Language, Region and National Identity

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My intention in this paper is to explore the nature and role of some key forces, which have shaped and fashioned the patterns of state and nation in the developing world. To illustrate my thesis I have primarily drawn on examples from India with which I am more familiar. But most of the arguments may also apply *mutatis mutandis* to other South Asian countries. I have attempted to address this subject within the broader disciplinary perspective of sociology but with an historical approach to the topic. However, in no way do I seek to focus on all the essential aspects considered crucial for constituting the nation. Given the objective of the present exercise, I consider closely only issues of language and region in the context of a national question.

Nation and nationalism have become an integral part of the people's psyche today. However, our understanding of nation and nationalism is still amorphous and blurred because of the confusion created by the interchangeable use of the terms nation, state and territory. In fact, these three major dimensions—the nation as a collective identity, the state as an expression of political sovereignty, and territory as a geographical area—have to be properly delineated to grasp the coincidence between nation and state.

The historiography of nationalism unequivocally suggests the ancient origins of a nation state. The past traditions of a nation have been articulated in terms of history, culture, language, folklore, territory or religion to demonstrate its antiquity and continuity. In these historical interpretations the nation subsumed the state. Hegel's famous definition, 'nations may have had a long history before they finally reach their destination that of forming themselves into states' (cited by Gellner 1983: 48) became the basis for all subsequent analyses. A similar formulation appeared in the writings of Ernst Gellner (ibid: 55): 'It is nationalism which engenders nations, and not the other way round.' These points were particularly highlighted taking into account the developments in Europe during the mid-19th and early 20th centuries.

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Elie Kedourie (1960: 1) stated as early as 1960 that 'Nationalism is a doctrine invented in Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century.' However, having realised the socio-political consequences of aggressive European nationalism some revision took place in the very conceptualisation of nationalism. The disastrous wars and their international fallout forced the analysts to see nationalism not as a positive and inevitable fact but as a ‘negative ideological creation’.

Another perspective on nationalism emerged through the writings of East European historians, who treated struggles for national independence as fights against imperial autocracy. Nationalism was understood as an embodiment of the forces of progress and betterment. Contemporaneously, in French historical analysis a distinction was made between national movement and nationalism. While national movement was considered to be the legitimate expression of popular sentiment, nationalism was defined as a narrower ideology. Such a distinction was however not noticed in English language historiography, where national movements and nationalism are part of the same formation. Thus, nationalism is perceived as an ideology of unusual force, an instrument of political manipulation.

Although the central theoretical position of these discussions has been somewhat different, all of them accept the historicity of national sentiment and identity. The growth and development of national identity as a potent political force determined by specificities of contexts and conditions are regulated and guided by the social processes. It is through the social process that the ideology of nationalism was spread, the composition of its bases determined and the functioning of its cultural symbols handled.

Genealogically speaking, the national question did not form the core of early Marxist writings. While Marx and Engels talked in general about the national struggles of the Irish and the Poles and commented on the national demands of the other East European Slav nationalities, it was for other major Marxist theorists like Kautsky, Luxemberg and Lenin to dwell upon the national question and its political importance. Lenin treated nationalism as a real social issue and endorsed the principle of national self-determination. But nothing specific can possibly be derived from his voluminous writings on the sources of national discontent (see, specifically, Lenin 1964a, 1964b, 1964c). However, the most enduring Soviet-Marxist treatment of the national question was provided by Stalin in 1913, which pointed to the numerous social contexts in which national conflicts might be defined. The urban petty bourgeoisie of an oppressed nation could be set against the bourgeoisie of a dominant nation (as in the case of the Czech-German conflict), rural bourgeoisie might be set
against landlords (as in the Ukrainian-Polish conflict in Galicia), or an entire "national" bourgeoisie might be in conflict with a ruling nobility as in the case of the Poles, Lithuanians and Ukrainians in Russia' (Stalin 1953).

Contemporary Marxist writings on the theme have heavily relied upon the classical Marxist-Leninist approach, particularly Lenin's major theoretical work on imperialism but some amount of freshness is noticeable in their articulation and coherence. The paradigms developed in these studies are essentially evolutionist and in the context of the Marxist stages of social and economic development, they have identified successive stages in the modern nations in their bourgeois and socialist forms. Most have focused on the early stages of national evolution but without highlighting the patterns and mechanics of formation of nations. The development of nationalism in Central Europe in relation to its evolutionary stages is especially analysed in the work of the Pole, Chlebowczyk (1980) and the Yugoslav, Zwitter. The Czech historian Miloslav Hroch (1985) has been more influential in the comparative study of national movements. By taking cases of smaller nationalities of Europe in his major work, Hroch examines the sequence of events as national movements develop and analyses the social background of nationalist activists. He illustrates his model with reference to the Czech, Lithuanian, Eastonian, Finnish, Norwegian, Flemish and Slovak national movements.

