come.

Hence, the solution of the problem of nationalities in India depends, first, on the recognition of India as a multi-nation geographical unit; secondly, on the formation of a federal union of autonomous states; thirdly, in guaranteeing the territorial and cultural integrity of each state; and finally, in basing this federation on the principle of voluntary associating of the states, with even the right of secession guaranteed. The bond that best unites a heterogeneous community of people is an equally shared conviction that freedom is a privilege that is inviolable and guaranteed not only by the constitution but by a strong national consciousness of its value.