The development of nationalism in the Indian case

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Abstract
Narratives, particularly historical narratives, frame our identities: they tell the story of our origins and provide us with direction to guide future action. Considering the numerous movements they have fostered in past 200 years, few identities have been as powerful a motor for social change or emerged as loudly on the world stage as national identities. In this context, India presents a unique case. In attempting to classify it, India could be labeled a multi-nation state, due to the immense diversity of linguistic, cultural and ethnic groups that reside within it, each with its own particular historical narrative and myths of origin. Simultaneously, there exist overarching nationalities that possess respective historical narratives. In addition to the secular "Indian" nation, an idea originating from the Indian National Congress, one could argue (as some political groups have in modern history) the existence of a "Hindu" nation, a "Sikh" nation, the "Muslim" nation each distinct from the other in terms of its respective origin, values and political goals. Undoubtedly there exist numerous other identities overlapping along lines of language, culture, religion and caste in addition to those identities which have gained enough political traction to agitate effectively for their own version of the Hindu, Sikh or Muslim nation-state.

This inherent diversity of the Indian people is apparent to observers sufficiently aware of extant linguistic, cultural and religious differences: the result of millennia of foreign invasions, cultural and linguistic growth and diversification based in part on the geographic and political separation. The political unification of these regions and their people into the entity of “India” is a modern phenomenon and an outcome influenced in numerous ways by colonial British rule. On the eve of its Independence from Britain the country had never before been united under a single civil administration bound together with the vision of a decidedly “Indian” civic and cultural identity. Swaraj, the democratic rule of the Indian people (of the Gujurati from Allahabad and the Bihari from Patna and the Tamillian from Coimbatore) by “the Indian people” had heretofore been absent from the subcontinent.

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