

Social transformation and future identities: West Europe and South Asia

Although it is conventional to begin by defining the concepts one employs, I shall desist from the temptation. However, it is necessary to indicate the restricted sense in which the two key concepts are used for the present purpose. Social transformation refers to macro-societal changes as against the changes which occur in particular aspects or institutions in a society. Similarly, while personal and group identities are also likely to change because of social transformation, here I am concerned only with certain collective identities. Social transformation implies a point of departure, a process of displacement and/or accretion and a point of destination. It is the point of destination which provides the linkage between social transformation and future identities; the former is in process and the latter is yet to be accomplished; it is a vision being pursued.

The two civilizational regions that I shall venture to compare are believed to be utterly different; the "twain shall never meet" as the adage goes. South Asia is inhabited by a thousand million people, West Europe's population is barely one-fourth of this. West Europe is highly developed, industrialized and modern. It has entered the "post-industrial" or "post-modern" phase. In contrast, South Asia is largely pre-industrial and agrarian although it is fast industrializing. South Asian society has an uninterrupted history of fifty centuries but the South Asian states are barely half-a-century old. West Europe constitutes not only the "Old World" but also has the old states.

In spite of all this, their projected future identities are unbelievably similar. In fact, there are two competing visions of these identities. For want of better terms I shall designate them as pluralist and primordial.

Pluralism is a much misunderstood word although in wide currency. For the present purpose I shall define it as the dignified coexistence of several cultural identities – big and small, strong and weak, local and cosmopolitan – within a state-society. Pluralism should not be mistaken for diversity; the latter is a social fact, the former is a value-orientation. The essence of pluralism is tolerance. However, cultural pluralism should not be misunderstood for cultural relativism which advocates the maintenance of cultures in their pristine purity, that is, primordialism. The primordial vision of identity invokes one or the other attribute of the collectivity – race, religion, language – or a combination of these, to build a new society or to discard the undesirable accretions to the existing society. The vision based on primordial identity seeks to legitimise one or the other salient identity of the dominant collectivity which provides the basis for establishing the society. Inevitably primordialism and hegemonisation are the two sides of the same coin.

It is necessary to situate the two regions in their recent historical contexts to understand the emergence of the two competing identities – the primordial and the pluralist. In South Asia the pluralist vision was the product of nationalist expect-

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tancy, provided by two centuries of colonialism. Nationalism was defined and perceived as the united struggle of a wide variety of peoples against a common enemy, an external intruder. The content of nationalism in South Asia was essentially political and the kernel of the nationalist expectancy was to keep the disparate cultural elements – religious and linguistic – together to build a common future. Nationalism was the legitimate expression of the perceived future identity in South Asia. In contrast, the excesses of nazism and fascism delegitimised nationalism as an expression of collective identity, and the liberal expectancy provided the content of pluralist vision in Western Europe. The building block of the Western conception of pluralism was/is not groups with varying cultural backgrounds but individuals; it essentially meant providing an adequate and appropriate opportunity structure. The critical point is that in the West the empire dissolved into more or less culturally homogeneous units and to build nation-states was the aspiration. The nation-state was the theatre in which the drama of liberal expectancy was enacted. But the progress towards the formation of states for each nation was not smooth, is not yet complete and perhaps cannot ever be achieved. It is this ground reality which provides the new vision of identity as exemplified by the European Community (EC).

