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Formation of a community: Production and circulation

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Abstract
How is a community formed? What are the elements that formulates a community? Considering a larger model of community i.e. nation, this paper aims to address these questions and comprehend the factors that go into the making of a community. The aim of this paper is to understand the production of idea of a community and comprehend the ways in which this idea is circulated in the society to create an identity for the community. Scrutinizing some of the most significant works on the formation of nation, the paper endeavours to outline the contours of the framework of community and construe how these contours are produced to carve an identity for the community. Through the study of this framework, the author aims to highlight the limitations of the model offered by scholars pertaining to the formation of the community and develop a set of questions which would enhance the understanding of the model of community formation.

Keywords: Community formation, nation, identity, memory

Introduction
The community encompasses one of the most important components of an individual's life. It offers the feeling of belongingness, safety, and security to an individual. It shapes the identity of individuals by providing them with a reference or basis to construct their identity. In the twentieth century, several scholars suggested that the expanding urbanism had transformed the society. As a consequence of this transformation, the personal intimate ties between individuals have been replaced by explicit and limited function which has made the concept of community anachronistic and irrelevant in the contemporary world [1]. However, the success of 'identity politics' has demonstrated the importance and relevance of the community in the 'modern capital world'.

Scholars have attempted to define community but the diversity of models of communities has made it nearly impossible for scholars to formulate a general definition. A community can be loosely defined as a coherent group of people who are bound together consciously, willingly or unwillingly due to any form of commonality or shared past. Such an imprecise definition of community widens its scope of understanding and escapes the risk of confining its diverse models. This study seeks to understand the formation of a community and identity of individuals. It will analyze scholarly works to understand the process and elements which go into the making of the community. The paper will aim to develop a set of questions through these works which will prove useful in studying the construction of a community and identity.

The historical study of community remained at bay as the historians were concerned with macroscopic models which had wider implications on general or world history [2]. In 1960s, scholars turned towards the study of more specific histories.

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[1] Anthony P. Cohen, The Symbolic Construction of Community (London: Routledge, 1985), 23-25. Robert Park (The city, 1925) follows the Durkheiminian argument to analyze urban ethnography. He suggests that the society is inclined towards more pragmatic working relations over personal and intimate ties. He borrows his idea from Durkheim (The division of labour in society, 1893) who suggests that the social division of labour has created a co-dependent society, a society where individuals depend upon each other to form the perfect machinery. Ferdinand Tönnies (Gemeinschaft and Gesselschaft, 1887) described a transition taking place between 'gemeinschaft', the society of intimacy, of close personal knowledge, of stability, and gesselschaft, a society characterized by ego-focused, highly specific and possibly discontinuous relationships, in which the individual interacts within different social milieux for different purposes.

[2] Carlo Ginzburg, Microhistory: Two or three things that I know about it, University of Chicago Press, 1993, 17-24

For instance, E.P. Thompson redefined the concept of class and analyzed the class consciousness in the making of the English working class. Pierre Nora argued that history suppresses and destroys memory as it tends to generalize the memory of the past through museums, monuments, and medallions [3]. These generalizations of grand narratives eclipsed the processes which occurred outside the assumed 'centre' and beyond the 'elitist' study of history. The historical study of communities challenges the generalized and elite model of grand histories. It is useful in understanding the religious and cultural traditions and socio-political conditions which go into the formulation of the communities. It highlights the contribution of communities in the making of history. The historical study of communities approaches history at a micro-level to discover and understand the larger processes which have remained veiled. It constantly moves back and forth between micro and macro history "so as to continually thrust back into the discussion of the comprehensive vision of the historical process through apparent exceptions and cases of brief duration" [4].

There are several forms of communities which exist in the society. The forms of communities vary in the stringency and volume of demands. They differ in terms of uniformity that they demand of their members. This paper is concerned with the communities (such as religious, local, merchant and national) which demand a consistent devotion and involvement of the members. Members of such communities are contractually obligated with or without legal enforcement. The communities are meaningfully constructed and carefully knitted through conscious efforts of members. The members maneuver different techniques and deploy various elements to forge a community and its identity which will be comprehended in the course of paper to understand the process of community formation.

The paper concentrates on the historical works which deal with the origin of nations to comprehend the framework of community. It will aim to, conceivably, accomplish two important tasks. Firstly, it will assist the paper to understand some of the ways in which a community is formed. Insights provided by several scholars will enhance our understanding of the underlying processes and elements which go into the creation of a community and its identity. Secondly, a careful analysis of these works will aim at locating the problems and lacune in the discussion of the origin of a community. Probably, such an exercise will facilitate the work to further develop a new set of questions which can be useful in understanding the formation of the community and its identity.

