

## Nation as an Anticipatory Space

It is needless to mention that the national flag, indeed, is the symbol of freedom and sovereignty or the marker of independence from colonial rule. It has been the usual cultural experience that people from different countries choose, perhaps spontaneously on their own, a national flag as the medium to relate themselves to their particular nation. In India, the current union government made an appeal to its people that the latter should celebrate the platinum jubilee of India's independence on an even wider scale by hoisting the national flag on the top of their individual homes. However, prior to this governmental appeal, people in the country have been hoisting the national flag in their houses. This would mean that the identification with the nation does involve a cultural initiative that displays an unconditional respect for the nation.

The national flag as the most powerful national symbol enjoys sovereignty against external domination as well as against internal competitors; for example, the political party or any cultural, religious organisation's flags that are displayed within the country. It is in this sense that the national flag may appear to be a symbol that is apolitical. It is also above competitive politics as it seeks to morally empower every nationalist without distinction. In another sense, the national flag is above parochial political intentions.

Within the totality of sovereign meaning bound by the sense of freedom and peace that is symbolically reflected in the national flag, however, people do attach different but generally positive meaning to the symbolism associated with it. This actually resonates with the multiple but affirmative meaning that the modern Indian political thinkers attached to the national flag, which was evolving and acquired its final shape in 1947. The national flag, in its totality of meaning, symbolises the sense of people being free from foreign domination as well as the structures of domination within the country of which they are the citizens constitutionally.

However, at the level of people's cultural reception, the colour, texture, and Ashoka Chakra that form the constitutive part of the national flag do suggest the affirmative meaning for every citizen of the country. For example, for common people, the three colours of saffron, white, and green suggest the notions of freedom with peace and the Ashoka Chakra in the middle symbolises progress—both moral as well as material. And yet, some of them may see a symbol of triumphalism in the national flag. The platinum jubilee celebration of India's independence by different sections of society does indicate the fact that the national flag carries a meaning that could be commonly shared. Thus, freedom, peace, and decent social relationships are the common contents that can be associated with the

national flag. This inclusive reading of symbols could be found in the celebration of the 75 years of India's independence, particularly by the members from Dalit and minority communities.

On the spectrum of celebration, some of the enlightened Dalits seek to look at the Ashoka Chakra as the symbol of equality and justice. Dalits find the blue chakra as the symbol that indicates the dynamics of moving up or forward. Thus, unfurling the national flag by a Dalit panchayat president or the sarpanch of a village panchayat symbolises the democratisation of cultural spaces in which Dalits can also participate. The nationalist act of unfurling the flag by a Dalit sarpanch, a minister, or a panchayat president does develop within the former an ascending sense of respect for the self and reverence for the nation. This enactment of self-respect becomes an integral part of the moment when they pull, with their heads held high, the cord that takes the national flag to the top of the flagpole.

However, such a symbolic act that defines respect for the self and the nation does not seem to go well with some of the upper-caste people. The social rage of the high castes simultaneously goes up, culminating in violently denying the act of flag hoisting to a Dalit. The descending sense of recognition of the upper castes that emanates from the Dalit enactment of their national duty continues to happen even today. As social media reveals that Dalits have to unfurl the national flag under the state protection. The Dalit predicament points out two observations: first, the upper-caste opposition to a Dalit unfurling the national flag suggests that after the state, it is the upper castes who have the power to decide who can hoist the flag. Second, it is not an appeal to individualise and hence democratise the privilege to hoist the flag in everyone's homes that is a necessary condition, but allowing the Dalits to unfurl the national flag at the nationally designated institutional spaces such as office of the gram panchayat.

For Dalits, a nation needs to be filled with the normative content of equality and justice that is textually provided within the Indian Constitution. Put differently, they anticipate to form a nation where its civil society does not relegate them to the sub-human level. Arguably, one could be a nationalist by adhering to and practising the constitutional principles such as equality, justice, and fraternity. Thus, the notion of the nationalist appeal has to broaden so as to include in its thrust a message for those who have been hostile to democratic assertion and the existence of the deprived and decimated.

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