

The Post-Colonial Indian State: A Paradigm for Emergence of New Identities

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I

'Post-colonial' is a metaphor to describe the deconstruction of hegemonic discourses that colonise the subjects. Post-colonial India is a description of India's undoing of Eurocentric colonising discourse. It does not only mean achievement of political liberation by breaking away fetters of British colonialism, but it means a conscious relocation of the identity, defined as 'Indian' in the site, where it unburdens the colonial hangover and defines itself in its own terms. Such a definition is historically constituted by the emergence of India as a nation, which means a cultural uprising against an alien dominating culture. Even though such a nation inheres in itself an Eurocentric liberal discourse, but an emergent nation always redefines itself in its own terms. Therefore, Indian nation is Eurocentric and liberal in its form, but in its content, it is an independent, autonomous self-defined identity. Such a definition is constructed around its own cultural, political and ideological institutions, which means it is an independent discursive formation that appropriates its 'other', the 'Europe'.

This emergence of post-colonial nation of India is structurally constructed by an apparatus of power, which can be called as 'Indian state'. The play of power is inextricably mixed with the construction of an identity and hence, the dividing line between the apparatus of power and its construction is very thin. For a genealogical analysis of the construction of power, power of its constructions are treated as part of the same discursive formation. It is considered that power

operates through its discursive formations that produces its subjects, which can be treated as constructions of power. Moreover, a discursive formation has its truth-claims tied with the claims of power having its ontology in its subjects. Such a digression is necessary to make it clear that Indian nation is inextricably formed and constructed by the apparatus of power, the Indian state. The play of power produces the ontology of its own, the Indian nation. But, such an ontology is merely discursive, drifting and dredging on a paradigm of multiple identities.

Here I would recall the definition of a nation, as given by Benedict Anderson, who defines nation as an 'imagined community'. In case of Post-colonial Indian nation, it is liberated 'imagined community', born out of a struggle against British colonialism, which is internally constituted by a variety inscribed within the imagination of an Indian nation opens up the possibility of creating subjects, differentiated in terms of plural identities. Therefore, one can infer that 'post-colonial' Indian nation produces a space of multiple subjects.

Mere recognition of such a variety does not fully unfold the process of construction of a discursive space of identities. It needs an interpretive horizon to describe the process. Nation, as a Eurocentric category is interpreted to be formed as a result of 'amnesia' of various communities under a spell of history to give rise to a community to which any individual/community belongs to in complete 'anonymity' with other such individual/community. Such an interpretation given by Ernest Renan to describe the genesis of French nation can be invoked in order to understand the emergence of Indian nation as a post-colonial entity. As Ganesh Devi argues in his book *After Amnesia* that the various cultural identities in India have been oblivious of their own cultural roots during centuries of Turk-Moghul rule and the two centuries of British rule. He argues that such a cultural amnesia has made it possible to give rise to a post-colonial identity in which various cultural groups have identified them. To deconstruct such an argument, one can show that colonialism suppresses the sense of identity and distinctness, fuses them into a metamorphosed identity and so post-colonial identity is the result of colonial amnesia of the past. At the same time, the post-colonial 'Anonymity' (following

Renan) is a sort of resituating one's own identity without being conscious of other identities, while being conscious of a 'whole' to which the 'other' belongs to. One can deflate this view saying that production of an identity without an 'other' is a post-colonial identity and in case of India, it gives an identity to an individual/community in anonymity to/with 'other(s)'. Such a space of 'anonymity' grows with multiple self-consciousness without the self, the self being lost as well as the 'other'. Here it is instructive to mention that Ashish Nandy, in his book *The Intimate Enemy* claims that post-colonial space is a space of recovery of the lost self under colonialism, which he means as a recovery of the lost image in new terms of resentment and rejection of colonialism and such a recovery means an emergence of the new self in the Post-colonial space. These arguments of Ernest Renan, Ganesh Devi and Ashish Nandy can be interpreted as mapping out the emergence of new identities in a space, which is discursive. But the crucial point is, if there is an amnesia resulting into an anonymity, how can there be a new identity consciousness, which marks the post-colonial space? It needs a re-interpretation of the whole emergence of post-colonial identity(ies).