More recently, the relationship between European powers and their present or former colonies has been interpreted in terms of core-periphery theory. By drawing attention to the conflicting interests of different groups within the periphery and their relations with the metropolitan centre, Johan Galtung (1971) shows the tension, between the two in terms of an imbalance due to a differential location of economic, political and cultural power. The internal colonialism perspective thus suggests that centre and periphery need not be separated by a great distance but they might be located within the area of the same state. Hechter's (1975) investigation into the process of nationality formation in the United Kingdom is a substantive work here in terms of its influence on the study of nationalism. It has been argued that like many other states, the UK is characterised by a powerful, culturally distinct core which exercises monopolistic control over commerce, credit and political life. The people in peripheral areas are just left with the option of joining the core. Under such circumstances, a peripheral nationalist movement emerges, particularly when the extent of economic inequality between core and periphery increases and communications between the two are intensified. Hechter (1985) thus defines nationalism as a popular
protest against oppression and elaborates his model with additional ideas of the cultural division of labour and rational choice theory.

In recent non-Marxist approaches to nationalism more methodological rigour is found because the conceptual schemes adopted by them reflect more analytical power as they have been developed within the framework of general theories of society. Another development here shows the critical role of the relationship between nationalism and ethnicity. Smith recognises that there is no direct link between ethnies and modern nations. He defines ethnies 'as named human populations with shared ancestry myths, histories and cultures, having an association with a specific territory and sense of solidarity' (1986: 32). Modern nations possess in addition to the characteristics of ethnies identified above, legal, political and economic unity. However, in a more recent work Smith (1991) has analysed many transformations of modernity, which are required to turn an ethnie into a nation. The objective reality of a past ethnie does matter for modern nations. In the absence of the 'myth-symbol complexes' which generate and express ethnic identity, Smith suggests modern nationalism would be rootless and arbitrary. Another influential work in this field is of Michael Banton (1983) who has devised a useful rational model of ethnic group formation and consolidation.

Some theorists, on the other hand, focus their attention primarily on a political perspective and relate growth of nationalism to economic and social development. Deutsch's theory of social communications asserts that the existence of a socially mobilised population within a distinctive ethnic group is a precondition for the development of nationalism among its members (Deutsch 1961, 1966). The balance in a state system is disturbed if social mobilisation grows faster than assimilation to the dominant culture. The section of population which is socially mobilised but not assimilated into the dominant culture is most likely to turn its back on the dominant culture and on the political system which supports it. Ultimately, the mobilised section of the population will start developing its own culture and will also move towards a political domain marking the beginning of a nationalist movement in the unassimilated peripheral community. If the rate of assimilation is equal to or greater than the pace of mobilisation, the process of nationality formation does not threaten the integrity of the state; but if the rate of assimilation is slower than that of mobilisation, an alternative nationality is likely to develop. Deutsch has taken up cases of Finland, Bohemia, India and Scotland to illustrate his model.

The political perspective finds a central place in the work of Paul Brass. He presents a distinctive theory concerning the origins of ethnic
identity and modern nationalism (1974, 1976, 1980, 1991). Using a more explicit political framework and focusing on the elites rather than on the masses, Brass bases his formulation on two main arguments: one, that ethnicity and nationalism are not 'givens' but are social and political constructions, and, two that ethnicity and nationalism are modern phenomena 'inseparably connected' with the working of the modern centralising state. The nature and specificities of interactions between the leadership of centralising states and elites from non-dominant ethnic groups located in the peripheries of those states have been examined to develop the theory of elite competition. He has drawn examples mainly from India, Eastern Europe and the erstwhile Soviet Union to illuminate the various patterns of ethnic mobilisation and nation formation.

Anderson’s analysis of the origin and growth of nationalism has been the most influential in the last few years in generating new theoretical ideas on nationalism. He shows that nations were not the determinate products of given sociological conditions such as language or race or religion; they had been 'imagined' into existence everywhere in the world (Anderson 1983). He has described some of the major institutional forms through which this 'imagined community' came to acquire concrete shape. The critical role of institutions of what he calls 'print capitalism' have especially been taken up to illustrate the arguments. Moreover, he demonstrates that the historical experiences of nationalism in Western Europe, the Americas and in Russia had provided models to all subsequent nationalisms in Asia and Africa, out of which nationalist elites selected the ones they liked.

The above appraisal of the selective approaches analysing nation, nationalism and national identity can conclude with a summary of some of the essential issues discussed above:

1. Nationalism is an ideological phenomenon, a matter of ideas and concepts, adhered to by certain groups and communities. The fundamental issue to be addressed here is not that of the real nation or national identity which lies behind the concept of nationalism employed in political practice, but that of the formation, articulation and propagation of the concepts themselves.

2. Nationalist ideologies are formulated in order to gain and retain hegemony. They are not 'givens' but are constructed and expressed in political terms. Accordingly, national movements have been studied as manifestations of political power in which social, economic and cultural aspects are considered as explanatory factors.

