

Anthropology in Nation-Building in the post-independence era and the road ahead

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When I was asked by the organizers of the conference, to deliver Professor S.C. Dube Memorial Lecture, I was in a fix for some moments for three reasons; first, I had met Professor Dube twice only, and talked with him only once. Secondly, and more importantly, whenever I am invited to therefore, I attend such a conference, I have the habit of speaking my mind on the very theme of the conference; also worried whether my thoughts about the nation building would appeal to the organizers or not? And thirdly, my knowledge about the role of anthropology in nation-building, or for that matter, contributions of Indian anthropologists to the nation building in the pre-independent or the post-independent era, I admit, has also been little. But at the behest of Professor Basa, Professor Subha Ray, and Dr. Mithun Das, I accepted the invitation to write. And thereafter, I began to explore the available literature on the theme.

After all, what the concept of nation-building is? What is meant by nation-building? Is it only the economic growth of a nation in terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) be called nation building? Is it only the infrastructural developments of a nation in terms of mega-industrial projects, or mega-dam projects, or construction of super-class highways, or piling up of tanks, missiles, and nuclear arsenal be called nation building? I think these are not the only features of nation building. Had only these been the sole features of nation building, our immediate neighbouring nation Pakistan does also have the above infrastructural features; rather, in terms of nuclear arsenal, it surpasses India. But why is Pakistan considered today as 'a failed state'? From the latest print media and news channels, we all know what has been happening in Pakistan today. And on the contrary, why India is considered as an emerging 'superpower' in many respects. Therefore, the questions that arise are what is the notion of nation building? Who builds a nation - the anthropologists, sociologists, or other social scientists, the doctors, the engineers, the businessmen, the police, the military, the political parties, or the government? What is a nation? What are the characteristics of a nation? What are the essentials of nation building? What is the role of anthropology in nation building? Is anthropology's role in nation building only to study the advantages and disadvantages of constructions of dams and mega-project industries? Is nation

building only the study of successes or failures of resettlement and rehabilitation schemes by the government? Or, Is only the study of any natural disaster, such as draught, famine, Tsunami landslide, soil-sinking, etc., the characteristics of nation building? The paper, *first* attempts to examine the very concept of nations building as such; and *secondly*, it attempts to discuss what could be the role of anthropology in nation building; and *finally*, what contributions Indian anthropologists have made so far toward the nation building; as also, what anthropologists can at most contribute to nation building?

Abhijit Guha, in one of his articles (2020) and also in a book (2022), has elaborately discussed about the role of some Indian anthropologists in nation-building. I had the chance of reading his article titled *Nation-building on the Margins: How the Anthropologists of India Contributed?* Of course, I have not read his book titled *Nation-Building in Indian Anthropology: Beyond the Colonial Encounter*. In his article, he has elaborately discussed and analyzed the published works of five renowned Indian anthropologists of the earlier generation. Among those five, he has chronologically discussed about T.C. Das's book *Bengal Famine (1943): As Revealed in a Survey of the Destitute of Calcutta* (1949); Surajit Chandra Sinha's *Resettlement of East Pakistan Refugees in Andaman Islands: Report on Survey of Further Possibilities of Resettlement* (1955); B.S. Guha's *Studies in Social Tensions Among the Refugees from Eastern Pakistan* (1959); B.K. Roy Burman's *Social Processes in the Industrialization of Rourkela: With Reference to Displacement and Rehabilitation of Tribal and Other Backward People* (1961); and Irawati Karve and Jai Nimbkar's book *A Survey of the People Displaced Through the Koyna Dam* (1969). In his article, Guha has also referred to the articles of Nobel laureate Amartya Sen (2008) titled, *Is nationalism a boon or a curse?*, as also, M.N. Srinivas'(2009) book *Nation-building in independent India*. I wish I had read Srinivas'book, but not, sorry.

I prefer to make no comments on the aforementioned works on nation-building by the patriarchs of Indian anthropology, except on Surajit Sinha's. Guha (2021) has quoted these lines from Surajit Sinha's report:

"The chart amply shows that not only the promised quota of land has not been fulfilled in most cases, but there also exists a large amount of disparity in distribution of land among the different settlers. This has hindered the attachment of the refugees to the local soil. They are still in the hope that they may be given their full quota of land somewhere else. The refugees allege that their lands have not been measured to their satisfaction". (Sinha, 1955, p. 14).

