National Integration and Challenges in its Way: A Descriptive Study in Indian Context

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National integration is a complex, dynamic, multidimensional concept, consisting of a great variety of interlocking historical, political, social, cultural, interactional and economic elements. These elements, to some extent, operate separately but are also interacting, cumulative and generally mutually reinforcing. Indeed, integration is a holistic concept whereby the whole or totality of the separate aspects is more than the sum of the different parts. National integration necessitates the maintenance of national authority over regional and sectoral authorities in order of national interests to take precedence over minor concerns (Myron, 1965).

This paper sets out to analyze some major challenges of national integration--the social, cultural, political and economic -in the large and very diverse nation-state of India. For the strength of national integration depends to a large extent upon the degree to which people within a nation-state share certain socio-cultural characteristics and feel themselves to be one people. Important shared characteristics may include use of a common language, adherence to a common religion, sharing of a 'national culture' in the sense of national values, customs, organizations, and institutions that cross local and ethnic boundaries, extend nation-wide, and encourage national consciousness and inter-regional contact.

The concept of integration is complex, partly because it operates at different levels among which there may at times be conflict. Thus, it is possible for some socio-cultural elements to be integrative at one level but disintegrative at another. Another complication, as Haas has stated, is that "paradoxically aspects of integration and disintegration can both occur at the same time, and may even be causally related" (Haas 1967, p. 315). For example, Religion can be seen from two angles, namely, spiritual and ritual. If one takes the spiritual aspect of religion, one finds that religion unites all humanity. It speaks of love and peace. But when we speak of ritual aspect of religion it is taken as a major threat to national integration in India.

Etzioni (1965) believes that a community is integrated when it has: (i) An effective control over the means of violence; (ii) A centre of decision-making that significantly affected the allocation of resources and rewards; and (iii) A dominant focus of political identification for a large majority of national citizens who are politically aware. Similarly Mazrui (1972) identified five interrelated aspects of national integration as : (i) The fusion of norms and cultures (including the sharing of values, mode of expression, lifestyles and a common language); (ii) The promotion of economic interdependence; (iii) The narrowing of the gap between the elites and the masses, the urban and rural areas, rich and poor, etc (social integration); (iv) The resolution of emergent conflicts; and (v) The sharing of mutual experiences so that people can discover that they have undergone some important experiences together.

These definitions suggest that for national integration to occur in a nation, a significant number of citizens must develop identification with the nation that supersede identification with ethnic, cultural or religious group, acquire political awareness, share common norms and values and develop attitudes favorable to the display of integrative behaviour among people of different groups

Constitutional provisions for National Integration

There were four aspects of the Constitution which helped immensely in promoting national integration. The very first was the Preamble, beginning with the letters, "We the people of India i.e. Bharat, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a Sovereign, Socialist, Secular, Democratic, Republic....... and to promote among them all Fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the Nation".

With the inclusion of the word 'unity and integrity' in the Preamble of the Constitution, Indian nation stressed upon the dire need of the integration of the masses. Then, the Fundamental Rights, enshrined in the constitution, that guarantee equal rights to all- irrespective of religion, region, caste, sex, creed, etc.

In addition to this certain fundamental duties had been incorporated to foster national integration and development of the country. It shall be the duty of every citizen of India-

1-   To abide by the Constitution and respect its ideals and institutions, the National Flag and the National Anthem. 2- To cherish and follow the noble ideals which inspired our national struggle for freedom.

3-   To uphold and protect the sovereignty, unity and integrity of India.

4.   To promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India transcending religious, linguistic and regional or sectional diversities; to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women.

5.   To value and preserve the rich heritage of our composite culture.

6.   To safeguard public property and to abjure violence.

7.   To strive towards excellence in all spheres of individual and collective activity so that the nation constantly rises to higher levels of endeavour and achievement. The Directive Principles of state policy that directs states in taking steps towards bringing equality, justice, liberty to all. The ideals of the Preamble are to be established through the Directive Principles of State Policy. It is these facets of our Constitution, when read together, aim at creating conditions for an integrated society in which individual freedoms are secure.

Challenges of national integration

Despite the constitutional provisions and various efforts of the government, there has been a threat to national unity from time to time. Some of the important factors challenging national integration are as follows.

Linguism/Linguistic Fanaticism

India is a multi-lingual country. We have seen that the Indian constitution recognizes 22 languages. Hindi is the official language and English is the link language. About 2000 languages are being spoken by various sections of the Indian society. When India became free the decision to make Hindi the national language was opposed by people of any other languages. There was an anti- Hindi agitation in Tamil Nadu. The language controversy started with Hindi being given the place of official language of India. In South India people revolted against this and demanded secession from India.

