Conclusion

This study purports to make an inquiry into three distinctive and yet interlinked things: (a) normative and theoretical aspects of nation and nationalism; (b) anti-colonial form of nationalism and nation-formation in Third-world countries in general and India in particular; and (c) Emergence of Ambedkar in the colonial age as the nationalistic of subalternity and his theoretico-political response to the imperialist regime and newly-emerged Indian bourgeois nationalists on the one hand and, nature and relevance of such a conception of nationalism on the other.

In order to make a comprehensive inquiry into the above-mentioned three issues this study is divided into five chapters. The first chapter, namely, ‘An Inquiry into the Theories of Nationalism’ deals with various theoretical aspects of nation and nationalism as they were originally formulated in Western Europe, eventually forming the dominant nationalist discourse. It covers both colonial and post colonial account of nationalism with an emphasis on the post-colonial theoretical discourses on nationalism. Apart from this, this chapter also examines the relevance of nationalism in the age of globalization, electronic-capitalism and supra-state institutions. The overall argument of this chapter is that nationalism is there to stay with us although it might go through different mutations.

My study of the history of real nations, as they have lived since industrial revolution and the ideology they have invoked, called, ‘nationalism’, has made me to formulate certain conclusions: (a) nation is an artifact, ideology, and imagination and all of these together are created by nationalism and in the age of nationalism and never the other way round; (b) no nationalism could be invented and nation born, except on the materialist foundation of industrial society; (c) Every nationalism, in different proportions, builds itself upon primordialist elements like culture, language and so on, and hence no nationalism is either absolutely primordialist or instrumentalist; (d) every nationalism, at its best, reduces the universal humanism to, the frontiers of a nation-state; (e) every nationalism is a bye-product of an interplay between a pre-given ethnic culture, positive sociology and ideological invented traditions; (f) the same industrial forces, responsible for giving birth to nationalism might, some time in the future, give a lethal blow to it, for an ethnic culture was always, since inception, a passive partner of nationalism and it will always be so (ideological part of nationalism, being the active partner, always acts upon the half-sleepy primordial ethnies or in sum, a primordial culture is always acted upon in order to vouch for nationalism).

This chapter makes a disinterested endeavor to study nationalism as it has been rather than as it should be, without putting into it any value-judgment as the positive sociologists like Gellner, Hobsbawm and others would do, for instance, by regarding nationalism as evil or conspiratorial. Nationalism, to me, has been like any other ideology a repertoire of good and evil, having as much of liberating element in it as that of subjugating element. It can legitimately claim to have liberated vast masses of mankind from the oppressive feudal state and church and thereafter establishing alternative
impedimenta of bourgeois democracy. But simultaneously, the same nationalism has unleashed horror and genocide selectively on the masses and thus, providing democracy with national-territorial and majoritarian character. At the same time nationalism is the most gullible ideology which is strong enough to purge any grand ideology like Liberalism and Marxism etc., of its universal contents and reduce them to the national-territorial confines as well as it is weak enough to be malleable to any ideology in question.

The second chapter “Debates on Nationalism in Modern India” deals with anti-colonial nationalism of the Third-World countries in general and India in particular. This chapter studies the dichotomous debates on Eastern versus Western nationalism and whether Eastern nationalism is a modular nationalism or derivative discipline. It also deals with the typology of nationalism in India and further if colonial India was a nation, civilization or nation-to-be. My endeavor in this chapter has been to tread a mid path between two extreme schools – Orientalist school which establishes that Eastern nationalism is absolutely a modular and backward nationalism with primordialist elements in it while Western nationalism is forward-looking secular nationalism and Indigenous-chauvinist school which establishes that Eastern nationalism is absolutely detached from its Western counterpart.

The take of this study is that Indian nationalism was as much dependent on the West as it was independent from it. Indian nationalism, much like its Western counterpart had its own sphere of universality and contextuality. As far as its universal part is concerned, it, of course, depended on the West to introduce the material conditions of Capitalism which, in turn, were responsible for creating an urban-based educated middle-class in India that spoke for nationalism. So the very birth of national consciousness in the urban middle-class India owed much to the imperialist British regime. Not only this, Indian nationalism also depended on the West for a supply of modern epistemological vocabulary without which no nationalism (not even cultural) could be imagined. But this is not the ‘be all and end all’ of the story as it is still half-told. The rest half of the story would rebuff the Orientalist scholars of nationalism.

