

## Relocating Nation in the Melting-pot of Cosmopolitanism

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### Abstract

This paper makes an assessment of the locus standi of nation-state in the aftermath of globalisation and in the wake of what is called 'cosmopolitanism.' In spite of the fact that the ideas of nation-state and nationalism have been contested in some quarters of the intellectual arena and construed as mere 'narratives,' the paper is of the view that these ideas are as hard a fact as human body. The paper also takes cognizance of the emerging new socio, economic and cultural order of the day – the order which bears the name of cosmopolitanism and which occurs across the length and breadth of the globe. It highlights how the fundamental sovereign position of nation-state in general is being increasingly challenged by not only the emergent cosmopolitan order as well as ideals but also by the few authoritarian superpowers of the world. Against this scenario of compromised sovereignty of nation states, the write-up has urged upon them (the nation states) not only to re-examine their locus standi and modus operandi but also to reform their political establishments in every respect in keeping with the emergent cosmopolitan order and ideals of the day.

**KEYWORDS:** Nation, Nationalism, Cosmopolitanism, Democracy, Narrative, Globalisation

*As substantial areas of human activity are progressively organised on a global level, the fate of democracy, and of the independent democratic nation-state in particular, is fraught with difficulty. -----*

----- **David Held**

*Cosmopolitanism is a new type of social solidarity; one where strangers are recognized and incorporated, where one's own assumptions and stories are comparable to all others, and where a variety of dimensions of social statuses are opened up, instead of closed off. The key dimension of this solidarity remains a feeling of belonging, of attachment and a spirit of collective goodwill.*

----- **Kendall, Gavin., Woodward, Ian. & Skrbis, Zlatko**

Neither an individual nor any individual nation today is an island in itself standing at a safe distance from their counterparts. Both of them, the individual humans as much as individual nations, are caught more than ever before in a wide and intricate web of interrelationships. In a well networked world, and a world of supersonic form and nature of connectivity, the interrelationships exert much more influence on one another in a multiplicity of ways. In this scenario of fast changes taking place across the world on multifarious planes, a new socio-economic and cultural order has continued to evolve over a period spanning some decades by now. This new socio, economic and cultural order is of definite cosmopolitan nature and disposition. In the

wake of such cosmopolitan ambience and order, “the fate of democracy, and of the independent democratic nation-state in particular,” as Professor David Held has aptly observed, “is fraught with difficulty” (1995, 21). This difficult situation through which the nation-states are passing for some time by now has made it almost an imperative for them to think of a decent future not only for themselves but also for the entire humanity at large. This write-up seeks to shed some lights on the existent sorry state of affairs of the nation states specifically in the context of the emerging cosmopolitan order and ideals of the day. In the following few pages, it concentrates focus on three key areas: (1) the idea of nation, (2) the idea of cosmopolitanism, and (3) the future progressive nation-state versus cosmopolitan trajectory.

To start with, in a recently concluded international conference conducted on the topic “Performing the Nation: Memory and Desire in Contemporary Literature” several speakers underlined the point that the idea of nation-state is nothing but a ‘narrative’ deliberately created by a few politically right wing people.<sup>1</sup> Their sole argument had centred on the utopian idea of an undivided earth and unified humanity. Apparently a cosmopolitan in his ideals, one speaker of a plenary session contested the mandatory provision for mentioning one’s nationality and religion at the time of applying for VISA. According to him, this provision dishonourably impels an individual to identify himself/herself with one specific religion and nationality. He further went on to claim that the idea of nation and nationalism does not mean anything at all to common citizens of a nation. Such arguments are also most often being heard over the past few years in various national TV channel debates and discussions particularly in India. Considered from the cosmopolitan stand point, this view point sounds quite pertinent. But the question remains, given the state of political affairs across the world at present, is cosmopolitanism in its present nascent state practicable at all? Or, can it be, right at this juncture of time, a viable alternative to the existing parley of nations? Are we all the members of the entire human species philanthropic, catholic and selfless enough both in our mind and action to practise a peaceful, harmonious and cosmopolitan way of life? Against the hard fact of innumerable divisions of humankind, kingdom, and against apparently unbridgeable gaps and differences of all sorts and nature, language, religion, caste, creed, colour, ethnicity, ideology are some, to name only a few, can idealistic and sweet sounding phrases like ‘universal brotherhood,’ and ‘vasudheiva kutumbakam’(the world is one family) wipe out myriad forms of differences which appear to be congenital in nature and therefore an integral and defining feature of the ‘given,’ and forge an order of perennial peace and harmony across the world? Notwithstanding a cosmopolitan’s answer to these questions in affirmation, the author of this write-up is very much sceptical about such affirmative answer. Such an answer can be construed theoretically as well as idealistically proper but pragmatically highly untenable.

