

ISSN 0976-8165

*The Criterion*



# The Criterion

An International Journal in English

Bi-Monthly Refereed & Indexed Open Access eJournal

*December 2013 Vol. 4 Issue-VI*

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## Sunil Khilnani's Idea of India: An Ideological Critique on his Book *The Idea of India* (1997)

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Literary theory has recently opened up radically new ways of reading. It can be stated that theory has de-essentialized the literary text by historicizing it. The present paper proceeds on the assumption that 'India' as a text is not an essential, timeless and unchanging entity, but a historically changing one. Peter Barry writes, "Many of the notions which we usually regard as the basic 'givens' of our existence (including our gender identity, our individual selfhood, and the notion of literature itself) are actually fluid and unstable things, rather than fixed and reliable essences" (34). The paper relies mainly on the insights made available in the theories of ideology to examine ideological formation of India in Sunil Khilnani's *The Idea of India*. The paper aims to study the ideological position of Sunil Khilnani writing about 'India'; how does he ideologically conceive an idea of India as a subject of socio-historical and material conditions of the time.

Ideology literally means the set of beliefs held by a particular group. It denotes forms of thought as a reflection of material changes in historical conditions. Hence it can be argued that ideology changes with time and conditions. The coiners of the term 'ideology', namely Cabanis, Destutt de Tracy and their friends, "assigned to it as an object the (genetic) theory of ideas" (Althusser 21). The Marxist idea of superstructure refers to "definite forms of social consciousness", such as political, legal, religious, ethical and aesthetic. Thus, Marxism views the function of ideology as ". . . legitimat[ing] the power of ruling class in society" (Eagleton, *Marxism* 5). Pierre Macherey uses the term "illusion" in his book *The Theory of Literary Production* (1966) to denote ideology.

Ideology, as Althusser says, constitutes persons as subjects through interpellation. A subject's understanding of the self and the world depends upon several factors which include, as Marx famously pointed out, his/her material conditions. This process is mediated by ideology. Althusser says, "Ideology signifies the imaginary ways in which men experience the real world. . ." (qtd. in Eagleton, *Marxism* 16). Ideology makes us happy by concealing the real conditions of our existence from our conscious awareness. Ideology is thus not only the expression of explicit ideas and opinions but it also exists in silences and gaps. Its function is to maintain the existing hegemonic relations. We are formed as subjects under the prevailing ideologies. From the Marxist perspective, the dominant ideologies are the product of the ruling class. So it can be argued to some extent that most of the ideologies are produced by the West in the world because we find that it is the West that is ruling over the world through hegemony, the power to rule with consent of the people being ruled, as stated by Althusser.

The ruling class rules through Repressive State Apparatuses (like the police, the army, administration etc.) as well as through Ideological State Apparatuses (like religion, education system, family, culture etc.) (Althusser 11-12). Ideology is therefore a tool to dominate the masses with their consent. The function of Ideological State Apparatuses is to create and perpetuate the existing system of domination and exploitation. The ISAs circulate the ruling ideology and thus reproduce the given relations of production. Clearly, ideology is not ahistorical but produced by the existing relations of production. It also has a material existence because it is consumed and practiced by its subjects. Ideology, however, does not reveal itself as 'ideology'. It recruits people as its subjects by interpellating them as free.

No author is entirely free to write. The writer, the writing and the publication are parts of an industry, as Walter Benjamin states. Writing is also the part of a wider structure which includes certain forces and modes of production. According to Benjamin, among other things an author helps to circulate prevailing ideologies. Capitalist business requires them to produce the commodities (called writings) to be consumed by the reading public. Critics and academicians are hired to teach how to consume the commodities (Eagleton, *Marxism* 55-57). The process of producing and consuming is overseen by a dominant socio-political ideology.

Sunil Khilnani was born in New Delhi and grew up in India, the continents of Africa, Europe, and Asia. He earned his graduation from Trinity Hall, Cambridge in 1983 and PhD in Social and Political Sciences from King's College, Cambridge in 1987. He began his career as a lecturer in 1989 and went on to become a Senior Lecturer, Reader, and then Professor of Political Science at Birkbeck College, University of London in 2000. He is the Governor of the Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Trust, and has been awarded *Parvasi Bharatiya Samman* by the Indian Government in 2005. He is completing a book on India's global role and prospects, besides continuing his research on Indian democracy and Jawaharlal Nehru.