The essential sources of identities of the two entities – West Europe and South Asia – may be noted before we proceed further. West Europe has two referents – the European Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries and the EC countries. The units which constitute these organisations vary widely in terms of their sizes – the giant, Germany, with a population of eighty million on the one hand and the mini-state of Luxembourg on the other. Similarly, India with her eight hundred million people is several times bigger as compared to the Maldives which have less than a million people. Broadly speaking, West Europe is racially homogeneous, the traditional homeland of the Caucasian races. The racial heterogeneity of Europe is a function of immigration from outside, particularly Asia and Africa. The non-Caucasoid population of West Europe is not more than 2 percent of her total population and yet such alarm has been raised in the recent past about this “reverse colonialism” that the European parliament was prompted to appoint a committee to inquire into racism and xenophobia in Europe. In contrast, South Asia has three racial strains, a small section of the Caucasoids, not an inconsiderable number of Negroids, the vast majority being Mongoloids. But race does not constitute a negative element in public discourse or in private interaction in South Asia, although, of course, subtle prejudice based on colour exists, white being cognised as superior. The only context in which phenotypical differences are visible is vis-a-vis the people of the North-East who resemble the Chinese or the Thais. But they are not perceived as inferior because of their physical difference.

Western Europe, viewed as a whole, is largely homogeneous in religious terms; the two European Muslim enclaves being Turkey and parts of former Yugoslavia. Most of the non-European Muslims are immigrants from Asia or Africa. Altogether the Muslim population resident in Europe – the natives and immigrants together – is only six to seven million. But Islam is the second biggest religion of Europe and has been a part of it for several centuries. In contrast, South Asia's religious pluralism is stragging. Not only were Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism born here but South Asia also has the biggest Muslim concentration in the world. Of the seven South Asian states, two are predominantly populated by Hindus (India and Nepal) three are mainly Muslim countries

(Bangladesh, Pakistan and Maldives) and two are Buddhist (Sri Lanka and Bhutan). All the South Asian states have adopted the religions of the majority populations either as the official or national religion, except India. although India is predominantly Hindu, it has the second biggest Muslim population (after Indonesia) in the world. More than 80 per cent of world's Zoroastrians live in India and viewed in terms of their total population the Baha'is presence in India is also substantial. While the Indian Christians constitute only 2.3 percent of the population they number twenty million and the Christian presence dates back to the first century A. D. The Sikhs are widely dispersed and constituting 1.8 percent of India's population they count over fifteen million. For these reasons perhaps it is not viable for India to have a state religion. Indian secularism is therefore conceptualized as religious pluralism, the coexistence of different religions in mutual respect.

Both Western Europe and South Asia are multi-lingual. While the proclaimed aspiration was "for each nation its own state" several European states have plurilingual native populations – United Kingdom, Spain, Switzerland, Belgium, for example. However, the indigeneous source of cultural diversity in Western Europe was and is language. (Although Christian denominational differences often coincided with linguistic diversity, there is no neat and tidy division). Once again, South Asia's linguistic plurality is much greater as compared with West Europe's. There are more than hundred languages which have ten thousand or more speakers and fifteen of them have ten million or more speakers. However, language has not been the basis of state formation in South Asia, save for Bangladesh, partly because of colonial history and partly because religion provided the over-arching identity. As I have noted above most countries in South Asia are multi-religious, notably India. Given this scenario cultural pluralism in South Asia essentially meant transcending religious identities. But India is the only state in South Asia which is secular in the sense it has no official religion and has constitutionally accepted the idea of equal respect for all religions. Similarly, the emergence of the EC is an effort to transcend the linguistic identities which are firmly rooted in Europe and which had provided the basis for state formation. Therefore, I suggest that the pluralist vision of India is anchored to religion and that of the EC to language. In what follows, I shall focus on India and the EC so as to show how the pluralist and primordial visions of identity are competing for prominence in these two regions.

The Hindu nationalist discourse was always oriented to culture and religion was the fountain-spring of culture. India is seen as the accredited homeland of the Hindus and non-Hindus have no right to be there. And yet the conceptualization of Hindu was far from clear. There are at least three clearly identifiable boundaries.

First, Hindus are simply the original and obvious inhabitants of Hindustan, that is, India. "Hindu society living in this country since times immemorial is the national . . . society here. The same Hindu people have built the life-values, ideals and culture of this country and, therefore, their nationhood is self-evident." Further, "... we, Hindus, have been in undisputed and undisturbed possession of this land for over eight or even ten thousand years before the land was invaded by any foreign race." Viewed thus, Hindus are simply a people who occupy their homeland and share a life-style. This all-embracing definition does not have religious content, Hindus being a people of a designated land, just as the German or the Greeks.

