PREFACE

From a thorough perusal of historical events occurring in different countries of the world, we come to know that nationalism played vital role in shaping the destiny of nations during the past millenniums. There is great difference of opinion amongst the scholars regarding what actually constitute nation, nationality and nationalism. But it is universally acknowledged that nationalism is the key factor contributing towards national regeneration and national development.

In India, we find an undercurrent of national consciousness cutting across wide diversities of caste, creed, region, language and religion. The progressive unfoldment of the national psyche commenced in the days of yore – in the Vedic age and gradually flourished through the passage of history – in the age of the Purânas, in the age of the great epics and also in the medieval period i.e., in the glorious period of classical Sanskrit literature when poets like Bhavabhâti, Bhâravi, Bhâsa, Bânabhatta, Mâgha and Kâlidâsa made valuable contributions to the literary heritage of India.

The development of national consciousness in this ancient land of civilization was primarily based on two factors; firstly the concept of one indivisible geographical unit styled ‘Bhâratavarṣa’ which was an object of adoration for the people dwelling this land of diversities and secondly, the allegiance of these people to a set of social, ethical and cultural values determining their behavioural pattern, which in other words is known as ‘Saṁ skṛti’. Bhâratavarṣa, the motherland, is considered as the substratum, the people as the body and the saṁ skṛti as the soul of this nation.

(ix)
This idea of nationalism massively influenced the poets and litterateurs of vernacular languages and thus the spirit of nationalism was still alive even during the British rule in India. The freedom struggle against foreign subjugation was mainly inspired by this unending flow of national consciousness which pervaded different princely dominions and provinces of British India. Even spiritual leaders like Swami Ramatirtha, Dayananda Saraswati, Swami Vivekananda, Mahayogi Aurobinda and the like enriched this national thought-current and contributed to awakening the people of eighteenth and nineteenth century India.

However, most of the western scholars and a dominant section of Indian scholars maintain that the concept of nationhood was unknown to ancient Indians, who were divided into many small states or clans and who fought against one another all along. Therefore, the prospects of the development of nationalism was absolutely nil. Those thinkers more often than not take Benedict Anderson's Imagined communities (1991) to be an authoritative text while formulating the view that envisages the birth of Indian nation in the wake of British invasion of India. Thus, the birth of nationalism – or, the concept of nation is considered by those thinkers as the by-product of British imperialism.

As against these tendencies, some indigenous scholars are of the opinion that the concept of nation or rāṣṭra was by no means unknown to ancient Indians, even in the Vedic age. Thus, it devolves upon us to examine thoroughly the question of nationalism with reference to the texts like the Vedas, Purāṇas and the two great epics – the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata to find out whether the concept of nation or nationalism was actually present in those days of yore.

(x)
We have, therefore, felt it necessary to dispassionately consider the question relating to the existence of the sense of nationalism in ancient India. In fact, any study on this subject is bound to be extensive in nature and so we opted for the two great epics – the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata and strove to interpret the texts and events of the great epics to substantiate our viewpoint.

In fact, the Purāṇas and the great epics are actually the illustrations of the truths discovered by the Vedic seers. Therefore, we looked back to the Vedic literature, in which lies the seed of Indian nationalism and also the Purāṇas, which through simple but enchanting stories, took the teachings of the Vedas to the common people, living in remote villages, forests and hills alike.

In the course of our study, we were all along free from any pre-conceived notions, and analysed the received information in an objective, unbiased manner and then present the findings honestly. A system reading has created the conviction that nationalistic ideas are richly present in the old Sanskrit literature. In the Indian literature of subsequent periods, the nationalistic feelings have been inspired and sustained by the Vedas and the Purāṇas and the two epics and such feelings have been reflected in the works of Sanskrit poets and authors of the medieval days.

While recording our findings on this interesting topic, we have tried to add new dimension in the field of Indology through presentation of some less known facts and through affording new interpretations of some already known facts. We believe, some contribution will be made in the realm of Indological study by this humble endeavour.

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(xi)