3. Some theorists consider nation as a natural unit that has always existed albeit for long in a passive and dormant state. Nationalism
for this reason is a reflection of primordial identities like the family, inherently superior to other loyalties.

4. National identity is an abstract concept that subsumes the collective expression of a subjective individual sense of belonging to a socio-political unit: the nation state. It is a cultural construct, not a fixed objective reality but an ongoing and changeable process, dependent on and deriving from social relations and hence not exclusive of other identities.

5. Nationalism in its identification of a people with the territorial nation state is a historically modern phenomenon. It may be seen as a response to the consequences of modernisation. Modernisation disrupts social life, causes role differentiation, creates new and different modes of communication flows and transforms the political system. Thus, at the origins of nationalism is modernisation, which consists of the processes of social mobilisation, cultural standardisation and growing political participation.

6. A series of elements are identified, constructed and placed together to constitute the nation. Some such decisive elements recognised so far are common territory, common origin, common historical experiences, common language, common religion and morals, and common customs. These objective characteristics cannot possibly be juxtaposed but can only be understood in terms of complimentarity or interdependence.

These issues have undoubtedly made the narratives of nation and nationalism more comprehensible as they concentrate on the processes of construction of ideologies of nationalism, the conditions which facilitated their spread and the social mechanisms through which they operated. However, equally important is their failure to illuminate why national sentiment, or the pride that an individual takes in belonging to a nation has become such a pervasive reality despite his disappointment with or hostility to the state apparatus of the nation.

II

One of the major elements in nationality formation is linguistic allegiance. The interface between linguistic identity and national consciousness is obvious because ordinarily one cannot locate a historic nation which is not associated with a linguistic marker. In this sense, language is the demiurge of nationalism and it acts also as a vehicle of expansion.
It is believed that each nation is a linguistic entity. The situation in Europe coincided with this presumption as native speakers of French, German and Italian were a Frenchman, German or Italian. It was emphasized that 'Mankind instinctively takes language as the badge of nationality' (Freeman 1879). But such a principle applied only to the reality existing in monolingual nations which covered substantial areas of Europe. However, even in this region, there were apparent exceptions like the Swiss and Belgian nations. Not only that but English, Spanish, Portuguese, French and German languages all crossed national boundaries. The common pattern was thus the reality of linguistic diversity.

The merits of linguistic uniformity for the development of national identity have been succinctly expressed by Rupert Emerson in the following statement:

Leaving aside the fascinating if unanswerable query as to the extent of which each particular language both mirrors and fashions unique patterns of thought and thus reflects and molds a distinctive national soul it is evident that language is the primary instrument of social communication (1970: 133).

The speakers of the same language develop a common bond and share a 'common store of social memories'. Language establishes a link with the 'glorious past'. No society likes to snap this link as it is taken to be great and grand. It is particularly so with the people who do not feel so great about their present. It is because of this that 'the mother tongue became almost sacred, the mysterious vehicle of all national endeavors' (Jaszi 1929: 262, also cited by Fishman 1973). It is further emphasized that:

in its mother tongue every people honors itself; in the treasury of its speech is contained the charter of its cultural history. For the "peoples without history, history and language were two sides of the same coin. The vernacular was not merely the highroad to history, " it was itself the voice of years that are gone' (ibid).

Joshua Fishman expressed this view most succinctly:

… the essence of a nationality is its spirit, its individuality, its soul. This soul is not only reflected and protected by the mother tongue but, in a sense, the mother tongue is itself an aspect of the soul, a part of
the soul, if not the soul made manifest (1973: 153, emphasis in original).

However, the idea that language signifies nationality and nationality signifies language is modern. Language does not automatically become the basis for making political distinctions. When language acquires institutional importance in some major domains of nationality - law, polity and economy - it may assume political significance. Thus, the link between language and nationality cannot be taken as natural or God - given, based exclusively on people's faith and belief. Sapir amply clarifies this point by stating that 'a particular language tends to become the fitting expression of a self-conscious nationality' but 'such a group will construct for itself... a race to which is to be attributed the mystic power of creating a language and a culture as twin expressions of its psychic peculiarities' (1942: 660). Actually 'the link is man-made but ascribed to supernatural forces in order to hallow it' (ibid).

The entire relationship between language and nationality has become more complex and demanding with the coming of modern nationalism. What was initially taken as a natural link has now turned into an espoused cause. With the increasing importance of the mass media, the standardisation of language became a necessity because ideas of the people were now expressed through newspapers, periodicals and pamphlets. Similarly, the expansion of the modern organised courts made the choice of language a matter of more popular concern. The extension of market relations and the development of mass education further boosted the interest in the use of specific languages. Thus, language gains relevance not only as a repository of national culture and reminiscences, as a storehouse of myths but also as a matter of political, economic, legal and educational interest.