Second, Hindus are all those who pursue religions of Indian origin, including the primal vision. Thus Savarkar contends: "Hinduism must necessarily mean the religion or the religions that are peculiar or native to this land... it should be applied to all the religious beliefs that the different communities of the Hindu people hold."

In this conceptualization the inextricable linkage between the community of faith and the country of residence is taken to be the essence of the Hindu nation. But such a proposition would be rejected by the "non-Hindu" religions of Indian origin and some have openly challenged it (e.g., the Sikhs) and hence the following clarification:

Sikhs are Hindus in the sense of our definition of Hindutva and not in any religious sense whatever. Religiously they are Sikhs as Jains are Jains, Lingayats are Lingayats, Vaishnavas are Vaishnavas; but all of us racially and nationally and culturally are a polity and a people... We are Sikhs and Hindus and Bharatiyas (Indians). We are all three put together and none exclusively.

Clearly this studied ambivalence and cultivated ambiguity is a political project designed to avoid possible wedges and potential conflicts between religions of Indian origin. Be that as it may, this definition of Hindu is both inclusive (all those who profess religions of Indian origin) and exclusive (all those who profess religions of "alien" origin).

The third conceptualization of Hindu is more restrictive and substantially exclusivist. It includes (a) only twice-born Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas or, at best, also ritually clean Shudras and (b) those from the Aryabhumi, that is, north India. It excludes the Panchamas (those of the fifth order), that is, the untouchables (currently counting a hundred million), the Adivasis (the original inhabitants of the land presently accounting for fifty million) and the Dravidian Hindus of South India, numbering around two hundred million. This conceptualization questions the *internality* of a substantial proportion of "Hindus," they are rendered outsiders. Clearly, such a definition of Hindu falls short of the requirements of a political project; it divides the Hindus of India into different "nations."

To avoid the extreme exclusionist orientation of this conceptualization, neo-Hindu reformers have attempted to accommodate non-Hindus through *shuddhi* (ritual purification). But the innovation is applicable only to (a) ritually unclean untouchables, (b) the tribal communities, that is, *Vanvasis* (forest dwellers) who claim primal vision as their religion, and (c) those who have been converted to "alien" religions. But for the Dravidian, the clean-caste Hindus *shuddhi* is irrelevant. Thus, once again, one encounters the ambiguity of boundary and ambivalence of attitude in defining Hindu and Hinduism. The caste and linguistic factors invoked in defining Hinduism erode the saliency of religion. Hindu is thus defined at least in three different ways invoking different variables: territory, religion and caste/language. And all of them pose problems in defining Hindu as a nation and/or nationality.

But this ambiguity disappears completely when it comes to defining the non-Hindus. They must accept unadulterated Hindu hegemony.

The non-Hindu people in Hindustan must learn to... adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion, must entertain no ideas but those of glorification of the Hindu race and culture... may stay in the country, wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges... not even citizens rights (Golwalkar 1934).

As against this utter Hindu nationalist orientation stands the position of M. K. Gandhi who held the view that:

If the Hindus believe that India should be peopled only by Hindus, they are living in dreamland. The Hindus, the Mohammedans, the Parsis and the Christians who have made India their country are fellow countrymen... In no part of the world are one nationality and one religion synonymous terms; nor has it ever been so in India.

It is thus clear that the Indian "nation" is defined in two diametrically opposite ways, one being exclusionist and Hindu-hegemonic and the other inclusionist and pluralist.