Khilnani's book titled *The Idea of India* is focused on India as an idea on different stages of history. Khilnani writes that the India known to us is the result of various ideas prevailing at particular times, and he claims to trace the history of this idea from pre-independence and Nehruvian nationalism to the neo-liberal state of 1990s. The ideological formation of India undergoes a major transformation in the 1990s as the country's political elite rapidly turns away from the socialist past to embrace neo-liberal capitalism. So, this book is the result of present historical and material conditions of the time. Khilnani provides the bridge between the nationalist and socialist ideological formation of India on the one hand and the later neo-liberal capitalist formations on the other. The book opens with an introduction (2003) demonstrating the difference between socialist past and emerging neo-liberalism in India. He discusses the arrival of Bill Gates in India and the enthusiasm of Indians for him. The historical difference can be noted that Indians struggled in past to expel East India Company from India while today the culture of European capitalists, open market, and privatization is being welcomed. He illustrates the face of emerging neo-liberal India. Khilnani argues that the "economic progress and the emergence of a middle class promote moderate and centrist politics, and as such

provide the conditions for a liberal democratic politics” (Introduction *The Idea of India* x). And writing about the purpose of the book, he declares that it

is to execute the conception that provided the intellectual and practical underpinnings of modern India, that gave it its distinctive identity over the past half-century, and that kept it, unlike so many other new states, democratic, tolerant, and open-minded. Of the many possible ideas of India, *The Idea of India* makes the case for one in particular because it is the only one that can enable other ideas to emerge, and allow them to learn to live alongside one another. (xv)

He claims to trace the history of modern India throughout his writing and perpetuates the neo-liberal India, which according to him, is more modern, free, flexible, and progressive. He also adds that the book is an attempt to “make clear why Nehru is so fundamental a figure in modern India’s history, and why he demands to be understood anew in this period of flux in India’s life” (xvii). The book is essentially a discourse of the celebration of Nehru’s role in shaping Indian economy and politics after independence and it provides the bridge between the secular socialist formation of India on the one hand and neo-liberal capitalist formation on the other.

In the chapter titled “Introduction: Ideas of India” (1-14), Khilnani treats India merely as an idea of different minds at different historical stages, besides its geographical existence. He states that it is “constituted by politics” (9) at various stages of history. He refers to the ideas of popular thinkers about India such as Nirad C. Chaudhuri, V.S. Naipaul and many others. At the same time, he argues that history of independent India can also be studied as the history of state, because according to him, a new state called India emerges with independent India. He further asserts that “the performance of Indian state invites evaluation by external and comparative standards” (3). So, according to him, “[t]his book is an initial venture into the task of retelling the political history of independent India” (3).

Khilnani claims to trace the history and formation of India as a nation state after independence. He describes Indian nationalist history after the British Raj as “a slow but irresistible erosion of the sand-castles of the British Raj” (1). He argues that all are not happy after independence and quotes Nirad Chaudhuri and V.S. Naipaul's disillusionment with India emerged after independence. He argues that this nostalgic vision of India is often reflected in various writings unthinkably and “a standard Indian response to this dull narrative bass has been a percussive nationalism” (2). He claims to analyze the history of India after independence as well as the narrative of it. Writing about the aim of the book, he again states that it “is an initial venture into the task of retelling the history of independent India. If its argument manages to encourage or irritate others into thinking about the larger picture, it will have served one of its main purposes” (3). Thus, the ultimate purpose of Khilnani’s project is to correct the post-Nehruvian discourses about India.

Khilnani treats the history of independent India as the “history of a state” (3). The present condition demands the evaluation of the formation of this state, according to him. He assumes that the history of India must be seen as the “adventure of a political idea: democracy. . . [and]. . . [t]he history of a state and the history of an idea: each provides ready if contrasting perspectives on contemporary India” (4). Contemporary India, for him, is the creation of modern world: “[t]he fundamental agencies and ideas of modernity – European colonial expansion, the state, nationalism, democracy, economic development-all have shaped it” (5). It is notable that for Khilnani, India is an idea given by modernity and a particular class while on the other hand India is an eternal and timeless entity for many other writers such as Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo.