This much of positive sociology does not rob Indian nationalism of its autonomous subjective imagination as the positive sociologists or seemingly Orientalists would like to believe. It is true that anti-colonial nationalism of India imported the grand ideologies as well as the modern-rational vocabulary from the West but it had its own pre-historic congeries of indigenous cultures and ethnies on which to construct its nationalism. Not only this, Indian nationalism did not blindly pick up the Western ideologies and moved the masses; on the contrary it successfully created its own indigenous forms of ideologies like Gandhism which boldly claimed to reject Western modernity and Ambedkar-ism (if I may say so) which only selectively and cautiously picked up the Western ideas. Thus it can be said that Indian nationalism had sufficient space to invent its own style of nationalism and certainly its imagination was not colonized as claimed by many authors, and it was adequately autonomous. Had it not been creatively autonomous, it would not have succeeded in firstly creating homogenous waves of national mass-movements and
thereafter ensuring the minority and group-rights in the constitution even before the US accepted it for the colored minority.

The third chapter of the thesis, namely “Ambedkar and Difference-sensitive nationalism in India”, deals primarily with Ambedkar’s nationalism which was the only mainstream political-nationalism next to Congress nationalism. It further delineates the theoretical nuances of Ambedkar’s nationalism which distanced itself substantially from Congress nationalism. This nationalism happened to be the only one to address the concerns of the identitarian subaltern masses and this is where it celebrated the difference. Ambedkar endeavored to entrench a political nationalism which established equilibrium between the Western rational modernity, indigenous culture and nationalist imagination. I have preferably called Ambedkar’s nationalism as ‘Difference-sensitive nationalism’ mainly because on the one hand it accepted the forces of modernity and western rational categories and on the other hand, it snubbed the universal notions of Liberal and socialist uniformity of rights and citizenship in order to embrace the preferential treatment for the disadvantaged people.

The fourth chapter “Culture and Tradition and Their Place in the Project of Nationalism” deals with how Ambedkar’s ‘Difference-sensitive nationalism’ copes with indigenous culture and tradition. This also depicts the different ways and anthropological modes that Ambedkar chose to incorporate the cultural question into his schema of nationalism. Determined to reject the whole of Hindu history and culture, it was quite a challenging task for Ambedkar to make a dip into Indian history and come up with an alternative historiography and culture. But he emerged successfully not only with an alternative Buddhist historiography for the rescue of untouchables but he also brought up a long buried ‘theory of Brahma’ as an ideal theory of equality, from early Vedic Hindu history.

Besides his theory of origin of untouchables and Shudras suggests that Brahmns, Shudras and untouchables are not divided by any theory of race and that they share the same racial bonding depending upon the territories they occupy. Even on the question of caste, Ambedkar argues that it was not the Brahmns who imposed forcefully the caste-system on the whole of society as it was beyond their power but Brahmns invented an irreversibly enclosed caste-system for them and the rest of society imitated them. This is apparently indicative of the fact that Ambedkar was constantly looking for the organic filaments to connect the weak linkages of society and construct his nationalism on social inclusiveness rather than social divisiveness. He was not like an isolationist or secessionist who clamored for a separate nation with his self-chosen people. On the contrary, he showed an equal concern to remove the cultural ills of the larger Hindu society and thus facilitate a rather egalitarian society and more difference-sensitive nationalism.

The fifth chapter “The Relation between Nationalism and Democracy in Ambedkar” deals with the common site where nationalism interfaces with democracy in Ambedkar’s theories. To begin with, it discusses various theories of democracy and their genealogies and estimates Ambedkar’s understanding of democracy in this discourse. It further relates
Ambedkar’s understanding of democracy with his conception of nationalism. As mentioned earlier, Ambedkar remained discontented with mere electoral democracy or what he called ‘political democracy’ and instead, sought to go wider into the social roots to first establish democracy in social ensemble. Even beyond this, he went into suggesting democracy as a way of life and took the battle into an individual mind itself. He was of the firm opinion that no constitution or government can forcefully ensure democracy unless a citizen internalizes it and cherishes it as a value and this is where his nationalism comes into the picture which, in turn, is based on citizens’ sense of common belonging, a fellow feeling, a feeling of kinship or fraternity.