But here a fundamental question arises. How significant is language as a component of nationality? How does it fare when placed in association with other decisive components such as territory, origin, religion, historical experiences, customs and morals? Analysing this question Fishman says: 'The ideological pinnacle of language nationalism is not reached until language is clearly pictured as more crucial than the other symbols and expressions of nationality' (1973: 163).

The primacy of the nationality-language tie-up in pre-nationalist days was essentially in terms of its greater collective significance but in subsequent phases it turned out to be just a symbol with which only the elite and intellectuals were concerned. In other words, language became merely a representation or an emblem in the nationalist phase which was
put to use by nationalist activists to accomplish their goals. For this reason, the supremacy of language from the perspective of nationalist ideology can be attributed only by comparing it with other collective symbols.

Some commentators argue that language is more important than territory for defining nation. For, language provides the most immediate link among people and helps to establish well-defined boundaries. In fact, the boundaries between languages are clearer and lasting. It was this issue that prompted Davies to state 'A people without a language of its own is only half a nation. A nation should guard its language more than its territories—tis a surer barrier, a more important frontier than fortress or river' (1945: 71). Almost a similar stand is taken when it is asserted that language is more abiding than the institutions of government. The linguistic identity of a nation may remain intact even if its state boundaries are lost. A state may be geographically or politically divided but its language does not break its promise. A nation remains intact if it maintains its distinctive linguistic traditions.

Likewise when language is placed face-to-face with religion in the context of nationality, the primacy of the former is distinctly discernible. The historical experiences of 19th century Europe, the cradle of modern nationalism, apparently suggest that the rise of nationalism coincided with a decline in the hold of religion. The advent of modernism weakened the grip of religion. Of course, the scenario substantially changed in the subsequent phases, particularly in the ex-colonial countries where it was inconceivable that nations could emerge without being profoundly influenced by religious issues. However, even in this period 'only an arbitrary line of coincidence links religion and nation'. Several instances of contemporary nationalisms show that the 'unity of language is more durable for survival and permanence than the unity of religion'. In language one has a secular symbol whereas religion is often an embarrassment for the modern man. The issues of linkages between language and nation and the primacy of the former in terms of other elements of nationality formation have been discussed so far to provide the background for analysing the problem in the context of the South Asian region which I shall do now. But before that, it remains to be noted that the idea of a single national language is a product of European historical experience. It does not essentially hold good for a large number of nation-states in other parts of the world, Asia included, where the reality is linguistic diversity rather than linguistic uniformity.

III

People's attachment and love for their own language is not new but the mobilisation of linguistic loyalty for political purposes is a recent phenomenon. The invention and growth of printing technology, the spread of
education, particularly among the lower strata of society, and the increasing participation of the people in mass politics obviously facilitated the use of language for the politics of nationalism. While the question of a national language assumed a central place very early in different European regions, the idea of linguistic nationalism gained in salience in multilingual states of Asia and Africa in the wake of the Second World War. Most of these countries were either in the phase of attaining success in their anti-colonial struggles or had already achieved freedom from colonial rule. Language was a critical issue in the national struggles of these new states as it acted as a symbol of identity and distinction which in turn provided access to their own cultural tradition. However, these newly liberated nations were multilingual in a majority of cases. But one common feature ascertainable in these developing nationalisms was the role of languages introduced by the colonial masters on the one hand and conscious standardisation of the major vernacular languages on the other. Under such circumstances, several patterns of language diversity have emerged in these nation states.

First, a variety of closely related languages co-exist, one of which may acquire the position of a major link language (Das Gupta 1970). The situation in Indonesia corresponds to this pattern. Second, there may be a variety of unrelated languages but none of them can claim a long literary tradition. One witnesses this situation in many parts of tropical Africa. Another pattern may be where several languages, all with some degree of literary tradition co-exist but no one can claim a distinct dominance over others. Such a situation is found in India, Pakistan, Srilanka, Malaysia and so on. While in the first pattern there is ordinarily no possibility of intense antagonism on the language issue, in the other two situations political rivalry on this issue is bound to be generated in the absence of dominance by a single language. The concurrent claims of several languages for national status may even lead to boisterous fights endangering the very existence of the nation. Language is thus not only a primary element in nationality formation but remains a significant issue even in the process of nation building.

India is a nation sharply divided along linguistic lines. A large number of linguistic regions have begun to compete with each other to impair the sense of national identity. Stalin's remark in 1925 that while India was spoken of as a single whole there could be little doubt that 'in the event of a revolutionary upheaval in India may hitherto unknown nationalities, each with its own language and its own distinctive culture, will emerge on the scene' has proved prophetic.