Many scholars have agreed, as it will be exhibited in this section of the paper, that nation is a community which can be culturally, politically, socially, or ritually coherent in nature. The scholars discussed in this section have pointed out at some of the processes which display the similarity between the construction of community and the nation. Similar to the communities, which are at the centre of this paper, nation also demands regular devotion and involvement of the members. A nation is meaningfully constructed and carefully knitted through several conscious efforts of members maneuvering different techniques.

Numerous scholars of nationalism have relied on the transformations induced by capitalism and industrialization in the modern times to explain the rise of nationalism [5]. This implies that nation is a product of certain form of consciousness, which is a by-product of 'modernity'. Similarly, every community, irrespective of its apparent 'eternal' existence, is a product of consciousness at a particular point in time. The paper argues that since the nation is a community, the processes of formation of the nation are similar, if not congruent, to that of the communities. Therefore, the study of the origins of nations becomes significant to understand the formation of community.

Ever since the emergence of nations in the 18th and the 19th century, scholars were attracted to the theme of nations and nationalism. Generations of scholars engaged themselves in construing and articulating the concept of nation and nationalism. In the second half of the 20th century, however, the focus of scholars shifted from explaining the concept of 'nation' and 'nationalism' to the origin and formation of a nation. According to Hugh Seton-Watson's brief autobiography, his interest developed in the studies of nationalism because it was the most immediate and dangerous force in his lifetime which shook the world he lived in [6]. Ernest Gellner holds similar sentiments regarding nationalism as he suggests that nationalism is the feeling of anger aroused by the violation of the principle, or the feeling of satisfaction aroused by its fulfillment [7].

According to Benedict Anderson, 1960s was a dynamic period for nationalism where a tiny nation, Vietnam was struggling against the colossal United States. In old Europe, supranational communities such as Northern Ireand, Scotland, Belgium, Catalonia, the Basque land and others, deployed militant nationalism against established nation-states. Another important affair that became popular in the 20th century was 'National Economy' which highlighted the issue of nationalism. Anderson argues that if one recalls the political situation of 1960s, one should not be surprised that the post-1960s period has seen an explosion of sophisticated writing about nationalism [8].

In a lecture delivered in 1882, Ernest Renan defined the nation and explained what nation comprises of. Renan declares that nation, in the sense we understand it, is rather new. He suggests that nation is a great solidarity constituted by the feeling of sacrifices made and desire of individuals to unite and continue a common life. He argues that the formation of modern nations is a work of several families with feudal origins that have contracted with soil and in some measure formed the nucleus of the central government. He agrees with 'certain political theorists' who suggest that nation is a dynasty representing ancient conquests which were first accepted and later rejected by the masses. He further adds that common interest certainly helps in establishing a community but investment of emotions makes it a nation [9].

3 Pierre Nora, Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoir, University of California Press, 1989
4 Ginzburg, 27

5 Refer to the arguments of Renan, Gellner, Anderson, Hobswbawm and Trevor-Roper discussed below.
6 Hugh Seton-Watson, Nations and States (Methuen & co. ltd., 1977), Preface, xi-xv
7 Ernest Gellner, Nations and Nationalism (Basil Blackwell Publisher Limited, 1983), 1-7
8 Benedict Anderson, "Introduction", Mapping the Nations (Verso, New Left Review, 1996), ed. Gopal Balkrishnan, 1-17
9 Ernest Renan, Qu'est-ce qu'une nation, 1882 tr. Ethan Rundell "What is a nation?" Presses-Pocket, 1992

According to Renan, it is not the race, language, or religion but the geography, amnesia and memory that contribute to the making and unity of the modern nation. He believes that forgetting, historical error, memory, and consent are the key factors in the construction of a nation as the essence of nation is that individual members should have a great deal in common and also they have forgotten many things. Renan admits that a nation's existence is a perpetual affirmation, a daily plebiscite. Renan's analysis of the origin of modern nations glorifies the role of nation in society. Further, it is based on the impression that nation and nationalism are originally European concepts [10].

Ernest Gellner borrows his understanding of nation as a community from Renan's insights. He incorporates Renan's argument to suggest that categorically, there are two elements which contribute to the making of the nation: firstly, will, voluntary adherence and identification, loyalty, and solidarity; and secondly, fear, coercion, and compulsion. Gellner preceded Renan to argue that nationalism owes its emergence to the social conditions produced by capitalism which harboured it. He argues that homogeneity of culture is one of the key factors which contributes to the making of a nation [11].