The European Community started as an economic proposition, as a common market, and its central thrust remains the same. The Treaty of Rome which came into force on 1 January 1958 envisaged establishing "the foundations of an enduring and closer union between European peoples, by gradually removing the economic effects of their political frontiers." The EC wanted to establish by the end of the transition period, "The free circulation of labour, services and capital, as well as the right to settle, work and trade anywhere in the community." Further, Article 117 notes, "Member states agree upon the need to promote improved working conditions and on improved standards of living for workers, so as to make possible their harmonisation while improvement is being maintained." Thus improvement in the living conditions of the Community's population and the harmonisation of social systems within the Community are the important objectives of the EC.

Admittedly this inclusionism is limited to the ECs population and provides only for restricted pluralism. Understandably, the problematic collectivities are foreigners/immigrants. There is a hierarchy of identities here: those of the same state/nation, those of the EC, those of the OECD countries, those of the First World, and others. Although it is extremely difficult to demarcate the immigrants drawn from different sources, if one identifies the accusations levelled against them one can locate the real target group.

The immigrants in West Europe are accused of three generalized offences. First, they are perceived as a threat to economic interests viewed in terms of competition in the job market, trade, commerce, and a drain on the state-exchequer as recipients of social security. Second, they are a threat to the cultural order as they differ in habits, mentality, life-styles, language, religion and race. Third, they are a threat to the social order as they are criminally inclined, indulge in deviant economic activities to earn their livelihood, are hyper-sexual and wear away, women. Clearly then, immigrants under reference are non-Europeans and non-Christians.

I have noted above that the non-whites do not constitute more than two million and the Muslims around six to seven million in West Europe. This means that the migrant population perceived to be posing a threat is not more than five million, as there is a double count in regard to the non-European, non-Christian population. This constitutes only around 2 to 3 percent of the EC population. And yet there is widespread feeling that there are too many coloureds in West Europe. This view is frequently aired in legislative bodies, parliamentary discussions and in the mass media. For example, M. Pascua said on 9 July 1986 in the French parliament, "The French are not racist. But facing this continuous increase of the foreign population in France, one has witnessed the development, in certain cities and neighbourhoods, of reactions that come close to xenophobia."

The statement made by Mr. Janman on 20 June 1990 in the British House of Commons is more revealing.

One in three children born in London today is of ethnic origin... That is a frightening

concept for the country to come to terms with. We have already seen the problems of massive Moslem immigration . . . Unless we want to create major problems in the decades or century ahead, we must not only stop immigration but must move to voluntary resettlement to reduce the immigrant population.

But a letter to the editor which appeared in one of the German newspapers is unadulterated in its xenophobic tone and in its contempt:

They (Turks) show archaic behaviour, they are illiterates, from a completely alien cultural context, and have Islam as their religion. Did Europe in 1683 conquer Turks so that they now get children's allowance, rent allowance, social welfare, and return premiums . . . ? The best policy for these Turks is: kick in the ass and out.

While the outer circle of outsiders is clearly specified on the basis of race and religion, the inner boundary of insiders is maintained on the basis of language. This is exemplified in the currently popular slogans such as, "Give back France to the French," "Germany is for Germans only," etc. For example, M. Le Pen said on 7 July 1986 in the French parliament, "We are neither racist nor xenophobic. Our aim is only that, quite naturally, there is a hierarchy, because we are dealing with France, and France is the country of the French."

Admittedly, Len Pen's idea of concentric circles neatly fits in when one views the immigrants hierarchically. Because, to quote him again, "I like my daughters better than my neighbours, my neighbours better than strangers and strangers better than enemies." The invoking of the family imagery while discussing national identity is very functional. The next-door neighbours are more acceptable, but only if spatial proximity coexists with cultural and mental proximity. This is where Christianity plays an important part as an intrinsic component of national identity in European nations. The Turks and Yugoslav Muslims are next door neighbours but worse than strangers, sometimes as bad as enemies. But the distance increases cumulatively if one belongs to another race and religion. Thus the African Muslim is put at the end of the continuum. In contrast, the notion of neighbourliness extends effectively to the European Christian brotherhood. Thus the Portuguese, the Spaniards, the Italians and even the Greeks are acceptable and can be assimilated with ease.