The demand for a reorganisation of provinces on a linguistic basis has a linkage with the struggle for Indian independence. The Indian National
Congress had ever since 1921 started supporting 'the idea of the creation in British India of administrative units based on linguistic homogeneity'. As early as 1928 the Nehru Report talked about the desirability of creating linguistic provinces and this principle was subsequently included in the election manifesto of the Congress. Immediately after independence on 27 November 1947 Prime Minister Nehru, on behalf of the government of India accepted in the Constituent Assembly the principle underlying the demand for linguistic provinces. It was against this background that two commissions—one the Linguistic Provinces Commission appointed by the Constituent Assembly in 1948, and the other States Reorganisation Commission in 1955—were appointed to go into all relevant matters concerning the formation of linguistic states.

The idea of linguistic states rested primarily on the premise that these linguistic groups are sub-nations and as such they are contracting parties to the Constitution from which the Federation and the Centre derive their existence and power (Indian Institute of Public Administration 1968b: 443). However, this question raised not only an intense debate but attracted sharp reactions from various corners of the country. It brought out two sharply conflicting views with regard to the formation of these linguistic states. The cases for and against the formation of the linguistic states were advanced. Several violent agitations and protests were launched to gain recognition for one's respective language. Its serious political consequences were also highlighted. The Linguistic Provinces Commission wrote:

An autonomous linguistic province... means an autonomous linguistic state and an autonomous state means... that its territories are inviolate. And if in a linguistic province the majority language group comes to regard the territory of the entire province as exclusively its own, the time cannot be far distant when it will come to regard the minority living in that province and people living outside it as not their own. And once that stage is reached, it will only be a question of time for that sub-nation to consider itself a full nation (IIPA 1968a: 474).

The nature of dangers involved in new separatisms based on politically consolidated linguistic communities was further highlighted by the members of the commission in these words:

This inquiry in some ways has been an eye opener to us. The work of sixty years of the Indian National Congress was standing before us face to face with centuries-old India of narrow loyalties, petty
jealousies, and ignorant prejudice engaged in a mortal conflict, and we were simply horrified to see how thin was the ice upon which we were skating. Some of the ablest men in the country came before us and confidently and emphatically stated that language in this country stood for and represented the culture, tradition, race, history, individuality and finally, a sub-nation, that the government of a linguistic group could not be safely left in the hands of a multi-lingual group; and that each linguistic group must have a territory of its own and that its territory was inviolate and could not be shared by any other linguistic group (ibid: 479-80).

The subsequent developments reinforced further the primacy of language as a national question. The language issue did not subside even after the reorganisation of states on the basis of linguistic regions. The consensus on official language arrived at within the Constituent Assembly and the adoption of the Official Languages Act in 1965 could not conclude this debate. Several new issues were added to the vexed problem inherited from the past.

As Indian nationalism has been deeply wedded to the question of regional languages, India's independence and the formation of linguistic states released certain social forces which culminated in the growing assertion of the unrecognised local contact languages for recognition of their rights. This further fostered a consciousness and an assertion of linguistic regionalism, the roots of which were already there in India's history and culture. Ray's contention that 'India's history and culture have always oscillated between an ideal of pan-Indianness and that of regional self-assertion' (1968: 6) appropriately captures the socio-political situation prevailing in the country today. Indian consciousness is co-existing, despite the multilingual situation, with another corporate consciousness at the regional linguistic level.

Given the complexity of multilingualism, it was not very easy to deal with several emerging issues involved in the language question in post-independence India. Some of the unresolved subjects included questions of national language, official language(s) of the union and the states, link language between the state and the union and among the states, not to speak of the question of language of education, the medium of instruction and the languages to be taught at the school level.

While the reorganisation of states 'sought a balance between the advantages flowing from federal units based on linguistically homogeneous peoples and the particularism and discrimination likely to be fostered by such units', bestowing national status on all the major regional languages through their inclusion in Schedule Eight of the
Constitution achieved some measure of amity on the language front. Of course, several other languages spoken by large sections of the people in certain regions, used as media of instruction at the secondary level and recognised by the Sahitya Academi for purposes of national awards, have still not gained the honour and prestige of being designated as national languages. The recent inclusion of Konkani, Manipuri and Nepali in the Eighth Schedule has further stepped up the demand for the inclusion of Dogri, Maithili and Rajasthani languages, which are already recognised by the Sahitya Academi.

Nonetheless, the most intense debate has been on the issue of the official language of the union and the states. This problem has broadly been solved at the level of the states, but it is only partially resolved at the national level. Initially, as is well known, it had aroused one of the keenest controversies in the Constituent Assembly and produced so much heat and debate that it was felt necessary to keep it out of direct discussion in the assembly. The central debate was confined to the issue of English versus Hindi. Colonial rule had established the hegemony of English by adopting it for official correspondence and as the medium of instruction in higher education, which also provided a medium of communication for the Indian intelligentsia throughout the country. It was thus widely accepted that English served as a force for national unity and for developing national consciousness as well as for administrative convenience.