Khilnani goes on to discuss the role of thinkers and politicians who formed India as a nation. He states that most of them had western education who initiated the process of forming India as a nation. His argument includes Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, Subhas Chandra Bose, Bhim Rao Ambedkar, and Jawaharlal Nehru. They invented and fashioned their public selves, according to him, to serve the demands for the formation of the nation. He also argues that their practical actions play greater role than their intellectual pronouncements to perpetuate the idea of India as a nation. Thus, it is not an eternal India or ‘the continent of Circe’ for Khilnani rather it is shaped by modern conditions and ideology.

Commenting on the present condition and identity of India, Khilnani writes that it has become totally the subject of power politics. It is redefined and constituted by politics on every stage. He writes:

The themes and conflicts that animate India’s politics today have a surprisingly wide resonance – the assertion of community and group rights and the use of democracy to affirm collective identities; the difficulties of maintaining large-scale, multi-cultural political unions; the compulsion to make democracy work despite economic adversity, to sustain democracy without prosperity. The older democracies might recognize that each of these stands uncomfortably close to their own doorsteps. (8-9)

Since 1990s India could not decide its economic character, according to Khilnani. But he finds that India becomes able to decide it during the 1990s. He tries to construct the bridge between the Nehruvian India and the current neo-liberal India, and finds that India first time decides its economic character by adopting economic reforms. Discussing the beginning of this neo-liberal phase in India, he writes that

[s]ince the early 1990s, it has dramatically revised its economic identity, and has begun to open itself to greater international exposure and competition. The liberalization has raised high expectations, and has encouraged hopes on an Indian economic ‘miracle’ to rival those of East Asia. (11)

Although, he welcomes this neo-liberal phase of Indian economy, yet he remarks that “[e]conomic possibilities have indeed rapidly changed for many Indians, yet the majority will find themselves waiting, some expectantly, most with no hope at all” (11). Thus, he favors the emerging neo-liberal India at the same time as he is under the impact of socialist vision of Jawaharlal Nehru.

Khilnani goes on to describe this neo-liberal idea of India. He states that the political and economic experiences of modern India are realized in its cities which are, according to him, “symbols of the uneven, hectic and contradictory character of the nation’s modern life” (11). He discusses the modern Indian cities – Banares, Calcutta, Chandigarh, Bangalore and Bombay, and argues that they “express the country’s unruly historical rhythms, and vividly reveal the harshly unequal opportunities of its denizens” (11). He asserts that although only a minor part of Indian population has direct access to the cities but the cities “have fired the imagination of all Indians” (12). Thus, for him, this neo-liberal phase of Indian economy provides identity to the individuals. By embracing the Nehruvian idea of India, he glorifies the emerging new India.

For Khilnani, it has become difficult to sustain a single political idea of India. Modern Indian politics continues its claims on India on the name of nationalism, he writes, while in practice these struggles are very far from nationalism. He further writes that these struggles are driven by new generations, new meanings and desires, and argues that “[t]hese struggles constitute the identity of India’s history since 1947. And, in its ability constantly to encompass diverse ideas of what India is, this history is itself expressive of the Indian idea” (13). For Khilnani, nationalism is no longer a base of the idea of India; it has shifted Nehruvian socialist idea of India to neo-liberal marketplace where individuals have their own ideas of India according to their desires. Although, he glorifies Nehruvian idea of India, he also welcomes to the current idea of capitalist India because, according to him, it provides the identities to the individuals.

In the next chapters, Khilnani goes on to record the Indian socio-political history and the various issues, important in the formation of the nation. In the chapter titled “Democracy” (15-60), Khilnani evaluates Indian system as a democratic state. He states that the old Brahminic order had a major role to play in Indian life. Although it was oppressive in nature, according to him, but it managed to grip over a geographical area by selective distribution of education. It sanctioned the rules based on caste system (17). And this society, according to him, “was easy to rule but difficult to change” (20). He further adds that “kings represented only themselves, never enduring states” (20), and only the foreign rulers brought the concept of state to India (21). He further observes that British rule fractured the Indian society and “[t]he state which the British built in India came to stand in a peculiar cultural relationship with Indian society” (22). The British wanted to dominate Indian political system and they cultivated the local elite who could understand their language and help them in their purpose. They introduced the new system of education and taught English in schools and colleges. He writes that

