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Nationalism and Internationalism in India

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Abstract

Nationalism in India was born out of the bondage of a country subjected to foreign rule and the internal loss of self-confidence that went with such a rule. The freedom struggle that followed was understood to be Indian nationalism, not Hindu or Muslim or any kind of religious or other nationalism primarily aimed to ensure the welfare of all citizens and their entitlement to justice and human rights. The present paper examines this evolution of nationalism in India as a freedom struggle against the British and then as a democratic process to give every Indian a voice in decision-making in free India. But what has been noticed over the years is a steady regression in secularism where individual rights were compromised, then as a struggle for power in party circles and finally in the name of religion. To the extent that today's nationalism in India is perceived more as an imposed 'feeling'--- a feeling that has equally impacted the country's image outside home; despite promising strides to transform India from a 'balancing' to a 'leading' power internationally. Being normative in nature the paper borrows citation mostly from secondary sources of information, including books, journals and e-sources for current affairs. It tries to incorporate two formal discussions on Nationalism and International status of India which is part of the curriculum at UG-level in college/universities.

Keywords:1 Unity in Diversity,2 Democracy, 3 Multi-party system,4 Religious,5 Nationalism

[Nationalism in pre-independent India](#)

It is said that India's tryst with nationalism is intimately connected to the anti-colonial movement as people began discovering their unity in their struggle against the British. According to Sarkar (1982)ⁱ the movement expanded in both geographical and social terms in successive waves--- the focus having shifted from Bengal, Maharashtra and Punjab in the extremist phase to new areas like Gujarat, Bihar and Central provinces in the Gandhian and

from city intellectuals to small-town lower middle classes, large sections of the peasantry and influential bourgeois groups. There was corresponding evolution of swadeshi movement, boycott of foreign goods, Gandhian satyagraha and constructive village work. By the 1930s Kisan Sabhas and trade unions were fast becoming a real force in many parts of the country and popular movements were emerging in many of the princely states. What all this amounted to was the irreversible historical fact of the entry of the masses into active political life. “Nationalism,” says Romila Thapar (2016)ⁱⁱ was “understood to be Indian nationalism and not Hindu or Muslim or any kind of religious or other nationalism.” There was an axiomatic belief that the primary concern of nationalism was to ensure the welfare of all its citizens and their entitlement to human rights. This required economic growth and social justice as fundamental to establishing a nation. Societies that emerged from colonial experience have known more than a single form of nationalism; in India two such forms were significant—first, inclusive nationalism dating back to the 19th century uniting diverse groups and strictly opposed to colonial imperialism. It envisaged a broad Indian identity and was sometimes referred to as ‘secular nationalism’ to distinguish it from other forms of nationalism. Second, imagined identities as a basis for political mobilization. The forced alliance of religion and ideology led to a ‘redefinition of religion through the imposition of conformity and rejection of diversity.’ Jawaharlal Nehru in his ‘Discovery of India’ (2004)ⁱⁱⁱ said: “India is a geographical and economic entity, a cultural unity amidst diversity, a bundle of contradictions held together by strong but invisible threads.... She is a myth and an idea, a dream and a vision, and yet very real and present and pervasive. Rabindranath Tagore (2012) in his piece ‘Nationalism’ argued thus: “India is too vast in its area and too diverse in its races. It is many countries packed in one geographical receptacle. It is just the opposite of what Europe truly is, namely one country made into many. Europe in its culture and growth has had the advantage of the strength of the many as well as strength of the one. India, on the contrary, being naturally many yet adventitiously one.... has tolerated differences of races from the first and this spirit of toleration has acted all through her history.”^{iv} At the Maharashtra Provincial Conference of 1928 Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose called for a coalition between labour and nationalism and the transformation of India into an independent federal republic. He warned Indian nationalists not to become ‘a queer mixture of political democrats and social conservatives, arguing: “If we want to make India really great we must build up a political democracy on the pedestal of a democratic society. Privileges based on birth, caste or creed should go and equal opportunities should be thrown open to all irrespective of caste, creed or religion. The status of women should also be raised and women

should be trained to take larger and a more intelligent interest in public affairs.” Dr. BR Ambedkar at the Bombay legislature clarified his notion of our nation, India. He said: “I do not like what some people say that we are Indians first and Hindus afterward or Muslims afterwards. I am not satisfied with that.... I do not want our loyalty as Indians should be in the slightest way affected by any competitive loyalty whether that loyalty arises out of our religion, out of our culture or out of our language. I want all people to be Indians first, Indians last and nothing else but Indians.”M.K Gandhi in *India of My Dreams*” said: “I shall strive for a constitution which will release India from all thralldom and patronage, and give her, if need be the right to sin. I shall work for an India in which the poorest shall feel that it is their country in whose making they have an effective voice; an India in which there shall be no high class and low class of people; an India in which all communities shall live in perfect harmony. .. Women will enjoy the same right as men. Since we shall be at peace with all rest of the world, neither exploiting, nor being exploited, we should have the smallest army imaginable.”