Sinha perhaps did not envisage how in future the same refugee settlers from East Pakistan would encroach the forest lands in North, Middle, and South Andaman, and create such a formidable problem to the fragile ecology of the Andamans that even after the interference of the Supreme Court of India to vacate the encroached lands, the problems remain as they were decades before. It would not be appropriate here to explain the *modus operandi* that these settlers adopted for encroachment.

There must be more literature on the subject, but as for last couple of months, I have been residing in Dehradun, where despite having the office of the North-Western Regional Center of the Anthropological Survey of India since 1969, there is quite a dearth of a good library. Therefore, I had to be content with whatever references were available in the internet. As much as I delved into the websites, I began to wonder, after all, what the concept of nation-building is? What is meant by nation-building? And, whether the terms nation-building and state-building were synonymous? These and many other questions began to emerge into my mind, and I began to search answers of them, which I am going to share with you today.

NATION-BUILDING

A nation is not merely a hodgepodge of a defined political territory. The concept of nation-building, I think, is a normative concept that means different things to different people at different times and different spaces. Therefore, there are divergent views also on nation-building. For some, nation-building is formulating and strengthening the 'national identity', and that too, using the power of the state. For some others, nation-building refers to the efforts of the newly independent nations that emerged after the Second World War, to establish 'trusted institutions' in their countries, such as, educational institutions, military defence, elections, foreign trade and diplomacy, banking and finance, police, law, courts of justice, healthcare infrastructures, citizenship, citizens right and liberties, marriage, birth and death registries, immigration rules, transport and communication infrastructure, municipal governance, et cetera. In addition, nation-building also includes the creation of such paraphernalia as, a national flag, coat of arms, a national anthem, a national language, and many more emblems and symbols, such as in India, we have the Lion Capital of Ashoka and Ashok Chakra.

There is yet another notion of nation-building that has emerged in the recent times. This view has surfaced particularly after the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. Let's take the example of Afghanistan. For over last forty years, Afghanistan has remained a war-torn country. From 1979 to 1989, she remained under Soviet occupation. After the withdrawal of Soviet forces from the country in 1989, the *Deobandi* Islamic fundamentalist Taliban ruled the country until 9/11 attack in the USA in 2001. After the attack of 9/11, USA together with several NATO nations waged an all-out war on Afghanistan to demolish, and overthrow the Taliban rule in the country. However, the American and the NATO forces also eventually withdrew in August 2021. During all these decade, the physical infrastructures, as well as the infrastructure of all the democratic, educational, healthcare, law and order institutions were torn apart. Now after the reinstatement of Taliban government in the country, with strict conditions and reservations, the international organizations are coming to help build the nation, and restore democracy there.

Nation-building, in fact, is the process, whereby a society of people with diverse origins, diverse histories, languages, cultures and religions, come together and live within the boundary of a sovereign state, with a unified constitutional and legal institution, a national emblem, a national flag, a national public education system, an integrated national economy, shared symbols and values, citizens are treated as equals, and together they work towards eradication of divisive forces and injustices of the past, foster unity, and promote a countrywide consciousness to establish a 'national identity'. Thus, nation-building is not merely concerned with the development of physical infrastructure of a country, such as constructions of dams, mega-industrial projects, super highways, etc., though they are also necessary in this regard; *but more important is the institutional developments that unify the people living within the state to exert their national identity as one people sharing common values*. Nation-building has to be conceived in abstract terms, not in concrete terms as the physical infrastructural developments only.

NATION-BUILDING vis-à-vis STATE-BUILDING

However, one has also to understand the difference between the two terms, 'nation-building' and 'state-building'. The terms 'nation-building' and 'state-building' are though very often used interchangeably, especially in America; but in political science, they are defined with a fairly narrow distinction. Whereas a 'state' is a political unit that occupies a defined territory, has a permanent population, and exercises, sovereignty; a 'nation' refers to a group of people that share

that share a common sense of belonging derived from a shared history, culture, language etc. Whereas structuring of 'national identity' is considered to be of prime importance in nation-building; the state-building refers to the development of infrastructure and all the indispensable institutions of the state, that have been referred to above, with a view to strengthen a democratic

state. In fact, I think that despite being not synonymous, the nation-building and the state-building are to a great extent, complimentary to each other,. State-building helps the unification of the nation by infrastructural developments, such as various means of communication, which eventually strengthens the national identity.