The French debate on *jus soli* or automatic citizenship had concentrated on second generation Algerians; although the Portuguese constitute the single-largest cultural block of immigrants in France, no reference was made to them in the discussion. In Germany citizenship is defined on the basis of blood and kinship. The German Democratic Republic was never defined as a foreign country by the Federal Republic of Germany. Millions of ethnic Germans, who lived outside Germany for several decades, who do not speak the German language, who have a different life-style, are given citizenship for the mere asking. In contrast, the Turks who are born and brought up in Germany, who can speak impeccable German, whose life-style may be more German than the Germans, are foreigners and immigrants. According to Article 51 of the Italian Constitution, an Italian who is living anywhere in the world can acquire Italian citizenship if only s/he chooses to be one. Examples can be multiplied but I think that is not necessary. The point is that in Europe the two identities, citizenship and nationality, are sought to be fused into one.

The fusion of citizenship and nationality was functional, perhaps utterly necessary, for the very survival of the nation-state. Citizenship was a sacralized identity; a citizen should be ready to fight for the frontiers of his state and nation, which were often coterminous, and be ready to be a martyr, the assumption being a non-

national citizen will not be willing to serve in the military or to die for the country because he has no commitment to preserve the borders of the sacred homeland. To concede citizenship to such a person is to de-sacralize it, to devalue it.

What we are confronting here is the lag between concept and reality. The conceptualization of citizenship and its fusion with nationality was perhaps an imperative in a war-torn world, in a world where the nation-states constituted the building blocks. But reality has changed radically; globalisation is said to be making rapid strides, the eclipse of the nation-state is impending. The very emergence of the European Community, even as it is not making progress in achieving its goals with the expected speed, is an indicator of the new mood, the new vision of identity. If citizens of the European Community could be French, German or British, what is their nationality? What is the identity of a German in Greece or a Spaniard in France? Are we implicitly making another unrealizable and unrealistic assumption that the national and ethnic identities will wither away? On the other hand, how do we account for the general tendency for ethnics to return to their ancestral homelands? In 1990, 400,000 ethnic Germans (Aussiedlers) mainly from the former U.S.S.R., Poland and Rumania returned to Germany after several decades of stay in those countries. In 1989, 300,000 ethnic Turks left Bulgaria, mainly for Turkey, after several centuries of stay. Ethnic Hungarians, from Rumania and former Yugoslavia returned to Hungary. Most of the returnees were ethnics and citizens in the countries to which they migrated but they were not nationals; by returning to their accredited ancestral homeland they are re-claiming their lost nationality.

In South Asia there is nothing comparable to the European Community although the South Asian Association for regional Cooperation (SAARC) could be viewed as a reluctant beginning on the same line. However, the cultural complexity and the size of India is much more even as compared to the whole of Europe. Thus India affords a good case to be compared with the European Community in that both may be viewed as multi-national states. The notion of single citizenship is deeply internalized and institutionalized for the whole of India, but as in Europe, the effort has been to fuse citizenship and nationality. However, given its complexity and size, India had to accept as a practical proposition the existence of regional-linguistic identities. The Indian provinces (referred to as states) are organized on the basis of languages. Hindi is spoken in five states by 38 percent of India's population, Bengali in two states and all other major languages in one state each. These are "nations" in that they are authentic cultural entities but nations without sovereign states. However, it is not true that all nations in India are thus recognized; several tribal or subaltern nations are struggling for their identity and autonomy. In terms of their population size, several of these tribal nations are as big as, if not bigger than, most Nordic countries.