There, the Dravida Munnetra Kazagham (DMK) political party helped organize the Madras State Anti-Hindi Conference on January 17, 1965-little more than a week before the January 26 date scheduled for Hindi's ascent to the role of sole official language of India. The day before this deadline, students in Madras picketed

with cries of "Hindi Imperialism" and "Hindi never, English ever!", beginning a two month long period of agitation and repression. During this time, sixty-six people died-two of which were members of the DMK who committed suicide by self-immolation on the street. At the same time, pro-Hindi groups in the north staged demonstrations which attacked "English imperialism" and urged the Union government to go ahead with the shift to Hindi.

In North- East Providences particularly post colonial Assam witnessed almost continuous language conflicts. Bengali being the second largest group was the worst sufferer of such conflicts. The hatred and ill feeling of many Assamese towards Bengali were generated by the Bengali conspiracy theory. This theory played the most important role in bringing the language conflicts. This theory was successfully applied for the socialization of large section of Assamese to label the Bengalis as inimical to the interest of the Assamese language and culture. The government of India was bound by the public opinion for division of states on linguistic basis. In the Telugu area communists set up the slogan "Andhra for Telugus". Similarly Marathi speaking people wanted a separate state. Gujarat is claimed a separate state for themselves. Sikhs demanded a state for themselves. Thus in order to meet the demands of public, states was reorganized on the basis of language. Language has become a strong source of political articulation, particularly since independence (Khan, 1992).

Regionalism

Regionalism is the expression of a common sense of identity and purpose by people within a specific geographical region, united by its unique language, culture etc. In a positive sense, it encourages people to develop a sense of brotherhood and oneness which seeks to protect the interests of a particular region and promotes the welfare and development of the state and its people. In the negative sense, it implies excessive attachment to one's region which is a great threat to the unity and integrity of the country. In the Indian context generally, the term 'regionalism' has been used in the negative sense. In truth, national politics has acknowledged the existence of regional and cultural identities, and the central government has even issued legal punishments on several occasions (Kothari, 1972). Parochial regionalism poses a threat to the sovereignty of the nation. The anti-migrant or anti-Bihari stance of the of Shiv Sena in Maharashtra which opposes the employment and residence of non-Maharashtrian people in the state of Maharashtra is a prime example of negative regionalism. Regionalism beyond a point can lead to secessionism, such as strong regionalism in Punjab ultimately resulted in the growth of Khalistani terrorism. Regionalism often promotes Vote- Bank politics, thereby weakens the national integration.

The roots of regional consciousness in India can be found in colonial policies, differential attitudes and treatment by the British towards princely states and those of the presidencies developed regionalist tendencies among them. British exploitative economic policies completely neglected some regions, giving way to economic disparities and regional imbalances. British imperialists deliberately encouraged the people of various regions to think in terms of their region rather than the nation as a whole, with a view to maintain their hold over India during the national movement. After Independence the leaders tried to foster a feeling among the people that they belonged to one single nation. Regionalism is a problem because it threatens the unity and integrity of the country. 1940s Dravida movement resulted in the demand of a separate and independent Tamil state. This triggered the demand for a separate state in the Andhra region. During the 1970s and 80s, the tribal insurgencies for separation and statehood in the north-east region of India intensified.

Economic Imbalances

Uneven development in many parts of the country may be construed as the prime reason of regionalism and separatism. There are certain regions in the country where industries and factories have been concentrated, educational and health facilities are adequately provided, communication network has been developed, rapid agricultural development has been made possible. But there are also certain areas where the worth of

independence is yet to be realized in terms of socioeconomic development. Indeed, the British administration may be held responsible for causing such wide regional variations due to their suitability for the purpose of administration, trade and commerce. But in the post-independence era, efforts should have been made for regional balance in matters of industrial, agricultural and above all, economic development. Economic Imbalances sometimes resulted in separatist attitude in the lag behind regions. Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand etc is the result of such economic Imbalances. People involved in these movements contended that the area's abundant natural resources had been plundered to benefit neighboring regions (Dutta, 2013).

Vested interests

Some vested interests always create issues which challenge national unity and integrity in any society or country, and India is no exception. Vested interests in India sometimes create a chasm in society. Occasionally, communal riots are sparked to fulfill the selfish needs of vested interest groups. Many political groups founded on minority/majority Interests foster social divisions and discord. People's religious sentiments are abused and used to achieve political goals such as gaining power. When rumours spread that a religious sign is being attacked or that the faith is under danger, people become enraged and lose their ability to reason. These political parties and groups poison people's minds and take advantage of the circumstance in order to gain votes. Vote bank politics, whether indirectly or directly, obstructs the development of national unity and cohesion (Mohanty, (2006).