ROLE OF ANTHROPOLOGY

As far as role of anthropology in nation building is concerned, indeed it is immense; however, it should neither be overestimated nor underestimated as well. What do anthropologists do after all? Anthropologists study all aspects of man of all time and space: be it social-cultural, biological, archaeological, or linguistic. All the branches of the discipline have their own significant aspects in which they contribute to the holistic understanding of human behaviour and his works. Anthropology alone is the holistic science of man. There are other social sciences also that study one or the other aspect of man: such as, sociology that studies the social aspect of man, but mostly of the urban and the industrial society; psychology studies only the psychological aspect; economics studies the economic aspect; political science studies only the political aspect of any state or nation, and likewise. Anthropology alone studies all aspects of man of all time and space. In addition, one more important thing with anthropology is that it studies the simple societies, which are referred to with different nomenclatures, such as pre-agricultural, preliterate, aboriginal, indigenous, or tribal societies. Such societies are not under the agenda of any other social science. No sociologist, psychologist, economist, or political scientist is found studying a tribal society. However, the study of all affairs of the tribal societies comes under the prime agenda of anthropology. And because of this, a misnomer view of has developed that anthropologists study the tribal societies alone. This is far from truth.

In fact, the studies of simple societies have remained the most neglected field of study in social science, except in anthropology. There are various reasons for anthropologists to focus their attention to study the 'so called' indigenous societies. I myself chose to study the Nicobarese society of the Nicobar archipelago. Rather, had it been then congenial to do so, I would have

preferred to study the Jarawas. I did fieldwork for my PhD 49 years ago in 1974-75. In those days, it was a common proverb in Andamans, that “you could see the Jarawas only once in your lifetime; either you kill them or they would kill you”. This speaks volumes of the extent of hostility that the Jarawas maintained with the outsiders. Of course, this is not the situation now.

First reason for the anthropologist’s preference to study the ‘so called’ primitive societies - living in comparatively more and more social and geographical isolation has been because none of the social sciences bother to study them because of their disciplinary boundaries. The economists would study only such societies, which have ‘surplus production’. Political scientists would study the politics of such societies, which fulfill the criteria of state or a nation, and likewise all other social sciences have limitations of their boundaries. Anthropology has no such boundary. It was for this reason that in the 19th century, sarcastically, anthropology was called, ‘a science without folio’.

However, the significant reason why the anthropologists still prefer to study comparatively more socially and geographically isolated societies is that on the basis of the study of material and nonmaterial cultures of such societies, it is hypothesized that the cultures of the past primitives is reflected in the culture of the contemporary primitives.. In the 19th century, it was called ‘comparative method’; meaning thereby, the equation of comparative primitives with the primitives of the past. It was supposed that the contemporary primitives represented the primitives of the past. And thus, based on ‘comparative method’, the 19th century evolutionists sought to explain the ‘evolution’ of society and culture in general and all the social institutions in particular, like family, marriage, kinship, religion, et cetera.

Coming to the significant role of anthropology in nation building, one has to understand the very basic characteristics of the discipline, viz., fieldwork, participant observation, holistic nature of the discipline, and cultural relativism. Without going into the details of the aforesaid characteristics of the discipline, the study of any social-cultural problem, be it of local, regional, or national one - an anthropologist is better equipped to delve into the problem more ‘objectively’, and suggest more feasible and constructive suggestions to deal with them than any other disciplines. It is more so because of the holistic nature of anthropology. This enables an anthropologist to examine the problems of any kind - be it economic, political, social, psychological, or even relating to healthcare, or so and so; not exclusively from the economic, political, social, or psychological viewpoints, but he studies the problem taking into consideration the entire gamut of the society under study. Suppose he studies the problem of draught or famine

in a rural area. He would not only examine the instant impact and extent of famine in the population under study, and suggest the immediate solutions to protect the population from starvation by distribution of food, clothes, and other relief materials; but he will be able to understand how the famine has been impacting the social fabric of the population, how it has been affecting the family, kinship, marriage, psychology, religious beliefs and rituals also of the people. He would also be able to suggest the far reaching and long-term impacts of any such phenomena, and its possible solutions. This is what the holistic nature of anthropological study is I think, I need not explain the importance of fieldwork and participant observation in anthropological research. However, a few words about the ‘cultural relativism’ is deemed necessary here. Franz Boas, in the fag end of the 19th century, precisely in January 1889, in his article “*On Alternative Sounds*”, published in the *American Anthropologist*, first initiated the ideas of cultural relativism; though the term was coined first by Alain Locke, an American-African activist and scholar in 1924. Boas observed that most of the anthropologists who studied the ‘so-called’ indigenous people, willingly or unwillingly, became victim of ‘*ethnocentrism*’. Therefore, in order to denounce *ethnocentrism* for the sake of restoring ‘objectivity’ in cultural research, Boas proposed ‘cultural relativism’. The above discussion may appear to be of quite general nature, but I have done it very purposively to demonstrate that why the role of anthropology is more important in nation-building than the other social sciences, which do not hold these distinguishing features of anthropology.