Inter-regional migration within India is limited but it has a long history. During the colonial period migration was tied with new ventures such as railway construction, plantations, etc. After independence, with the acceleration of the process of industrialization crossing the cultural frontiers has become common. These migrants are Indian citizens who have the right to reside, work, study and trade in any part of India as provided by the Indian Constitution, just as the Treaty of Rome provides for the citizens of the European Community. And yet, migrants in India are treated as "aliens" outside their provinces, particularly if the province to which they migrate is culturally different, that is, if it has a different language. Properly put, they are ethnics and the fact that they are citizens of the same state does not "protect" them from such labelling.

The point I want to make is this. Both in the European Community and in India there are three identities – citizenship, nationality and ethnicity – which are distinct and actually complementary but unfortunately viewed either as competitive or as mutually exclusive. Instead of accepting the reality on the ground and evolving an appropriate conceptualization and a plausible public policy, both India and the European Community are pursuing an ostrich-like attitude. The primordial identities in Europe are based on race, religion and language. But as I have indicated earlier neither race nor religion pose a real threat to the European identity as a whole. In India the primordial identities are anchored to religion and language and both could pose a serious problem. However, the threat from linguistic collectivities has largely been contained by forming language-based provinces – administrative and political units – to which a certain degree of economic and political autonomy is conceded. Thus, taken together, race and religion remain the irritants in the European Community and in India, both of which, I suggest, cannot provide a firm basis for the formation of national identities.

Before the geographical explorations of the sixteenth century and during the colonialism which followed it and persisted till the early twentieth century there was a broad coterminality between race and territory. This situation has substantially altered since then. The peoples of the same race, that is, the same physical type, were always drawn from several languages. That is, race is trans-territorial and pluri-lingual. This is also true of religions. Although particular religions have specific lands of birth none of them are confined to those territorial bounds today. In fact, the proselytizing religions – Christianity, Buddhism, Islam – have prospered away from their original homelands. Non-proselytizing religions such as Judaism, Zoroastrianism, and the Baha'i faith found new homelands, permanently or temporarily. Even religions such as Hinduism and Sikhism, which are largely confined to their original territories, have substantial migrants living far and wide. And people of the same faith are distributed into several languages. If sections of a particular race or religion tend to form nation the crucial fact in this language.

What I am trying to drive at is that a minimalist definition of nation has only two elements: a territory on which the inhabitants have a moral claim and a common language. As language is an imperative for human existence (unlike religion) primordial identities based on language will persist. No amount of globalisation will substantially reduce the role and importance of language within particular regions and localities. Therefore, I see the possibility of a re-legitimation of nationalism in Europe. But the content of the new nationalism will be essentially cultural. Europe will have nations without states in future. The European state will be multi-national, nay, supra-national and citizenship will provide the transnational pluralistic European identity. Therefore the concept of citizenship will have to be re-defined; the value orientation to it will have to change. Citizenship can and should only mean economic and political rights and obligations of the members of the polity, and to enjoy them they need not belong to the same nation or ethnic, that is, cultural collectivity. This would provide for and nurture cultural pluralism within state boundaries. The Rome Treaty has explicitly referred to the economic and political rights but is silent on the cultural dimension. This is the Achilles heel of the European Community.

The Indian conceptualisation, as I have noted earlier, of citizenship and nationality is equally ambiguous and even ambivalent. This is prompted by the anxiety of keeping India as one indivisible entity. But the Indian practice is much better in that in spite of single citizenship the idea of different nationalities is

accepted in effect. However both in the EC and in India ethnics pose a problem in that ethnicity is a product of dissociation between territory and culture. And in the contemporary world migration across cultural regions is inevitable for a variety of reasons – economic transformation, political instability, the urge for upward mobility through spatial mobility and simple individual choices. The identity of cultural strangers or aliens within given national territories is what I have designated as ethnic identity. If the cultural background of the ethnics are proximate to that of nationals and if the nationals endorse it and ethnics aspire to it, assimilation is a possibility. If not, ethnic identity will persist. Thus three identities will coexist in future, both in India and in the European Community: citizenship will provide the pluralistic and encapsulating identity, and nationality and ethnicity the primordial and differentiating identities.