[t]he imposition of English as the language of politics transfigured Indian public life in at least two ways: it obviously divided the British rulers from



their Indian subjects; and it also divided Indians themselves, between those who could speak English, who know their Dicey from their Dickens, and those who did not. (23)

It is notable that Khilnani partly has an anti-colonial idea of India like Nehru. He argues that though during the culmination of India's freedom struggle many leaders played a major role including Mahatma Gandhi but the concept of democracy was not on priority due to diversity of voices in congress (28). In his argument, the democracy in India is not in its real sense. India has not earned anything from such a democracy but it has always paid for it.

Writing about the constitutional democracy, Khilnani writes that it did not emerge from Indian society. The intellectual elite forms the Assembly to form the constitution which was an unrepresentative body, it included

around 300 men (more were added after the princely states entered the union), elected on the restricted franchise of the provincial legislatures, and overwhelmingly dominated by the upper-caste and Brahminic elites within congress. There was no organized representation of India's Muslims, no presence of Hindu communal groups (although congress itself harboured many Hindu conservatives) and, after 1948, no socialist voice. To Gandhi, for instance, it was quite clearly not a sovereign body. Within the Assembly itself the drafting of the constitution rested in the hands of only about two dozen lawyers. (34)

He adds that most of the Indians were not aware what exactly they have been given. For him, the formation of Assembly of Indian constitution was itself undemocratic. One thing is notable that Khilnani praises Nehru for his role in freedom struggle and formation of the state but he does not discuss his role in the formation of the Assembly as Nehru was a prominent leader of the time. Further, in the same chapter, Khilnani glorifies the role of Jawaharlal Nehru in formation of the state. He also argues that Nehru was against the partition of India (31). Although, Khilnani condemns the formation of Assembly for forming Indian constitution, because it was not formed on democratic basis, according to him, yet he glorifies the role of Nehru who actually was the power behind the formation of the Assembly. On the one hand, he goes on to praise Nehru and on the other, he goes on the condemn Assembly and the constitution.

Khilnani writes that the formation of the constitution influenced the subsequent Indian history very deeply. He adds that with the establishment of the Supreme Court of India as the guardian and interpreter of it the powers became centralized. It also implanted two fundamental problems, according to him; first, the tension for powers between the centre and the provinces, and the second, the policy of regeneration for backward classes which led to more inequality and the extension of reservation became the agenda of every political party at the time of elections to win the favor of such classes (35-37). He further argues that "[t]he constitution established a democratic regime, but how the state would actually act was still undecided" (37). His arguments about the formation of Indian

constitution are contradictory as he praises again and again Nehru for the formation of a nation-state and on the same time he condemns its constitutional formation.

Khilnani argues that India is first time established as a forceful and independent voice in the international politics under the leadership of Nehru. He writes that the Nehruvian period made centrality of Indian political leadership in the Indian state but Nehru's unexpected death in 1964 set India into a long crisis. He states that the centralization of power which began during the Raj was accelerated in the two decades after Nehru's death. Lal Bahadur Shastri, the successor of Nehru died in 1966 and Mrs. Indira Gandhi got the chance to preside over the country. Khilnani argues that Indira Gandhi altered the character of the state, democratic politics, and the Congress Party (43). After the win in the elections of 1967, Mrs. Gandhi brought unthinkable changes in the Party and political system of India. She split the Congress Party between the centre and the regions; nationalized banking; abolished privileges to the princes; raised the slogan "Garibi Hatao" (abolish poverty); created a national electorate by calling general elections in 1971 one year before its time; defeated Pakistan in a war in the same year etc. (44). He notes that the dictatorship of Mrs. Gandhi "fractured congress as an organization and opened a deep crevasse in Indian politics" (45) and further adds: "[a]s the identity of congress faded, Indira Gandhi's own profile began to fill its space" (45). He writes that the proclamation of Emergency by her in 1975 suspended democratic rights and judicial procedures; which, according to him, concentrated the power within the boundaries of Delhi (46). Ultimately there was revolt in the minds of people for Mrs. Gandhi for Emergency and the Congress lost elections of 1977 and first time a non-congress government is formed by the Janata coalition, an alliance of other right-wing. Khilnani observes that Mrs. Gandhi had very deep impact on Indian life. The meaning of democracy changed after her, according to him: "it is now signified simply, elections" (48). He further argues that by "invoking her huge parliamentary majorities especially after 1971, [she] tried to portray the constitution as a conservative obstacle to her radical ambitions" (48). Khilnani finds faults with the Assembly forming Indian Constitution and the theories of the Constitution; he also does not find suitable the dictatorial activities of Mrs. Gandhi, which are according to him, unconstitutional.