The linguistic divide had another dimension as well. The major regional languages used in different regions of the country are classified into two broad categories—the Sanskrit-based languages, important among them being Hindi, Bengali, Gujarati and Marathi, and the Dravidian languages, that is, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam. Although Sanskrit had influenced and contributed towards the development of most of the Indian languages, nonetheless each of these languages has its distinct character with its own script and grammar but in the absence of a pan-Indian unity, a common language could never become the goal.

Given these circumstances, Hindi, being the major language in several states, emerged as a strong contender for acquiring the status of official language. Besides, an enormous section of speakers of Hindi/Hindustani received substantial patronage by the leaders of the freedom struggle including Gandhi and Nehru. It was contended that English could under no circumstances be the national language of India and it had to be replaced by Hindustani. Gandhi wrote 'Our love of the English language in preference to our own mother-tongue has caused a deep chasm between the educated and the politically-minded classes and
the masses. ' The state of affairs in the Hindi belt was also perplexing and confused. The language issue in northern India had taken a communal turn from the early decades of the 19th century in the shape of the Hindi-Urdu controversy. In the Moghul period, Persian was the court language but with the fall of the empire, Persian was replaced by Urdu. Thus, in spite of several essential common features in Hindi and Urdu, both these languages began to signify something different from each other, particularly from the second half of the 19th century. The separatist tendency in language got a further boost when Hindi and Urdu were identified with the two major religious groups, the Hindu and the Muslim, which actually had no base in the prevailing reality.

Reverting to the wrangling over the official language it may be pointed out that the sharp differences of opinion which were expressed at the time of the framing of India's Constitution revealed the extent of violent sentiments this issue had engendered. The protagonists of Hindi led by Seth Govind Das demanded that the Constitution should specifically provide for Hindi in the Devanagiri script as the official language of the country. Feelings on this issue were so strong that Govind Das once made an impatient remark:

I want to tell my brethren from Madras that if after 25 years of efforts on the part of Mahatma Gandhi they have not been able to understand Hindustani, the blame lies at their door. It is beyond our patience to bear that because some of our brethren from Madras do not understand Hindustani, English should reign supreme in a Constituent Assembly which is said to be a sovereign body and which has assembled to frame a constitution for a free India (IIPA 1968b: 783-84).

The opinion of non-Hindi speaking areas was that while they were not antagonistic to Hindi, they would resent what appeared to them to constitute the imposition of one language over the whole country and over vast numbers of people who were not acquainted with the language. The most vigorous exponent of this view was T. T. Krishnamachari who termed it as 'language imperialism' and forcefully argued that the Hindi issue, pressed too far, might result in a secessionist movement. Without demur he said:

I would convey a warning on behalf of the people of the South for the reason that there are already elements in South India who want separation and it is up to us to tax the maximum strength we have to keep those elements down, and my honourable friends in the U. P. do not help us in any way by flogging their idea of 'Hindi imperialism'
to the maximum extent possible. It is up to my friends in the U. P. to have a whole India, it is up to them to have a 'Hindi India'. The choice is theirs and they can incorporate it in this Constitution; and if we are left out, well, we will only curse our luck and hope for better times to come (IIPA 1968b: 788-89).

However, subsequent development suggest that a consensus was arrived at on the issue of recognising Hindi in Devanagiri script as the official language of the union and English as the associate language until all states agree to the exclusive adoption of Hindi. Likewise, the problem of link-language for intra-state and between state and union now does not pose a serious threat to unity because a workable system has already been evolved for this purpose. Similarly, with regard to the language of education there is almost universal agreement on the use of the mother tongue as the medium of instruction at the primary level and the Three-Language Formula at the secondary level. Some distortions have no doubt taken place in the actual implementation of the Three-Language Formula but they have not caused any bitter dispute among the various states. All told, it may be asserted that despite the far-reaching implications of the language issue, India has been able to balance the conflicting forces unleashed by the political mobilisations for language.

Nonetheless, separatism based on politically consolidated linguistic communities will not wither away because culture-based regionalism centring on language communities represents values more easily intelligible to the average Indian than Indian nationalism. That is so because when a vast majority of people will achieve literacy and education in their local languages, the consequence may well be the rise of a sense of local provincial identity which may not necessarily coincide with national identity.

IV

Apart from language, region is another important variable relevant to the idea of nation. A region is a geographical unit characterised by a particular biological cycle and an ecological equilibrium. A natural region acquires its boundaries and area by the expanse of a valley or a watershed. Life in the valley is made possible by the ever-replenished flow of water, which activates land fertility and the complex functions of the ecological cycle (Glikson 1955). Man built his society and culture in river valleys which served as their natural foundation. Ever renewed fertility of soil, water and easy communication among communities settled along the river were guaranteed by such a landscape. This
fundamental basis of civilisation remains important up to this day. The network of socio-economic relations had expanded over those natural geographical regions. Nonetheless, the content and form of the socio-economic organism was determined by the quantity, quality and location of the region’s natural resources and the size of the population living in it. Thus, two broad facets of region were identified—the physical and the social; the first has existed since the beginning of time, the second has acquired its shape through thousands of years of human history. The socio-economic region fulfilled the natural tendency of man to settle in groups and to form local nuclei of settlements, which in their turn strongly enhanced social and regional coherence and centralised regional life around focal points of settlement (ibid: 50).