The fact of the matter is, the idea of nation is as much a hard fact as our body. The feeling of nationalism is as much real as other human feelings such as love, hatred, anger and so on and so forth. One manifestation of this collective feeling underscoring a common national belongingness and pride as well, is felt in the responses shown by the citizens of a nation when their sports personnel, their team or individual players either win or lose specifically in the title clash of an event. It is displayed in more frenzied and euphoric manner when the win comes at Olympic level. While a win results in a nation-wide euphoric celebration and a strong tide of rejoice and pride, the loss drowns the nation in deep despair and frustration. The sad demise of a national figure constitutes another occasion of display of strong national feeling expressed in the form of deep mourning. The performance of the team or even

of the individual player is construed to be the performance of the whole nation. The loss of an individual is counted as a national loss. But the fact of the matter is, it happens to be an individual performance, or the performance of a team. Similarly the death of an individual in numerical measure is a loss of a single being. But in emotive and symbolic way, it takes the whole nation in its sway. The national feeling comes to fore also at the time of war. On such occasions, many citizens of civilian type also volunteer to take part in war and lay their lives for the cause of the nation, not to speak about the trained military cadres. One may argue here that nationalism is an idea strategically indoctrinated in the minds of the citizens of the nation. It is nothing instinctive but a cultivated and cultured one. That way each and every idea including cosmopolitanism is an indoctrinated one. The wisest of the American minds and the encyclopaedic author, R.W. Emerson has rightly observed in his seminal essay "History,"

Every revolution was first a thought in one's mind, and when the same thought occurs to another man, it is the key to that era. Every reform was once a private opinion. . . (1940, 124).

As to the idea of nation, is a hard fact in more than one respect. All the four of its constitutive components: territory, population, government and sovereignty, are so physical a fate. These aspects cannot be ruled out by saying that 'nationalism is merely a narrative' and therefore fictitious in nature. Such an argument is not only factually incorrect but also perceptually inept and presumptuous. The geographical space demarcated by the national boundaries means a lot to them who are born and brought up within its ambit. Their free mobility is confined to this geo-space only. The population of a nation does have commonality in several aspects too. The government of a nation is the supreme and sovereign authority to formulate law construed to be beneficial to its denizens. It is government agency again which is entrusted to enforce such law. It is of course a different story that the rulers of a nation often tend to be ruffians and most imprudent individuals. It is a pity that the most learned, the intellectuals are to conform with and abide by the rules and regulations passed by the stupid parliamentarians. The sovereignty of a nation-state is messianic to its citizens. It allows power and gives prerogative to the government to rule the state the way it wants to and thereby decides its fate. By virtue of its sovereignty, it is the exclusive owner of and the ultimate authority over the geo-space and the population coming under its purview and their dispensation. Its authority as such is not only ultimate but also arbitrary and thereby it is unquestionable by any external agency or force. This was presumed to be the locus standi and authority of the nation-state. And that is how it operated in supreme manner and with independent and optimum authority.

Entering into twentieth century, some nation-states have made much progress in the field of science and technology. The scientists and technocrats have furnished us of late with better networking mechanism and means of connectivity. Along with their precious contributions, there has also emerged a consumerist market culture as an offshoot of the liberal economic policies adopted by many nation states. This new culture has received a boost in the hands of the corporate bodies, Multi-National Companies whose tentacles have taken the world under their seize. As a result of this ongoing process of globalisation, the world has been reduced to a, as they call, 'global village.' To a considerable extent, man has achieved victory over time and distance or space. The globalisation process in addition to the emergent consumerist culture has added new fervour to the age old idea of cosmopolitanism.