Gellner agrees with Renan's suggestion that collective forgetfulness and collective memory are two of the most important constituents of a nation which are essential to veil the internal differences within the nation. He believes that the state does not rely on voluntary reaffirmation of loyalty and that loyalty is ritually reaffirmed. He further suggests that the idea and message of nationalism has been produced and disseminated by a small number of nationalists with greater literacy and propagandist gifts who have found support of media and educational institutions. The educational and academic institutions insinuate the idea of nation; and the media not only disseminates the ideology of nationalism but also plays a role in redefining ideology.[12]

Ernest Gellner relies on the institutions to explain the rise of nation and nationalism. His model of nation overlooks human agency. He states that it does not matter who said or wrote a particular idea.

Benedict Anderson suggests that the nation is an imagined political community-imagined both as inherently limited and sovereign. Benedict Anderson is influenced by Watson and Renan in his understanding of the nations. Watson states "a nation exists when a significant number of people in a community consider themselves to form a nation, or behave as if they formed one" [13]. Anderson argues that it is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members meet them or even hear of them, yet in their minds, each lives the images of his or her communion. Anderson further explains that the nation is limited because even the largest of them have finite boundaries beyond which another nation lies. He adds that nation is imagined as a community because irrespective of the prevailing inequalities in the nation, it is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship [14].

According to Anderson, the cultural roots of nationalism constructed a coherent community. In his explanation of the

origin of nationalism, print-capitalism is the key factor. Anderson argues that the convergence of capitalism and print technology set the stage for national consciousness. The collaboration between printing institution and capitalism hampered the condition of Latin language and the Catholic Church. He suggests that reformation owed its success to print-capitalism which exploited the print technology. The coalition between Protestantism and print-capitalism created a new community of readers which were not interested in Latin language. He argues that vernacular languages were shaped grammatically and syntactically by the print technology which mechanically reproduced print-languages capable of dissemination through market. According to Anderson, these print-languages laid the bases for national consciousness in various ways [15].

Contrary to Renan and Watson's works, Anderson suggests that the United States was responsible for the development of the idea of nationalism. He explains that till the 19th century, in Europe, print media was controlled by the state and the church. On the other hand, in the United States, creoles, even though introduced to print technology much later, had easier access to print technology without the intervention of the state. Access to print technology circulated the idea of common belongingness throughout the thirteen colonies and created a national community in the United States [16].

In Anderson's model of national consciousness, print-capitalism is the most dominating institution. However, it is not the only institution which contributes to the construction of the nation. Anderson suggests that the emergence of several other institutions can be observed in the 19th century. For instance, songs were popularized as national anthems and flags as national flags. He suggests that memorials such as cenotaphs and tombs of unknown soldiers deepened the cultural roots of nationalism among the masses. He claims that three institutions were responsible for the origin of nationalism in the colonized zones: census, maps, and the museums. These three institutions shaped the way in which colonial state and its dominion imagined their nations. Anderson believes that the categorization in the census and maps by the colonizers shaped the way the colonies perceived their nation and national boundaries. Museums became the sites of 'preserving' and 'representing' a colony's ancient culture. Anderson believes that census, maps and museums shaped the grammar which made possible 'Burma' and 'Burmese', 'Indonesia' and 'Indonesians' [17]. He further suggests that in order to serve the narrative purpose of the nation, state and nationalists choose what must be remembered and what must be forgotten [18].

According to Anderson's model, upper class was responsible for the proliferation of national consciousness in the United States. In explaining the rise of national consciousness in Europe, Anderson agrees with Watson. Watson suggests that a small group of nationalists undertook the task of building a nation through several different measures. He shows that in 19th century Europe, "the energetic activities of professional intellectuals such as vernacularizing lexicographers, grammarians, philologists, and litterateurs were central to the shaping of nineteenth-

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[10] ibid
[11] Gellner, 53-60
[12] Ibid, 127-136
[13] Hugh-Seton Watson, Nations and States (Methuen & co. ltd., 1977), 5
[14] Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities (Verso, New Left Review, 2006) third edition, 6

[15] Ibid, 36-46
[16] Ibid, 47-66
[17] Ibid, 9-36, 163-186
[18] Ibid, 187-206

century European nationalism" [19]. He suggests that in the central and the southern America, middle classes were still insignificant at the end of the 18th century. The movements of freedom were led by substantial landowners allied with a smaller number of merchants and professionals. He argues that the fear of 'lower-class' political mobilizations was one of the key factors responsible for spurring the drive for independence from Madrid in Venezuela, Mexico and Peru. He believes that upper class creoles were responsible for the transmission of feeling of nationalism in the United States as they articulated the idea of common experience through print technology which awakened the feeling of common belongingness [20].