Khilnani goes on to enlist the demerits of Mrs. Gandhi. He states that the powers of President's rule were invoked ten times between 1947 and 1966 but seventy times between 1967 and 1986. He states that after her return to power in 1980, she inflicted four chief ministers of her choice in Andhra Pradesh; and also involved in illegal activities to weaken the Akali Dal, the regional political party of Punjab which participated in the governing Janata coalition of 1977-79 (51). He adds that Mrs. Gandhi did not spare religious sentiments; she also flirted with them (52-54). He observes that after Indira Gandhi's government political assassinations began to happen at public places: Mrs. Gandhi was assassinated in 1984 by two of her own bodyguards and Rajiv Gandhi was killed by a Tamil suicide bomber in 1991. Thus for him, Mrs. Gandhi spoiled Nehru's plans for India. Comparing the time of Nehru and Mrs. Gandhi, he again states that "[p]olitics and the state, once seen as the prophylactic that would invigorate the country, where now seen as the disease" (55).



Khilnani writes that the effects of first two critical periods of independent India began to manifest in the third, which is the most troubled face. The new political parties emerged in India: the BJP (around Hindu nationalism), the Lok Dal (around caste and class), the BSP (around caste alone), the Jharkhand Mukti Morch (around a particular tribe), the Akali Dal (for religious separatism), the Tamil Dravida parties (around cultural identity) and the Shiv Sena (around nativism) etc. (50). He argues that new parties broke the monopoly of one party rule in India: “the national parliament formed in 1996 contained twenty-eight different parties. . . [and]. . . most [were] elected from the regions” (57). He adds: “[y]et the meaning of democracy has been menacingly narrowed to signify only elections” (58). Summing up the present condition, he again states that “[t]he conflicts in India today are the conflicts of modern politics; they concern the state, access to it, and to whom it ultimately belongs. And the protagonists are creatures who belong to neither the modern nor the traditional world: they exist in the homeless world of modern politics” (59-60). Thus, Khilnani describes democracy as a failure in India. He divides the history of Indian democracy in three phases: first, the Nehruvian; second, the period of Mrs. Gandhi; and third, the phase after Mrs. Gandhi. According to him, Nehru attempted to form India as a strong nation-state but after his death the project could not prosper further.

In the chapter titled “Temples of the Future” (61-106), Khilnani claims to evaluate the economic policies of Indian government from independence to the 1990s. He describes that Jawaharlal Nehru was dedicated to the modern idea of India who initiated many great projects in India; Bhakra-Nangal Dam is one of them. He praises him for modernization of cities and construction of modern cities like Chandigarh. He argues that India promised to be an industrial giant under the leadership of Nehru (62). Countering the colonial idea of India, he writes that colonialists perpetuated the idea of rich culture and spirituality of India to detach Indians from material production (64-65). But he argues that the modernist Nehru struggled to develop India as a strong economic power. He observes that the British, through their policy of divide and rule, divided the urban elites from the rural; thus, they kept Indian interests divided (66). But he also finds that it was the British Raj which, “unite[d] India into a single economic field” (66), by introducing common currency and other policies. Thus, his idea of Indian nation emerges partially from anti-colonial feelings as well as from Nehruvian idea of modern nation-state.