Cosmopolitanism is as much a phenomenon today and has turned as much a necessity as the air we breathe in for our survival. It is manifest in our dress and food habits. It is reflected in our concern for and the fellow feeling with the human species at large. It has become an important segment of our orders of thought. Rising above narrow sectarian feelings and kinship, we increasingly think in cosmopolitan lines as well as ideals. Despite lack of rigours of enforcement, many international bodies, organisations and agencies have come up in about last one hundred years. The UNO, the WHO, the WTO, the World Bank, and the UNESCO are some such international establishments. Besides, the NATO, the OPEC, and the SAARC are organisations established to protect regional interest and address issues of regional importance. Issues of transnational importance and repercussions have made it imperative for such international institutions to come up. The issues which pose potential threats to humankind as a whole include increasing production and accumulation of mass destructive weapons such as nuclear bombs, chemical weapons, diseases like AIDS, upward trend of fundamental forces and international terrorism, environmental challenges like global warming, ecological imbalances, and scarcity of un-renewable natural resources. Such changing scenario particularly on environmental front has already resulted in extinction of many species of animals, birds, insects and plants from this unique planet of living organisms. Such challenges and threats have made it imperative on the part of the remnant inhabitants of this planet to come together and address the menaces in concerted manner and effort. This vital issue of survival nature, efficacy, importance as well as implication has had a compulsive reason for instituting a cosmopolitan establishment and dispensational mechanism. Prof. David Held has rightly observed that “substantial areas of human activity are progressively organised on a global level” (1995, 21). As a result of such activity taking place on large scale, he has further observed that “the fate of democracy, and of the independent democratic nation-state in particular, is fraught with difficulty.”

The “difficulty” is more and more found in maintaining the status quo of nation-state particularly its sovereign status, purity of its geo-space, sanctity of borders, singular loyalty of its citizens, and local and native colour and contours of its indigenous languages, religion and more importantly culture(s). Large scale activity taking place on global plane has caused serious and multifarious violation of its salient features and affected its sovereign status. The emergent cosmopolitan or rather new cosmopolitan culture and order have problematized the idea as well as modus operandi of nation-state. The following definition of ‘New Cosmopolitanism’ by Gita Rajan and Shailaja Sharma in their book, *New Cosmopolitanism: South Asians in the US*, does highlight to some extent indirectly though, the problematized position of the nation-state. They write

We define new cosmopolitans as people who blur the edges of home and abroad by continuously moving physically, culturally, and socially, and by selectively using globalized forms of travel, communication, languages, and technology to position themselves in motion between at least two homes, sometimes even through dual forms of citizenship, but always in multiple locations. . . . It is these new forms of shifting choices and complex relationships that emerge from what were earlier ‘knowable’ as diasporas that we call new cosmopolitanism” (2006, 2–3).

A. Giddens, an observer on ‘globalisation,’ has described the global plane of activity in terms of “action at distance.” This sort of “action at distance” has irresistibly affected action at home. The “action at distance” which is of serious concerns for the nation-state is, according to David Held, “the stretching and deepening of relations across the borders of nation-states and at increasing intensity” (1995, 20-21). The process of globalisation which has taken the entire globe as the platform of its action has put the nation-state in serious jeopardy today. The erstwhile absolutely independent and sovereign nation-states of late have come under tremendous pressure from such “action at distance.” In this context, Prof. Held has rightly observed in his book, *Democracy and the Global Order* (1995),

Developments putting pressure on democratic polities are often referred to as part of the process of ‘globalisation’ . . . . globalisation can be taken to denote the stretching and deepening of social relations and institutions across space and time such that, on the one hand, day-to-day activities are increasingly influenced by events happening on the other side of the globe and, on the other, the practices and decisions of local groups or communities can have significant global reverberations (20).

Evidentially the nation-state is in doldrums being intricately caught in the melting pot of cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitanism has exerted serious pressures on the nation and diluted the feeling of nationalism. The cosmopolitan wind is so strong and varied that the national boundaries often get rattled and face the threat of being erased or blurred. The increasing rise of cosmopolitanism marks increasing dilution and adulteration of nationalism. The more intense cosmopolitanism grows, the more defiled nationalism turns. The honour and popularity of cosmopolitanism are inevitably at the cost of and subversive to national integrity and sovereignty. In the ever growing glaze and glamour of cosmopolitanism, the colours and fervours of nationalism become proportionately faint and fragile. In other words, in the phenomenal wake of cosmopolitanism, the interest and integrity of independent nation-state stand very much compromised. The tentacles of cosmopolitanism are so powerful and pervasive today that the nation-states can hardly protect their territorial space and purity from the sweeping impacts and influences of globalisation and cosmopolitan fervour.