Communalism

Once Jawaharlal Nehru, first Prime Minister of Independent India had rightly pointed out that the greatest danger for this country is from communalism and not so much from external aggression because when there is external aggression, the people of India tend to get united but when communalism is rampant, the people get divided. Communalism is, thus, the most deadly enemy of the people of India. "Nationalism and communalism have been the most important factors of the root of major crisis in twentieth century Indian politics. Nationalism has been the aspiration and communalism the disease and both in their ways have shaped Indian Politics (Mehta,1983)." According to Bipin Chandra, "the concept of communalism is based on the belief that religious distinction is the most important and fundamental distinction, and this distinction overrides all other distinctions....As such the loss of one religious group is the gain of another group and vice-versa. If a particular community seeks to better its social and economic situation, it is doing at the expense of the other (Chandra, 2004)."

Britishers tried to disturb the national integration of our country by applying the 'divide and rule' policy to curb the freedom movement. In pursuance of that policy they began to show their favour alternatively to this community or that. In this way they had sown the seeds of misunderstanding and jealousy in the minds of the people. Ultimately India was divided into two states based on religion, i.e., India and Pakistan. Side by side these communal trends, also manifested in the form of Muslim League and Hindu Mahasabha. Muslim League, with this understanding wanted an Islamic state (Pakistan) and Hindu Mahasabha stated that it is a Hindu Rashtra.

In post - Independence India communal riots based on religious identity happened many times in different zones of the country and also going on time to time. "Of the bloody pogroms in sixties, the ones at Ranchi, Bihar (1962) and Ahmedabad, Gujarat (1969) stand out as the major events. In seventies the Turk- man Gate massacre of 1976 perpetrated by police..... the riots in Moradabad (1980), Nellie, Naogaon, Assom (1983), Bhiwandi (1984) and Meerut (1987) have been the major ones in which more than a thousand lost their lives" (Khalidi, 1995). The Ramjanmabhumi campaign left a big trail of blood in which more than thousand people lost lives in 1989. The massacres of Bhagalpur, Hyderabad and Aligarh heralded the onset of bloody 80s, which has seen the peak of communal violence. Post-Babri demolition riots of 1996 was one of the worst, the country has suffered so far. This communalization process goes through various levels,

beginning from 'the Muslims are aliens', responsible for partition of the country', 'have spread Islam on the strength of sword' and 'are loyal to Pakistan.

Minority - Majority - Syndrome

India is a culmination of many groups. Those in less populated communities are considered as minority. It is generally accepted fact that Hindus are majority in India. But it is also a fact that what is a majority from one perspective is a minority from another. Today Sikhs are in Minority in India but in Punjab it is Hindus who are in minority. Jains are India's oldest religious minority. Recently, they are given the status of minority. Muslims are India's largest religious/ minority, but in Jammu and Kashmir it is Hindus who regard themselves as a minority. Many people think that those who are not Hindu can be considered as minority. Some Hindus speak of the need for the 'Indianization' of minorities, by which they mean that minorities should adopt "Indian" (i.e. Hindu) names, observe Indian (i.e. Hindu) national holidays, identify with India's historical (i.e., pre-Islamic Hindu and Buddhist) past, its heroes and great events, and be attached to the soul of India not to Mecca or Rome (Madhok, 1970). According to census 2011, Muslim constitutes 14.23% of India's population. Sometime, it is felt by majority community that Muslim population is increasing and after few decades they will be in majority. Sometime they have been asked to go to Pakistan, the Islamic State. Quite often the political and religious leaders speak of creating "Hindu Rashtra" in the name of Indian culture and this leads to some tension between the Hindus and Muslims across the country. Majority community felt that Muslim population is increasing alarmingly. Although this claim is not supported by census data.

Conclusion

There are several difficulties to national integration, some variables pose particularly serious obstacles to achieving national integrity and unity. Casteism, communalism, linguistic fanaticism, socio-economic inequity and disparities, and regionalism are all major roadblocks. There cannot be national integration without understanding the character of the nation and there cannot be national integration unless we intrinsically believe in the validity of different beliefs and approaches. When these factors are taken into consideration, it can be seen that national integration is a complex problem and political integration is only one part of it. It is beyond doubt that the threats of disintegration are staring us in the face. If we keep on remaining disunited in the name of above mentioned disintegration factors, the country will be in trouble. There is urgent need to rethink about our basic political and cultural concepts, reinterpret them, and be bold to emphasize them through educational system, political behaviour and social environment. At the same time We must realize that we have the strong bond of same cultural heritage and must not let ourselves fall apart and disintegrate. Toleration, co-operation and feeling of brotherhood should guide us in maintaining the national unity of our country. Let us echo what Pandit Nehru said, "There is no division between North and South, East and West of India. There is only one India of which all us are inheritors, it belongs to all of us."

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