Khilnani states that Indian nationalists before independence were not much aware about the economy of the country; they stressed on political freedom but could not realize the economic problems of the country. Some nationalists started to realize it with the passage of time that the policy of “de-industrialization” by the British does not allow India to grow economically. Some nationalists were in favor of industrialization but they were not sure whether it will help to reduce rural poverty or not. He writes that in the mid – 1940s, leading businessmen and industrialists of India put their names to *A Plan of Economic Development for India*; “[t]hey agreed that poverty was a fundamental problem but they envisaged neither a substantial segment of the economy in public ownership nor extensive redistributive responsibilities for the state” (70). The left wing of the congress party imagined India’s future in terms of industrial modernity, according to him, and it

included two most rousing voices: Subhas Chandra Bose and Nehru (71). Khilnani immediately shifts to the glorification of Nehru's economic plans for the nation.

Discussing the economic condition of India at various stages, Khilnani states that Nehruvian planning for industrialization in India begins in the late 1930s under the National Planning Committee, which included – industrialists, advisers to princely states, scientists, economists and a lone Gandhian – under Nehru's leadership (72). Nehru accelerated the industrialization and economic growth through the functioning of Planning Commission, according to him. Writing about the formation of the Planning Commission, he states: “[t]he members of the Planning Commission were by no means all economists, but they were chosen by Nehru for their broad agreement with his political project: committed to ‘socialist’ and reformist ideals, in the Indianized version of social democracy” (85-86). For Khilnani, Nehru plays a major role to construct India as economically strong nation through his socialist leanings. He praises Nehruvian idea of modern India, which according to him, unfortunately fades after his death. But it is notable that he ignores Nehru's undemocratic ways for forming the Planning Commission.

Khilnani finds the death of Nehru (in 1964) unfortunate because it broke the continuity of his projects. The successors could not realize Nehru's dreams, according to him. Describing Mrs. Gandhi's approach, he writes: “she tried to reduce expansionist policies, hoping this would end India's reliance on external aid. But unlike her father, Mrs. Gandhi had no intellectual analysis of the domestic economy or of its place in the international arena” (90).

The major shift in Indian economy, according to Khilnani comes in the 1990s. The formation of government depended on coalitions: the regional parties made their own space; there was domination of minor parties formed on the basis of caste and religion; all this, according to him, brought a major change in the Indian economic policies. The first weakest congress government was formed in 1991 with coalitions. P. V. Narasimha Rao became the prime minister and the finance ministry was put in the hands of Manmohan Singh, a liberal economist. Khilnani writes that “[t]his temporary reprise of powers by intellectuals and technocrats was now turned to goals quite different from those set in the 1950s” (95). He observes that this shift was also the result of international developments as the Soviet Union collapsed and the socialist economic model was replaced by capitalist market and the governments everywhere were putting their faith in free market (96). He adds that businessmen, industrialists and political parties in India all arrived at consensus that state controls of the economy should be limited and the intellectuals and economists favored it (96).

Khilnani states that the measures introduced in 1991 brought significant changes in trade and industry by a gradual process of political negotiations. But, he argues that liberation could not abolish corruption from Indian system: “mutually beneficial transactions on the stock exchange and in the sugar, power and telecommunications industries left the wardrobes of cabinet ministers bursting with cash, and Narasimha Rao himself stood in court accused of corruption” (98-99); and the problems like – poverty, illiteracy, ill

health, social inequality still persist. At the same time, he hopefully quotes liberalizers' arguments that

India must create conditions for growth, since indisputably this was necessary for any alleviation of poverty. This exclusive focus on growth encouraged a new faith in the discovery of the 'elusive policy framework' that would enable India to break with what some economists had mockingly dubbed the 'Hindu rate of growth', the steady 3 per cent or so characteristic of the economy between the 1950s and the early 1980s. . . . If the appropriate policy was followed, the growth rate of the economy can be accelerated and sustained at an average level of 7-8 per cent per annum. (100)

Thus, Khilnani's idea of India merges Nehru's secular and socialist India with neo-liberal culture of 1990s. He believes in Nehru's modern idea of India as well as is hopeful about the new identity of India in the capitalist phase, rather he fills the space between the two ideas of India: secular socialist and modern idea of India on the one hand and the capitalist idea of India on the other.