A region is located between a community and a nation-state. Although the geographical distinctiveness is a significant determinant of a region, its entity does not always possess formal physical boundaries. The latter may be identified in cultural, linguistic, economic and administrative terms. However, these specific domains may coincide in some cases and may not in some others. For example, cultural and linguistic confines may transcend the political and administrative boundaries. The Hindi region in India provides a ready reference in this regard. Thus regions may lack formal boundaries identifiable in physical terms. That is why some analysts consider ‘region as a mental construction’ (Hartshrone 1939: 253), ‘a reservoir of energy’ whose ‘origin lies in the nature but whose development depends on man’ (ibid).

Closely related to the concept of region is the idea of regionalism. The latter has been conveniently used to explicate the tendency of various regions of a country to assign primacy to the region as a value in comparison to the country as a whole. This tendency may be concretely expressed in terms of language, culture, economy or polity. Accordingly, regionalism represents the regional idea in action as an ideology or as a movement. But more often it is used in the political sense to describe the nature of mobilisation of people of a certain region to ventilate their grievances. Paul Brass, for instance, defines regionalism in the Indian context as:

... patterns of politics in the states that are best explained primarily in terms of conflicts and issue that arise within the states rather than in the national political arena and that deviate in easily discernible ways, such as in political party formations and voting patterns, from national trends (1991: 161).
However, this term, of late, has acquired notoriety in India and is used in a pejorative sense. It is perceived negatively and taken as a danger to the territorial integrity of the country. But to my understanding, regionalism or regional movement is not always a challenge to the survival of a nation-state. History shows us that states have not only existed but also progressed faster with numerous regional identities. The people of different ethno-linguistic groups located in various regions have lived together harmoniously in a nation-state and strengthened each other with mutual advantage. Thus, regionalism *per se* is neither a risk factor nor a hazard to the integrity of states. However, it needs to be emphasized that regionalism may grow into a formidable challenge to the nation-state if the latter fails to accommodate the legitimate aspirations of various regions, in a situation of multi-regional national identities there are several regions which are not only relatively small in size but possess distinct cultural, linguistic particularisms. Conversely, there may exist a sizeable majority, which is politically and socially dominant. Under such a structural condition, it is possible that even justifiable rights of smaller identities are neglected and ignored. Their demands and genuine grievances are overlooked more often under the pressure of the dominant majority. As such, smaller communities remain under constant threat of deprivation and discrimination. There is a constant fear for the loss of culture, language, tradition and even religion among the smaller groups. The notion of 'mainstream' is expounded by the dominant group to pressurise the smaller identities to assimilate with the larger whole. Historical evidences and justifications are invented to show linkages among various regions and ethnic groups on the one hand and the dominant groups on the other.

An impression has gained ground of late that there exists in India a dominant national group identified as a Hindu-Hindi community apart from a number of other smaller linguistic, cultural and religious groups. The dominant national group comprising the Hindi-speaking states of north and central India is acknowledged as the largest single block of states with Hindu-Hindi as a major concern. From the point of view of political, economic and administrative interests the Hindu-Hindi region does not essentially present a homogeneous block, but as long as language and religion continue to be the essence of national politics, the linguistic and religious affinities of such a large block of states tend to give an impression that the Hindu-Hindi area constitutes the 'mainstream' and represents the heartland of India. Whether such a notion of dominant national identity coincides with ground level reality requires further examination but frequent charges of 'northern domination' and 'Hindi imperialism' from the southern language groups
and the mutual distrust arising out of the unevenness of development in various regions of the country definitely supports this contention. It is frequently observed that all regional demands and grievances are considered 'anti-national' by the so-called mainstream India. In most cases these grievances give rise to a number of questions about the socio-economic origins of regionalism. As mentioned earlier, it is possible to find an answer in the peripheral position of different regions in the background of various grievances.