Role of anthropology in nation-building is not merely important for any particular nation, but because of ever increasing technological advancement today, in the first quarter of the 21st century, the entire planet is conceived as a ‘global village’. Therefore, building a nation alone is not the only need today, but ‘building the planet’ is the need of the hour. Anthropology’s role now is not limited to contribute to build a nation; but anthropology has a very critical role to build the planet, and save the humankind from extinction. Today the problems of one nation do not remain its exclusive problem, but it affects other nations; rather, the entire globe in one way or the other. For example, the war between Russia and Ukraine is not merely the affair of two nations, but its impacts are experienced in the entire globe. Likewise, the relationship between India and Pakistan, China and USA, China and Taiwan, Palestine problem, the continued and unbridled nuclear tests being carried out by North Korea, and the fear of biological war, etc., have been worrying the mankind. Why I am referring these international issues because the role of anthropology is not only concerned with building a particular nation, but saving the very existence of the planet and the mankind.

Ever since the first nuclear bombs were made, the world is sitting on a precipice of a nuclear disaster. The bombs detonated over Hiroshima and Nagasaki were a fraction of the power of bombs currently in the arsenals of the countries possessing nuclear power. Robock and Toon (2016) wrote in their article *Self-assured Destruction: The Climate Impact of Nuclear War*, “A nuclear war between Russia and the United States could produce a *nuclear winter*.” *Nuclear winter* is a scientifically hypothesized concept about the firestorms and its aftereffects that would occur in case of a large-scale nuclear war. In that case, the smoke is expected to rise as high as 45 kilometers (25 miles) above the surface, and there would be massive ozone depletion that would allow more and more ultraviolet radiation to reach the earth surface. The temperature on the earth surface would go down much below the freezing point. One can only imagine the consequences of the nuclear holocaust, if ever it took place! It would possibly result into collapse of the present civilization making the large parts of the earth uninhabitable. In worst case, it might cause the extinction of humanity, or termination of life on earth, both flora and fauna.

Robock and Toon further add, “The total number of nuclear weapons worldwide peaked at about 70,000 in 1986, when (*thanks to*) Reagan and Gorbachev (*who*) agreed to reduce them.....”. Even after reduction, as of now, Russia, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, China, India, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea possess an estimated total of roughly 13,000 nuclear warheads, most of which are many times more powerful than the nuclear bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. A single nuclear warhead could kill hundreds of thousands of people, with lasting and devastating humanitarian and environmental consequences. The number of nuclear weapons possessed by countries and the ongoing geopolitical tensions between several countries means that a slight miscalculation can start a war so terrible that its impact would be on a scale equivalent to that of the meteor that caused the extinction of dinosaurs.

Under such a scenario in the world, anthropology can play a key role in mitigating the ‘conflict and tension’ among nations prevailing world over. And to understand why anthropology could be the ultimate panacea in such a turmoil situation, one has to understand the ultimate cause of the ‘conflict and tension’ prevailing at the international level today. It would be though too early to make any generalization; however, I am sure that if all such ‘conflicts and tension’ prevailing at the local, regional, national, and international levels are properly examined, out of many other causes, one cause would perhaps be common in all, and that would be the ‘clash of the values’ between people, communities, and nations.

I have stated earlier that today the very survival of mankind appears to be at stake. With whatever knowledge and understanding of anthropology I have at my disposal, I have often tried to think about the crux of the problems, that what is the cause of such conflict and tension pervading throughout the world? To my mind, *manifest* reasons may appear to be ethnic, economic, political, territorial, racial, linguistic, religious, and so on; but the *latent* reason is one and only one, and that is the 'clash of the values'. Since in most types of the conflicts 'clash of values' appears to be the common factor. The clash of the values among the human groups has been a perennial feature of humankind. And unless the appropriate measures are undertaken to mitigate the clash of values in human societies, 'conflict and tension' will always plague the mankind in future also. To my mind, this is the most important role that anthropology can play in the 21st century. After all, what are the values? Every society has its own values. Values are the yardsticks by which the members of a society make judgment that what is right and what is wrong? What is desirable and what is not desirable? What is beautiful and what is ugly? What ought to be done and what ought not to be done? And so on. Anthropologically, this is also important to understand that how does the sense of values develop among the members of a society? In a simple way, it can be explained as such that when a child is born he remains *egocentric*. Egocentric means he thinks and bothers about himself and his wants only. Once his wants are fulfilled, he remains satisfied. He has little sense of other's wants and necessities. As he grows in the family, in the neighbourhood, and eventually undergoes the entire process of socialization, he becomes *ethnocentric*. He begins to think that the norms, the customs, the traditions, the religious beliefs and practices, and everything that he observes and follows in his own society, are always better than any other. And such *ethnocentrism* has given rise to all sorts of 'clash of values' in human history, whether in the name of ethnicity, territory, religion, language, customs and traditions etc. Thus, conflict and tension in human society is also a perennial feature. It has pervaded during all times in history.