In the chapter titled "Cities" (107-49), Khilnani claims to analyse the importance and politics of construction of cities in India. He writes that pre-independence cities did not have much political significance and India was supposed to live only in the villages. He admits that although India still is the land of villages but today no Indian can avoid the impact of its cities on her/his life. He argues that after independence cities, streets, and parks also have been nationalized by naming after the national leaders. He argues that from the first half of the twentieth century, it is the city which continues to make the politics of the nation (107-10). The discussion about the formation of cities in India on different stages shows the changing structure as well as the idea of nation. Khilnani describes that how the British colonized the cities for their trade and administration. Talking about the colonization of Delhi, he writes:

vast areas of the old cities were demolished. In Delhi, which had retained a strong sense of its pre-colonial habits and styles, the stately Mughal Red Fort was turned into a squalid barracks, its watercourses converted into watering troughs. Railway lines were struck through the central areas of the city. (116)

The construction of New Delhi is also meant to serve the purpose of the rulers. He writes that "New Delhi was besotted with being a capital rather than a city – it was a grand, capital complex with an attached residential campus" (123). Although cities became the mean of colonization, according to Khilnani, they also gave Indians the idea of being members of a single large community ruled by single city (123-24). Cities also form the different idea of India at different levels of history in his discourse.

In the chapter titled "Who is an Indian?" (150-95), Khilnani describes the changing identity of an Indian time to time. He finds that there is always contest between the

different claims of Indian identity. His focus of discussion is the twentieth century Indian identity. He argues that even the Indian nationalist movement was not of a single identity, there were “a variety of contending responses” (153) about Indians and India’s unity. He writes about various nationalist claims:

[n]ationalist Hindus asserted that Indian unity could be found in its common culture derived from religion; Gandhi, too, settled on religion as a source of interconnection among Indians, but manufactured his own eclectic and pluralist morality from different religious traditions; others, for whom Nehru became the most effective spokesman, turned away from religion and discovered a basis for unity both in a shared historical past of cultural mixing, and a future project of common development. (154)

Indian identity, for Khilnani, was undetermined since the emergence of consciousness about identity in India.

Khilnani further describes the role of the British to give mythical and fragmentary identity to the people of India. He writes that they imposed Indian history on Indians written from the British; and argues that Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay provoked Indians to write their history by themselves (157-58). He argues that thus gradually all Indian scholars, politicians, would-be terrorists turned to write history from their own points of view and it resulted in “confounded and divided nationalism” (159). Indian identity, for Khilnani, could not be defined by histories either written by the British or the Indians; all of them had their own motives to write it.

Khilnani writes that both the Brahmin and orthodox intellectuals in twentieth century turned to find unity in the past and the history of India which was traditionally sliced into Hindu, Muslim and British periods. Such intellectuals, according to him, stressed on Hindu period as a classical and authentic period of India’s history (159). He adds that V.D. Savarkar and K.B. Hedgewar's theories of Hindu past led to political organizations (the BJP and RSS) in future. He notes that secular and Hindu nationalists assign primary responsibility for partition on Muslim communalism; but, he argues:

[t]he Muslims of British India did not form a monolithic community with a single ‘communal’ identity or interest any more than the Hindus did. . . . Muslim politics had significant secular voices, most notable Jinnah’s own. . . . Jinnah saw the Muslims as forming a single community, or ‘nation’, but he envisaged an existence for them alongside a ‘Hindu nation’ within a united, confederal India. (162-63)

For Khilnani, the Hindus were more communal than the Muslims and they were more responsible for partition of India than the Muslims. He rejects the Indian Hindus’ claims of secularism.

Comparing Gandhi and Nehru on the idea of India as a nation, Khilnani describes that Gandhi was a firm believer, who perpetuated the idea of “territorial nation state”

(165) by invoking the masses to wear khadi to be linked by common forms of production, and treating both the Pakistan and India as one country. But, he argues, Gandhian vision receded with emerging Hindu and Muslim nationalisms and Gandhi is killed by Nathuram Godse, a Hindu (166). On the other side, he came with a different, secular and modern idea of India on the stage.