As I have argued in the beginning, if the post-colonial space is a space of deconstructing the colonising hegemonic discourse, how can the colonial amnesia be deconstructed? As Michael Foucault, following Nietzsche, describes an encounter as an emergence into an interstice, a 'non-space', do we call a post-colonial space as a space of encounter, an interstice, a non-space, in which the origin of an identity is lost into 'amnesia' and where its self-reflexively encounters its colonial 'other' and inscribes its 'self' as an alterity to itself as well as its 'other'? This is a space resolved into an interrogation of the 'other' and then, interrogating its own 'self'. In this interrogation, it reproduces its subjectivity in a series of conflict of power and thereby subjecting itself to various discursive ontologies. It is a production of a self against the other and then an enhanced articulation of reproduction of itself against itself to lay bare the layers of itself, the structure of domination within itself. Following Paul Ricoeur, one can characterize this interrogation reveals a specific 'hermeneutic horizon' of the subject who constructs her discourse, a dis(closure) of herself by (dis)locating and (de)centring herself.

Therefore, one can infer that a post-colonial identity of a nation as an 'imagined community' poses a common identity so long as it is self-reflexive to the 'other', e.g., it is an Indian identity so long it poses against its 'other'. But within itself, it undergoes a vigorous transformation in which it reproduces a disjointed variety of identities, because this is effect of deconstructing the hegemonic discourse. Nation, as a common identity is a deconstructive identity with a surface of discrete identities engaged in a process of locating itself by displacing itself and its 'other'. Therefore, within an Indian identity, an 'other' is always created.

What follows from this discussion is that a 'responsibility to otherness' can effectively construct a post-colonial space of self-construction without exclusion and persecution. But looked from a hegemonic perspective, such an 'other' can always be negotiated, reduced, remaindered and normalised into its discursive formation, but such a hegemonic process is inherently unstable to release a number of forces in conflict, which only shall reproduce an internalised 'other'. Such a perspective is adequate to understand the dynamics of political conflict in Indian perspective.

II

The question that I would like to raise is how far the 'responsibility to otherness' is discharged in the conflicting political stage of Indian state? Even though Indian state represents a theatre of multi-cornered contests by various ideological formations, does it mean a play of various alternative discourses or a reduction of such discourses into a hegemonised discourses of the state? A hegemonised discourse of the state with its institutional, legal and administrative structure inscribed within a metanarrative colonises the possibility of various alternatives. For this internal logic of India's discursive polity, the legitimacy of the Indian state is fast eroding and the state is becoming 'reactionary' and 'repressive'.

At the same time, the process of internal 'otherisation' is manifesting the form of marginalised discourses. Such discourses can be located in the context of N.E. India, such marginalised discourses are constructed to resist the dominant discourse, but it is constructed in the terms of hegemony and it is capable to reproducing the same

normalising and disciplinary impact on its subjects. Moreover, even though such discourses are transgressive to the dominant discourse, by their act of transgression, what is produced is the subordination to the dominant discourse, because without transgression such marginalized discourses cannot be produced. The very act of transgression constitute the production of subordinate and marginal identities.

This perspective shall make it clear that the identity movements in the N.E. India spearheaded against the state in earning a fair deal from the state is a marginalised discourse that transgresses the dominant disciplinary discourse of the state. As, such marginalised discourse involve specific cultural and ethnic ties, therefore, these discourses appropriate the terms of hegemony in articulating a reverse discourse against it. The agenda of such discourses become the issues of discrimination, neglect, exclusion and domination. To cite an example, the discourse of the ULFA movement in Assam can serve as a sample of such marginalised discourses. With respect to this, the response of the Indian state can be studied to fully comprehend the effect of hegemony and its relation to marginalised discourse.