The changing global scenario has made it imperative for the nation states to introspect themselves and redesign their structure and modes of operation in tune with the cosmopolitan orders as well as ardours. Change is the go of the world. It is physical a fate both for the nation and its culture. As a physical fate, it can neither be altered nor diverted. In this situation, it is wiser for the nations to be pragmatic and fine tune themselves both structurally and functionally in commensurate with the emergent global order of the day. It definitely tends to be magnanimous and honourable on their part to be stake holders of the emergent “social solidarity.” It is more than being responsible on their part to be respondent to world peace and the safety and security of human species as well as of this wonderful planet of ours. Redefining the boundaries of the nation states more in respect of their foreign relations and political affairs than in the geographical territorial one, seems to have become an urgent and unsparing necessity today both for the interest, existence and honour of the nation states as well as of the world as a whole. The existential crises both the nation states and the human species across the world are facing today have made adaptability mandatory for both. They have to realise that the situation involving a conflict of interest leads to destructive confrontation and in the long run is

beneficial to none where as the scenario coordination in maintenance and protection of mutual interest is immensely productive to both the parties.

At this critical juncture of time, the idea of cosmopolitanism is as much a fact as that of nation-state. The only difference between the two is while one (cosmopolitanism) is in its nascent stage, the other one (nation) is age old and on that count somewhat outmoded too. While one is marching ahead towards its pinnacle and predominance, the other one is, so to say, in its senility, and therefore, maintaining a declining trend and comparatively more losing its ground and made to compromise its legal and sovereign position. At present time, in the league of nations, the nation state is facing challenges more from other bullying nations than from the world bodies and world organisations. As such the existing world bodies and world organisations including the UNO are apparently toothless. They are being overpowered by a select few bullying nations specifically the developed ones with their overarching and manipulating veto powers. These authoritarian nation states armed with their superior, overriding military power as well as technological monopoly, do often pose themselves as the 'big brothers' of the other less powerful and underdeveloped nations. Being at the helm of world affairs, they more often than not dictate the terms and conditions of the dispensations of the world. They decide how to harness the natural resources and other amenities of the world. Posing as the sole custodians of human rights, human justice, human species, global environment as well as the globe itself, they lay down the terms and conditions of the charters, pacts, agreements, resolutions by surreptitiously protecting their own vested interest. Being the optimum beneficiaries of the world resources, such mighty but minority nations, minority only in terms of number not in any other ways, do in reality more harm than good to other nations as well as to the earth. Under their duress, less powerful nations particularly the third world nations suffer the worst. They simply turn puppets in the hands of these so called 'big brothers.' They cause more dishonour to the weaker nations especially to their sovereign nature and status. Under the authoritarian hegemony of these few big brothers of the world, the vast majority of nations are in utter constant duress and disrespectable positions.

The well tailored transnational activities, tailored and monitored by the powerful military and technocratic powers, have definitely created a situation where the erstwhile sovereign, sacrosanct and unsurpassable national boundaries have been grossly breached and violated. The sovereign locus standi of nation-states has often been undermined, tampered and compromised with. To put it another way, globalisation and its upshot, the cosmopolitan culture have beyond doubt turned subversive to the customary sovereign status of the nation-states and their modus operandi. However, cosmopolitanism is the trend of the day. It tends to be the future of the inhabitants of this planet. Keeping in mind its impacts on and directions to the emerging world-wide political, economic, social and cultural order, as already argued in this write-up, the nation-states have to reform themselves. Here in this context, this paper is at one with the seriousness and urgency which Prof Held has shown in his urging upon nations to rethink of "the meaning and place of democratic politics, and the contending models of democracy"(21). Moreover, this paper also finds sense in "the cosmopolitan model of democracy" conceptualised as well as put forth by him (Prof Held). The proposed "cosmopolitan model" appears not only pertinent but also persuasive enough as it has been well conceived against the background of globalisation and more importantly appears to address many intricate challenges the world is facing today. A cursory account of this model is given in the opening lines of

the last chapter of his book *Democracy and the Global Order*. Its outline deserves mention here. Held has written