Glorifying Nehru's role in construction of India as a nation, Khilnani argues that Nehru believed in self-making, and discovered India through the medium of history. He adds that Nehru's vision of Indian unity in diversity is blurred because of many other factors as regional cultural groups demanded to create linguistic states. He praises Nehru, because according to him, Nehru was the person who provided an identity to the India and Indians. But, he observes that after the death of Nehru in 1964, all went in vain; the regional cultures and religious minorities started to demand more space and political powers:

[t]he national leadership had never invoked religious identities for electoral purposes. This taboo fell in the 1980s, and religion and caste sentiments were now routinely invoked in national elections. . . [t]he insecurities of different religious minorities were played on: Hindu minorities in Kashmir and Punjab, Muslims in Uttar Pradesh, all were invited to support congress if they wanted the state's protection and favours. The politics of secularism was interpreted to mean that the state was visibly solicitous of all religions. (183)

Khilnani shows his firm belief in Nehruvian India and finds faults with other leaders; he does not give much space to other social reforms (such as the abolition of princely states, efforts to remove poverty, and nationalization of banks) done by Mrs. Indira Gandhi and other leaders. He describes the period after Nehru as the period of crisis for congress as well as for Indian identity (184). It is notable that here he measures Indian identity with the congress. He goes on to describe that gradually the upper castes turned to Hindu nationalists; the intermediate to the backward classes; and the lowest to the Bahujans and Dalits. Thus, for him Indian identity is fragmented in 1980s in political terms and a single national party is not able to fill the whole political space (185). It is notable that, Khilnani is more critical about BJP, as he treats its idea of nation contrary to the Nehru's. Criticizing the BJP, he writes:

The BJP did not propose a return to a traditional Hindu polity, it had no Gandhian picture of a stateless India composed of village republics, nor did it even insist that all Indians must be Hindu. Its ambitions were more purely statist: to eradicate any legal and political recognition of cultural and religious differences. Although it described itself as a positive project of 'cultural nationalism', in fact the BJP was committed to a negative programme, designed to efface all the signs of non-Hinduness that are in fact so integral to India. (188-89)

A Close examination of the book reveals that Khilnani's project serves a political purpose to reject the Hindu nationalism and political establishment of the BJP. Rather, he likes to celebrate the Nehruvian Secular nationalism and the neo-liberal policies of the 1990s congress government.

Khilnani describes that the idea of Indian identity under the new economic policies, globalization, and capitalism is more complicated in 1990s. The range of identity has become vast from the regions to the international market; and there are numerous contesting claims about Indian identity. He argues that

[t]he idea of India has been constituted through struggles to balance these contrary pulls in a coherent political project, to respect the diversities of culture with a commitment to a common enterprises of development. . . [a]fter fifty years of an Indian state, the definition of who is an Indian is as passionately contested as ever. (194)

For him, India becomes a contested sign, a prize for the politicians, to which they define according to their requirements. Yet, he is hopeful in the present neo-liberal phase, which according to him, provides more chances to the Indians to choose and define their identity.

The last chapter titled "The Garb of Modernity" (196-208), is focused on the condition of India in-between the traditional India and new India as a part of international capital market. He argues that the modern state of India is fictive entity and it too maintains a stubborn reality (203). He asserts that in modern politics states must be trustworthy to all who live under them. He argues that the "[a]llegiance and identification in the modern world are profoundly political relationships" (204). He suggests that today India has two types of external challenges: military challenge and the pressures of the global economy; and suggests that Indian state henceforth has to make its way to the changing scenario (205). He adds that "[i]n entering the world as a state, India has had to cut its own modern garb. For Indians, this self-fashioning has brought discomforts, pain and risk. But it has brought them new liberties" (207). He welcomes India on the threshold of the neo-liberal international marketplace.

Khilnani claims to trace the modern history of India since the culmination of India's freedom struggle to the neo-liberal capitalism of 1990s. His nostalgia for Nehruvian socialist India is clear from his arguments and praise of Nehru and Nehruvian policies but he also welcomes India in the new world of international market; thus, his book serves the purpose of a bridge between the idea of India of old socialist days and the neo-liberal phase. He treats India not as a mystical or immemorial entity like Hindu cultural nationalists or romantics rather treats it merely as an idea 'constituted by politics' and the conditions of time. His political leanings are clearly firmed in congress, as he glorifies the role of congress in formation of India as a state; when he criticizes some of its leaders, his purpose is only to correct their policies. He rejects the Hindu nationalism of BJP and welcomes the neo-liberal policies started by the congress government in India and hopes for a better India through this period.



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