If that is the case then what is the ultimate panacea? To my mind, the ultimate panacea lies in anthropology only. To mitigate the perennial feature of 'conflict and tension', and the 'clash of values' in human society, we need to develop *homocentric* values. Our yardsticks to judge what is right and what is wrong, what is desirable and what is not, what is good and what is evil, etc., such binary views must be developed by not only keeping one's own society in mind, but considering the entire humankind. Thus only the *homocentric* values would emerge in human societies. I believe it is anthropology alone that can help develop *homocentric* values in society. Needless to reiterate about the four fundamental characteristics of the discipline, viz., the fieldwork, participant observation, cultural relativism, and its holistic or integrated nature of study, gives anthropology an edge over other social sciences. But the greatest problem is how to

convince the people in general and the respective governments at the national and international levels about such seminal role of anthropology in mitigating the various kinds of crisis in the world. It can only be possible, if the concerned world bodies are convinced about the significant role of anthropology in 21st century; and at least, from the high school onward, fundamental courses of anthropology is made compulsory to the students in all schools. This will help them develop *homocentric* values, which are the need of the hour. Through this national seminar, I call upon my fellow anthropologist to deeply think about it, and come forward with positive and practical solutions to achieve the desired goals. This I think is the most important role of anthropologists in the 21st century.

CONCLUSION

Nation-building is not a one-man-job. Nation-building is not only the job of an anthropologist. Nation building is a *spirit* to be inculcated and instilled by the power of the state in the minds of the people of diverse histories, cultures, languages, beliefs and practices, religions etc., who live within a political boundary and share a common heritage, and the spirit of unanimity and integrity that they belong to one nation. They have one flag, one national anthem, one national emblem. The people living within the boundary of the state are treated as equals by constitution. And thus, they ensure their economic prosperity and safety from external and internal divisive forces. Nation-building is the job of every citizen engaged in any profession - be him a social or a natural scientist, a businessman, a soldier, a policeman, or even a vendor. Nevertheless, the government's role in nation-building is most important. The government must develop all such infrastructural institutions that the legislative, executive, and judiciary should work together in harmony to ensure the liberty, security, and prosperity of all her citizens.

It is the high-time that Indian anthropologists should contribute to nation-building by their studies on the most emergent problems that the country has been facing. Today, the entire nation is reeling under one or the other form of extremism. The divisive forces are operating throughout the country. The North-East is plagued with ethnicity and fundamentalists, the Maoists have made a red-corridor from North Bengal to the entire tribal belts of Bengal, Jharkhand, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana. Communal violence between various religious groups could be found taking place in any part of the country at any time. Islamophobia is on the rise. Lynching in the name of conversion has been making headlines every now and then in the media. Social fabric in the rural areas infested with Naxalites has been completely shattered. Secessionist forces have been operating underground from Kashmir to

Kanyakumari and from Punjab to the Northeastern states. Sometimes, it appears that the country would be again divided into several parts in future.

Some international media have been also playing their negative roles to weaken and malign our nation. Malhotra and Viswanathan (2022) have well exposed how some of the renowned universities of America, including the University of Harvard, under the garb of *Critical Race Theory* and *Liberal Marxism*, have today become the breeding grounds of India-haters. Many Indian billionaires and intellectuals have also joined the anti-India-boggy of the Harvard. Their sole aim to stop India's march towards progress and economic growth, and prevent the country from becoming an economic superpower. Without going into the details of their philosophies and activities, it is suffice to say that our nation has been facing an unsolicited and unprecedented onslaught of all kinds of divisive forces. Under the circumstances, it is the sublime duty of the Indian anthropologists to save the nation from disintegration, and preserve its one of the most ancient civilizations and cultures in the world. Now is time that the Indian anthropologists should also counter-strike such threatening forces, of course anthropologically; and thus only they can contribute their scholarship toward nation-building.

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