Eric Hobsbawm analyses the traditions which supposedly have 'existed since the time immemorial.' He believes that tradition is the set of practices which inculcate certain values and norms of behavior through repetition. He refers to these practices as traditions which have been invented to construct historic continuity around, otherwise recently formed, nation. He argues that invented traditions establish and symbolize social cohesion or the membership of groups. These invented traditions were implicitly identified with the community or institutions which represented, expressed, or symbolized it such as 'nation.' According to Hobsbawm, these traditions constitute of rituals which represent important occasion or festivals for the community or symbols such as flags, images and music, and commemorative memorials. These symbols, memorials, and rituals are then circulated and popularized among people through several institutions. He mentions several instances where a certain community has invented traditions. For instance, he suggests that the carols were the first kind of folksongs revived by middle-class collectors. He explains that the reason for the invention of these traditions is the substantial transformation in the society which was induced by industrialization [21].

Hobsbawm's theory of invented traditions becomes clearer in the work of Hugh-Trevor Roper. Roper examines the Scottish claims of an ancient communal identity. He argues that the traditions of Scotchmen which are the base for the Scottish identity are not older than the late seventeenth century. He shows that most of the national symbols of Scottish identity were borrowed from the materials of the ancient traditions. For instance, the musical instrument bagpipe which is an important symbol of Scottish identity was developed sometime after the Union with England. He traces a genealogy of literary works which were composed and circulated among the 'Scottish' to strengthen the claims of a separate identity and demand of separate nation later. Trevor-Roper evidently claims that literary works played an important role in this invention of a unique identity which differentiated them from the British [22].

Partha Chatterjee criticizes Anderson for his understanding of modern located in a homogeneous empty time. He depicts that modernity is cracked and therefore it cannot be imagined to have existed globally at the same time period.

Also, he argues that there is a need to comprehend the meanings of this modernity which cannot be generalized [23]. Chatterjee critiqued the argument that nationalism in colonies was a European import. Contrary to Anderson's proposition, Chatterjee argues that nationalism in India precedes the political battle against imperial powers. He disagrees with Anderson who argues that models of nations were formulated by Europe, Russia and America which were later available to be borrowed around the world. He discusses the case of Bengal where ideas of nationalism were articulated and circulated with the help of print technology [24].

Conclusion

How is a community formed then? What are the elements that go into the making of a community? Why are these communities formed? These works benefit the paper in construing some of the elements which go into the making of a community. Firstly, memory and amnesia are integral parts of a community. They play an important role in binding the community together by inducing common memories which provide a sense of similar past. It is through the act of commemoration that some events become momentous in the history of a community. Therefore, commemoration is another important constituent of a community formation. Literary works circulated within a community effectively develop a sense of belongingness among people which produce a feeling of common belongingness and contribute in the making of a community. A community is identified and differentiated from another community through the rituals, symbols and traditions. These symbols, rituals and traditions play a decisive role in the making of the identity of the community as they construct the normative and moral framework of a community. Common interest unites the members of the community but a community cannot exist without the consent and constant reaffirmation of loyalty of its members.

Predictably, scholars have considered the contribution of a small number of literati as they have emphasized on the significant character of print technology in the story of nationalism. Emphasis on the role of literary works and reliance on print technology has completely marginalized the role of oral narratives in the making of a nation. Consequently, the role of unschooled communities has been completely overlooked in these works. Secondly, scholars have confined their attention to the articulation and dissemination of this idea which has eclipsed the study of the origin of the nation. The agency of reception has been lost in these works.

These works reflect a constricted understanding of the nation and nationalism as the ideas were produced and captured in literary works by a small number of 'intellectuals' but, were these ideas embraced the way they were circulated? Collective memory and amnesia are transmitted through commemorations, print technology, and educational institutions but, were these collective memories and amnesias accepted by people smoothly especially when the national identity would overshadow their most immediate communal identity? Why would the people

[19] Hugh-Seton Watson, Nations and States (Methuen & co. ltd., 1977), 10-11; Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities (Verso, New Left Review, 2006), 71-74
[20] Ibid, 47-66
[21] Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions", The invention of traditions (Cambridge University Press, 1983), ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, 1-14
[22] Hugh Trevor-Roper, "The invention of tradition: The highland tradition of Scotland", ibid, 15-42
[23] Partha Chatterjee, Politics of the governed (Columbia University Press, 2004), 3-24
[24] Partha Chatterjee, The Nation and its fragments (Princeton University Press, 1993), 3-13

imagine themselves to be a part of a community? Did people or groups of people interpolate the 'invented traditions' while accepting them? In order to answer these questions, it is necessary for scholars to focus on ignored communities which are a part of the nation. While concentrating on the writings of small number of intellectuals and thinkers, it is necessary to focus on the writings of common people, resistance of these ideas and movements from within, and popular oral narratives to understand the process of acceptance of idea of belongingness to a community which will enhance the understanding of the origin of communities and widen out understanding regarding what goes into the making of the community.

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