Regional demands articulated in India may broadly be considered under three headings: institutional, economic and cultural. Institutional demands have been primarily raised in the context of reorganisation of states, provision for the devolution of power to these states, constitutional safeguards for different 'special' regions (Sixth Schedule of the Constitution), the greater degree of administrative, political and financial autonomy to the units, and so forth. No doubt, these institutional provisions seem to have been made initially to accommodate regional demands but in actual practice the nation-state has used them as instruments to assimilate the regional political elites into the Indian state. It is pertinent to point out here that the degree of autonomy for each region has been defined by individual regional statutes. For example, we have Article 370 for Jammu and Kashmir, 371A for Nagaland, the Fifth Schedule for tribal regions of central India, and the Sixth Schedule for certain hill regions of north-eastern India. There is no single constitutional arrangement applicable uniformly to every unit. In most of the cases new provisions were made under heavy regional pressures created by the organised regional political parties and groups. In effect, all institutional demands such as further reorganisation of states, more autonomy, secessionist threats have been met by the central government under similar pressure. For example, once the linguistic reorganisation of states passed through the first phase, the subsequent compulsion led to the bifurcation of Bombay into Maharashtra and Gujarat, of Punjab into Punjab and Haryana. Likewise, the creation of Nagaland as a separate state and bestowal of full statehood to Manipur, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram are some other instances in point.

Economic demands have arisen out of a context of uneven development, or better still regional disparities in development, more particularly under-development of peripheral regions. Even a passing reference to the situation obtaining in the north-eastern region of the country will adequately illustrate this point. While both central and regional planning agencies have recognised the specificities of the north-eastern situation, they have failed to adopt a suitable alternative developmental strategy.
that could develop the region without disturbing its ecological balance and the people’s psychology. The primary objective of the developmental policy is to utilise the natural resources of the region, with scant regard for its impact on the socio-economic life of the indigenous people. Such a strategy has led to destabilisation of the socio-economic life of the locals. Moreover, the developmental programmes entail emphasis on the growth of linkages with national and global markets, commercialisation of indigenous designs and skills, competitive use of land and forests and far-reaching changes in the pattern of land ownership and property relations. This, in turn, involves establishment of linkages between unequal formations, one highly developed and competitive and the other still at the stage of slash-and-burn cultivation. The former expropriates maximum benefits, the latter increases its dependence on market forces. The fact of the matter is that the planning strategy envisaged for the northeastern region is premised upon an ethos and value gestalt entirely unconnected with the socio-economic reality of the area. Consequently, there is a rather minimal impact of development measures, leading to growing disparities among various regions (Kama 1990). Such imbalances in socio-economic development inevitably result in political fragmentation. The emerging regional elites and middle classes tend to utilise the inherent conflict potential for a larger share of power. Regional political parties and groups emerge to articulate and mobilise large sections of the population on issues pertaining to common economic interests in their regions (ibid. 1998).

The cultural dimension of regional demands is equally significant and centres around issues of linguistic and cultural identity. The question of language has already been discussed in some detail. It remains to be noted, however, that language and its associated features are the symbols most easily available to ethno-nationalist organisations for constructing an ethnic identity. In addition to language, the shared socio-cultural experiences in terms of a whole series of traditions, art forms, behavioural patterns and images are articulated to promote regional awareness.

In fact, these three major issues-institutional, economic and cultural-form part of regional demands in India today in most cases. But the nature of articulation of the demands is not uniform in all such regions. It varies, depending on the specificities of the social structure and the historical conditions, and so also the character of regional movements. In some cases it may take the shape of constitutional or democratic struggles, in some others it may assume a direct secessionist form. There is also the likelihood of the assertion of regional identity taking a communal turn in certain areas, leading to conflicts between ‘tribals-non-
tribals', or 'insiders-outsiders'. As long as regional-cultural identities insist on their right to preserve and develop their language, tradition and ways of life, the problem remains manageable but when they assert their economic and political rights the system faces stresses and strains. The latter often aggravates conflicts (Oommen 1986).

V

I have argued in this paper that a proper understanding of nation and nationality in India is possible if one adopts an alternative model of state-nation relations. The issue of state-nation relationship is different in Asian and African countries as compared to the nation-states of Western Europe. The model suitable for the latter cannot therefore be transplanted on a country like India.

When an ethnic group uses its cultural identity to seek economic and political rights, the process of nationality-formation comes into existence. The articulation of political and economic demands assumes a critical role in this context. They may range from merely a demand for regional economic development to increasing control over local resources or full economic and political autonomy. The group may even claim a separate homeland within the country or a separate country with full sovereignty. This is how a group aspires to have some kind of recognition as a national group. Such ethnic groups become nationalities when they succeed in gaining recognition not merely due to the sharpness of their demands but also because of their distinct culture, common heritage and political unity within a more or less well defined geographical area. In this process a nationality becomes a nation when it possesses an additional power to compel its members and back up group aspirations. Eventually, a nation becomes a state when it has successfully acquired sovereignty and attained all these aspirations.

Against this background, I am in agreement with the characterisation of India as a multi-national state. India's nationalities vary in size and are at varying stages of development. This contention is objectively based on the fact that pan-Indianness co-exists with the regional national consciousness. Nonetheless, the most crucial and substantive issue here is whether India's several nationalities together form or tend to form the Indian nation-in-the-making. The fact of the matter is that such an assumption gives rise to serious difficulties because the regional identities in the country have adjusted to the reality of an Indian state but are yet to harmonise with the idea of the Indian nation.
References