A Remark on the Contemporary Status of Nationalism:

In order to demonstrate the contemporary relevance of nationalism, I would mention two authors on this: Benedict Anderson and Will Kymlicka. I would quote Anderson from one of his interviews at International Literature Festival Kapittel (’05) in Stavanger where he talked of new emerging forms of nationalism in 21st century, like that of ‘Long-Distance nationalism’. This is a kind of ‘Diaspora nationalism’ which has gone globally mobile in the age of e-mail/internet and IT-Revolution. Some of the examples, he gives for such nationalisms of the migrants, are as follows: Jews in the USA fighting for a state in the Middle East, Tamils in Norway working for their own state in Sri Lanka, some of the most ardent Sikh nationalists being situated in Canada and Australia. Or for that matter, the presence of Norwegian schools in Spain: the only reason for their existence is that people fear that their children will stop being Norwegian. The Norwegian Schools, argues Anderson, take Norway to Spain.

There could be two possible forms of such ‘Diaspora nationalisms’. One form could be found in such groups as Norwegians in Spain which do not aspire to a territorial state anywhere, as their desired cultural homeland is already actualized and at best they want the autonomy of their cultural-community to be respected by the nation-state they have migrated into. Another diasporic form could be found in such cases as Tamils in Norway or militant Sikhs in Canada and Australia, wherein they seek a territorial state in secessionist fashion and also fund the militant struggle against what they call ‘imperialist state’. It functions as nationalism-in-exile and also nurtures a secret dream to get back if such a nation-state is successfully carved out.

Now we switch over to Will Kymlicka’s narration of the contemporary relevance of nationalism in the light of the European experience of transnationalism in the form of EU. Responding to David Held’s idea of cosmopolitan citizenship, Kymlicka wonders if cosmopolitan democracy should be viewed as an alternative to outmoded models of nation-centered democracy, or as a supplement to, and dependent upon, nation-centered democracy. Let us have a look at the study of the special case of European Union, which probably is the outcome of one of the few serious attempts at developing a democratic transnational political institution. The EU has two major centers of decision-making: the European Parliament, whose members are directly elected by citizens in Europe-wide elections; and the European Commission and the Council of Ministers, whose members
are appointed by national governments (which are themselves elected in country-specific national elections).

Corresponding to these two centers of decision-making, there are two broad strategies for trying to remedy the EU’s democratic deficit. One is to increase the power of the (directly elected) European Parliament, at the expense of the (nationally nominated) Commission and Council of Ministers, and thereby increase the extent to which the EU is directly accountable to individual citizens in pan-European elections. The alternative is to leave most of the power in the hands of the Commission and Council of Ministers, but to increase the extent to which national governments are accountable in national elections for how their delegates act in the Commission/Council.

Many defenders of cosmopolitan citizenship endorse the first approach: they think it is essential to increase the extent to which international institutions are directly accountable to individual citizens. But it seems clear, adds Kymlicka, that most Europeans themselves prefer the second approach. There is very little grass-roots demand for a strengthened EU Parliament. On the contrary, most people, in virtually all European states, show little interest in the affairs of the European Parliament, and little enthusiasm for increasing its powers. What they want, instead, is to strengthen the accountability of their national governments for how these governments act at the intergovernmental Council of Ministers. That is, citizens in each country want to debate amongst themselves, in their vernacular, what the position of their government should be on EU issues. For example, Danes wish to debate, in Danish, what the Danish position should be vis-à-vis Europe. They show little interest in starting a European-wide debate (in English?) about what the EU should do. They are keenly interested in having a democratic debate about the EU, but the debate they wish to engage in is not a debate with other Europeans about ‘what should we Europeans do?’ Rather, they wish to debate with each other, in Danish, about what we Danes should do (Kymlicka, op.cit, 2002, 313-4).