The discourse of ULFA points out ruthless exploitation of Assam by the Centre in the form of taking away of natural resources and produces, while in return investing capital to widen the base of exploitation. ULFA characterizes this phenomenon as 'colonisation by the Indian state'. To thwart such 'internal colonization', ULFA calls for a liberation struggle of the Assamese nation to create an independent state of Assam. To analyse the agenda of such a discourse, which is considered as illegitimate from the perspective of Indian state, one can notice that ULFA discourse subverts the state discourse of development, according to which the backwardness of Assam can be removed by fuller utilisation of its resources. So, the state discourse of 'backwardness' is dug in ULFA discourse as a 'measure of exploitation' and this is how ULFA discourse appropriates the commitment of the Indian state towards development of Assam. Moreover, call for creation of an independent state is again how ULFA discourse appropriates the legitimacy of the Indian state and therefore, ULFA discourse produces its own ideological formation, a battle line drawn against the state. But such a discourse articulates itself through the cultural

resources of Assamese community that cites songs of Jyoti Prasad Agarwala and evokes the trope of a beautiful and evergreen Assam. Such a cultural overtone of ULFA discourse closely constructs a narrative of Assamese identity in which they include various minorities of Assam. Such a construction of political narrative transmutes the Assamese identity from the space of hegemonic Indian identity to a deconstructed space of independence.

Similarly, there are strong 'cultural resistance' to the domination of a perceived 'Indian culture', which in its dominant construction is an accommodative and synthesizing cultural space, comprising of varieties, fails to assure minorities and smaller marginal cultural group a safe and fair treatment. Moreover, in the perception of such small cultural groups of N.E. India, the space of 'Indian culture' does not provide accommodation to their distinct cultural identities, rather it poses a homogenized space with dominant value-systems. This penetrates deep down into the psyche of the small and marginal cultural groups, who exhibit reluctance and withdrawal from such an accommodation, which they perceive to be a process of disorientation. The images projected in the dominant media constitute a brand of popular culture, which does not have any root in social realities, the community-life of various cultural groups. Construction of such a reified cultural space accompanied with propagation of symbol of dominant cultural groups lead to marginalisation of smaller groups and they become 'resistant' to such cultural domination.

But such resistances are articulated through a certain mode of aversion and substitution. Even though such articulations are mostly not represented in construction of narratives, but is reflected in certain attitudes and preferences. As for example, among the indigenous people of the N.E. India, the marks of Sanskritization is absent, while the marks of an assorted acceptance of Westernization is present. The popularity of Western type consumerist life, western films and music are simultaneously an 'aversion' to dominant 'Hindi' popular culture and a substitution of it by western idols and signs. None of these two dominant varieties of culture has grown in the life-world of such people, but it is a politics of culture in which marginalized identities assert themselves by subverting the hegemonic space of Indian culture. This particular aspect can be

visible not only in terms of consumption of cultural products, but also in terms of rejecting a privileged essentialist view of 'Indian way of life'. Simultaneously, an effort to revive one's own past cultural traits among many marginalised and small cultural communities is a strong tendency to articulate their own identity. But the impact of dominant and hegemonising global and Indian cultural space have already changed the distinct marks of marginal cultures in the N.E. India to such an extent that the 'emergent' cultural identity is articulated in terms of ethnicity or language, which can unite the community in a minimal sense. Therefore cultural identity gets subordinated under the fabric of political discourse, through which a marginal identity can enter into a dialogue with the dominant discourse of the Indian state.

Therefore, the monologue of post-colonial Indian state discourse elevating the differences of identities to a common subjecthood with a hegemonic space of homogeneity only serve as a source of dissent, resistance and protest from the marginal groups. At the level of a centralised power, such a discourse reduces the specific cultural location to a universal culture, called 'Indian' that makes out a strategic advantage out of diverse cultural ontology of India. Therefore, such a space gets internally ridden with cultural conflicts of various politicised identities, to contain which the Indian state becomes repressive, leading to a further centrist-hegemonistic monologue of the State. This crisis of the post-colonial Indian State results into its ineffectiveness in maintaining the unity and integrity of India. So, the state is 'ambivalent' in its mechanism of power and cannot decenter itself by investing power in various identities and social formations.

To conclude, such a critique of the Indian state exposing its fissures within not only can pave the way for the fullest expression of various marginal identities, but will also weaken a hegemonic centre and therefore open the path of a liberatarian-communitarian system of democracy.