In the contemporary world, democracy can only be fully sustained by ensuring the accountability of all related and interconnected power systems, from economics to politics. These systems involve agencies and organisations which form an element of and yet often cut across the territorial boundaries of nation-states. The possibility of democracy today must, accordingly, be linked to an expanding framework of democratic institutions and procedures – to what I have called the cosmopolitan model of democracy (1995, 267).

The cosmopolitan model is very much neo-liberalist and democratic in principle and spirit. It accommodates everyone with the individual nations as local constituencies at the bottom and the global ones like the UNO at the top, and the regional ones like the NATO, the SAARC, the EU, in between. It is out and out inclusive in nature and based on much needed mechanism as well as systems of check and balance with reasoned fetters on varying power centres of the world. At present, the existing regional and international bodies and organisations are found most often biased and extra sensitive and protective as well to the interests of the select few powerful member states. They come invariably under the shadow of the most domineering member nation-states, and on that account, fail to be bold, impartial and inclusive in their approaches. Toothless as they are, they cannot deliver much needed justice to one and all. A more coordinate, representative, responsible, strong as well as interrelated governmental mechanism is to be evolved taking all stake holders on equal footing – stakeholders from the local or national, through the regional to the transnational ones. Only such a three-tier interrelated federal body and governing mechanism can protect the rights of all, administer justice to all, maintain economic equity, and eliminate regional disparity. Such a federal trajectory can curb totalitarian power and hegemony of individual nations. The proposed cosmopolitan model of democracy shall have separate but centrally monitored bodies looking after legislative, executive, and judiciary responsibilities. The monitoring body shall look after laying down of reasoned cosmopolitan laws, rules and regulations, and their effective implementation and enforcement. To this end of devising a federal cosmopolitan model of governance, the nation-states need undergo thorough structural re-formation. The model must be based on the cosmopolitan principles of mutual recognition, tolerance and respect. The future of nation rests on such drastic structural re-formation. In this context, it is worth clarifying that the cosmopolitan model is not a disparaging mechanism thrust upon the domestic one. The local or the domestic one is rather, as two other prominent defenders of cosmopolitanism, K A Appiah and Calhoun have advocated, the precondition of the cosmopolitan democratic model. Here in the new order, no one will be the loser. On the contrary, both local/national and the cosmopolitan are in the win-win position. The mechanism is quintessentially dialectical in nature and is meant to operate not in antithetical but synthetic mood, not in conflicting but conciliatory manner.

Lastly, R.W. Emerson, the nineteenth century encyclopaedic author and the most erudite of American minds, sounds very much pragmatic as well as persuasive when he proclaims, “Each age . . . must write its own books; or rather, each generation for the next succeeding. The books of an older generation will not fit this” (1940, 49). These famous words of Emerson on books are very much applicable today to the idea of the “nation-state.” The existent sorry state of nation-states which owes its origin to the dead past will not fit to the requirements of the present day nor even

to those of the forthcoming days and generations. It must be reframed and revised from time to time. The old and obsolete model cannot address current issues nor can it do justice to the cosmopolitans, or “the citizens of the world.” The political theorists, political scientists, statesmen of the world and other intellectuals of the day must come forward and shoulder responsibilities of forging a better socio, economic, cultural and political order to be followed by the present generation as well as the posterity across the world. Only the intellectuals can nurture “a sound attitude of mind,” and “a right psychology,” which are according to E.M. Forster, the need of the day(1969, 45). If they cannot do it, nobody can do it. The sooner they rise to the occasion the better for the nation states as well as the world.

#### Notes:

1. The Post Graduate Department of English, Berhampur University, Berhampur, Odisha, India, organised the Conference on the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> of February 2019. The author of this article was a participant of this intellectual event. The present paper is considerably modified a version of the one he presented on the occasion. As a matter of fact, the modification has been undertaken in an irresistible temptation to respond to some impracticable arguments put forth by some important speakers of the cited conference.

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