

THE BLOG

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There's A World Of Difference Between Patriotism And Nationalism

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Nationalism and patriotism are two words which are often used inter-changeably. This is incorrect since there is a world of difference between the two concepts, in spite of a few shared ideals. While patriotism fundamentally means affection for one's country and willingness to defend it, nationalism is a more extreme, unforgiving form of allegiance to one's country. As opposed to patriotism, which involves social conditioning and personal opinion, nationalism involves national identity and the belief that one's nation and/or its government is supreme.

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George Orwell explained this contrast in his essay "Notes on Nationalism".

"By 'nationalism' I mean first of all the habit of assuming that human beings can be classified like insects and that whole blocks of millions or tens of millions of people can be confidently labelled 'good' or 'bad'. But secondly--and this is much more important--I mean the habit of identifying oneself with a single nation or other unit, placing it beyond good and evil and recognising no other duty than that of advancing its interests. Nationalism is not to be confused with patriotism. By 'patriotism' I mean devotion to a particular place and a particular way of life, which one believes to be the best in the world but has no wish to force on other people. Patriotism is of its nature defensive, both militarily and culturally. Nationalism, on the other hand, is inseparable from the desire for power. The abiding purpose of every nationalist is to secure more power and more prestige, not for himself but for the nation or other unit in which he has chosen to sink his own individuality."

That is not to discount the impact of nationalism, though. Nationalism is a very strong instrument for uniting people, especially during wartime. The anti-colonialism struggles in Asia and Africa are an excellent example of this. In India, our freedom fighters led by Mahatma Gandhi and Subhas Chandra Bose used nationalism to unite the subcontinent's diverse demographics against British rule. However, while nationalism can unite people it must be noted that it unites people *against* other people. It was nationalism driven by religious identity and political

misgivings which caused the Partition of India in 1947. It was nationalism which was central to Hitler's philosophy and which led the Japanese to invade China in 1937 and precipitate the Second World War.

Nationalism focuses on the State while patriotism focuses on the people. John Dwyer enunciated this difference when he wrote:

"The patriot says, 'I love my country,' works for its good, and defends it if necessary--against enemies within and without. He strives and prays not primarily that God will bless his country, but that his country will bless God. The nationalist, meanwhile, says, 'My country is better than yours.' 'My country is the greatest there has ever been.' 'The greatest nation on God's green earth.' 'They hate my country because it is so good.'"

The Arab Spring of 2010 was buoyed by nationalism, catalysed by a pan-Arab sentiment. Many political analysts feel that for peace in the region, the Middle Eastern countries need to embrace a national identity over a religious or tribal one. It is much easier to negotiate between nations which have a codified set of amendable laws rather than between two religious entities inspired by unalterable and ambiguous religious laws.

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If history is any evidence, there is ample reason to believe that cultural and religious barriers are being weakened due to globalization and free market economics. This trend can be seen over time, particularly after the Industrial Revolution. After the ultra-nationalist movements during the World Wars, the fall of colonialism, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the rise of democratic governments around the world, we are connected to everyone else in the globe like never before.

It is better to love our country keeping in mind that democratic ideals are the most important. The term 'national identity' is difficult to define--it can mean a religious identity, an ethnic identity or even an ideological identity. The main shortcoming of nationalism lies in the fact that it can blind people. Love for one's country is imperative and necessary, but if this love becomes more important than Constitutional values or democratic ideals, it is misplaced.

I will conclude with another quote - this time by Rabindranath Tagore:

"[Nationalism] is the particular thing which for years has been at the bottom of India's troubles. It is my conviction that my countrymen will truly gain their India by fighting against the education which teaches them that a country is greater than the ideals of humanity."

https://www.huffingtonpost.in/sudhanva-d-shetty/patriotism-nationalism-a_b_9354822.html

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