Thus Kymlicka has shown practically how the forces of national citizenship is still prevailing upon the idea of transnational or cosmopolitan citizenship even in the most developed territorial nation-states of Europe, let alone the Afro-Asian nations. Afro-Asian nation states are even in the stronger grip of ethnic/cultural nationalisms. Not only this, Kymlicka also argues that attempts to create a genuinely democratic form of transnational citizenship could have negative consequences for democratic citizenship at the domestic level. For example, the inevitable result of giving more power to the elected European Parliament, on the grounds that it is more ‘democratic’, would be to take away the veto power which national governments now have over most EU decisions. Decisions made by the EU Parliament, unlike those made by the Council, are not subject to the national veto. This means that the EU would cease to be accountable to citizens through their national legislatures. At the moment, if a Danish citizen dislikes an EU decision, she can try to mobilize other Danes to change their government’s position on the issue. But if the EU is ‘democratized’ – i.e. if the elected Parliament replaces the nominated Council as the major decision making body – a Danish citizen would have to try to change the opinions of the citizens of every other European country (none of which speak her language). And for obvious and understandable reasons, few Europeans seek this sort of
democratization' (Ibid.). Apparently, for Danish citizens to engage in a debate with Italians to try to develop a common European position is a daunting prospect. In what language, Kymlicka raises the doubt, would such a debate occur, and in what forums? Not only do they not speak the same language, or share the same territory, they also do not read the same newspapers, or watch the same television shows, or belong to the same political parties. For what would be the forum for such a trans-European debate?

In the debates so far, I have tried to establish that nationalism is still deeply entrenched into every society in spite of all the talk of transnational identity and globalization. Before I bring this whole exercise to an end, I would again refer to Benedict Anderson’s optimistic and probably utopian elements of nationalism: wherein he inquires into the idea of ‘dual citizenship’ or the idea of having two legal passports simultaneously. Anderson hopes that in the time to come it might be possible for a national citizen to transcend his ‘loyalty to a single nation-state’ and develop attachments to two or more states. A key word he coins for every nationalist is shame as he says that nobody can be a nationalist unless he feels shame for his country and it is possible to feel shame for more than a country. On being asked which country he feels shame for, Anderson answered that when he was young he was ashamed of England, especially when he used to see the upper class English lads beat up the Sri Lankan students demonstrating against Britain’s role in the Suez Crisis. Just to think that an Englishman could behave like this made him feel ashamed of England. Later in his life Anderson ceased to have any attachment to England and developed some attachment to USA and also to some of South East Asian countries like Thailand (From an Interview taken by Lorenz Khazaleh in Stavanger, 2005).

A Note on Ambedkar’s conception of nationalism:

Having discussed almost all aspects of Ambedkar’s conception of nationalism, this study makes a note that in the advancing age of technological revolution, economic liberalization and seemingly cosmopolitan citizenship, Ambedkar’s conception of nationalism is not only far short of being exhausted but also pregnant with the so-far unexplored ideas of a non-ascriptive pyramidal society on egalitarian lines. At the beginning of the 21st century, when Congress nationalism is well-nigh devastated of its own ideological strength either in terms of Gandhism or Nehruvian socialism, Ambedkar’s ideas, like – ‘affirmative action’ for weaker sections, political recognition of community rights, strong bonding of difference-friendly citizenship and eventually the notion of a ‘democratic Indian nation’ to be constituted by the self-convinced masses from below, rather than imposed by the political elites from above – are still standing high and being increasingly incorporated by the policy-makers of Indian state as well as by the academicians. Besides, Ambedkar has also increasingly become an iconic symbol of resistance against the identitarian Brahminical oppression and the model image of virtually every social movement that took place in India since independence. But this image of being champion of Dalit rights does not divest him of his equally emphatic belief in universal rights of citizenship or of his notion of fair distance of state from communities as well as just statist intervention into the communitarian life. Ambedkar
speaks as much to the state on behalf of communities as he does the vice versa. Thus, we can conclude that Ambedkar-ism provides with a tool to check, on the one hand, the arbitrariness of the state-machinery, on the other, to do away with social ills by the just state intervention.