Nationalism in post-Independent& Contemporary India

India’s freedom struggle culminated in the transfer of power in 1947. For most Indians independence was won on that day, albeit at the painful but affordable price of partition and a country still being carved up by lines drawn by the British. The trauma of partition meant that the first priority of state managers in India was to set up a strong central government; a state structure capable of ensuring unity. “We the people of India solemnly resolved to constitute the country into a sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic Republic. India adopted democracy because that was its heritage and that was how she showed her respect to the national leaders who fought for ‘one’ India. “India succeeded as a democracy,” says Surjit S. Bhalla “because it was the only political system compatible with a heterogeneous population. As a democratic process gives, at least in theory, every group and each individual a chance to participate in decision-making--- a small chance that solidifies their expectations and perpetuates nationalism.” During Nehru’s long tenure in office, the country completed three national parliamentary elections within 15 years of independence, setting India firmly on the path of democratic development. By the mid 1950s the crucial question of the political structure of the Indian state had been resolved and the process of organising India as a union of relatively autonomous ethnolinguistic states—the broad principle being that significant language groups should have their own states—was set in motion. This process proceeded

incrementally between 1947 and 1949 by incorporating several hundred nominally independent feudal principalities known as 'princely states' into India. Also in the mid-1950s an important "modernization" was enacted by Parliament with the reform of Hindu family law on inheritance, marriage, divorce and adoption. But if the Congress Party of Nehru's India was a guarantor of stability and democratic development, it was also a force of profound social and political conservatism. PM Nehru's administration "was based on a coalition of urban and rural interest united behind an urban-oriented industrial strategy. "Change is essential," Nehru wrote, "but continuity is also necessary." "The future has to be built on the foundations laid in the past and the present," he declared. Undaunted by the task of nation-building Nehru went about preparing plans for changes in every field. India having chosen the path of 'rapid evolution' instead of 'violent revolution' Nehru launched ambitious plans in several fields which Rajni Kothari described as the challenge of simultaneous change. "No revolution can be complete," Nehru said, "if it is only political." The oppressed and the exploited sections of the society deserved special consideration and Nehru felt that economic planning could go a long way in alleviating their hardship. About 70 percent of laborers in India were employed primarily in agriculture and less than 10 percent in manufacturing. The setting up of the Planning Commission and the launching of the community development were landmarks in national development. Nehru along with his trusted Cabinet established other major institutions like the University Grants Commission, the Atomic Energy Commission and the Defence Science Organisation. The Avadi Congress Session of 1955 saw Nehru giving India a clear direction in achieving the economic and social objectives. Speaking on the Scientific Policy Resolution in Parliament Nehru said that the aim was "to make Indian people and even Government of India conscious of scientific work and the necessity for it." Building heavy industries and accelerating the pace of development on the farm and in the factory received top priority. He felt that "it is on the basis of steel and power that countries are industrialised and advanced." Simultaneously he worked for 'trained personnel' to effectively implement the policy. The growth of the public sector was vital though the acceptance of mixed economy underlined the importance of the private sector. Nehru did realise the utility of promoting small scale and cottage industries, though the dice was tilted heavily in favour of the public sector. Nehru was opposed to factories concentrating on mere consumer goods. "You must go to the root and build up the structure of industrial growth" he exhorted. Iron, steel, coal, electricity, heavy chemicals, etc., therefore received top priority for investment. Nehru was convinced that modern technology should come in a big way to help India solve many of her chronic problems. His democratic

socialism was ‘a growing, dynamic conception’ something which he felt would not be rigid. It should be something that would suit the genius and requirements of the Indian people. The launching of the Panchayati Raj was without doubt a great step forward in taking democracy meaningfully to the people in the rural areas. His commitment to democracy was borne out by the respect he showed to the opposition, the Press and those with whom he disagreed. Two of his speeches made during the last months of his life referred to the threats to national solidarity and unity. He pointed out that variety should not affect unity nor should religion, caste and language disrupt national unity. From the Buddha to Gandhi, he observed, India’s heritage conveyed to the world the lesson of living harmoniously together. Democracy required the spirit of tolerance and cooperation and he firmly believed in India’s capacity for sustaining the democratic spirit.

Nehru, in short, was committed to the modernization of the Indian ‘nation’ and – notwithstanding his defence of the public/private divide – of Indian bodies. To the extent that the Constitution of India bears his impress, and it clearly does in its broad attachment to ‘liberty, development and directed social change’ in the Fundamental Rights guaranteed by the Constitution and the Directive Principles of State Policy which are ‘the conscience of the Constitution’. The Fundamental Rights of the Constitution seek to guarantee a person’s negative freedoms: freedom from arbitrary arrest, freedom of speech and so on. The Directive Principles ‘aimed at making the Indian masses free in the positive sense’ (p. 51). It is here, among the Directive Principles, that we find references to the promise of social and economic justice. Under Article 39 the state is enjoined to:

direct its policy to securing (a) that the citizens, men and women equally, have the right to an adequate means of livelihood; (b) that the ownership and control of the resources of the community are so distributed as best to serve the common good; (c) that the operation of the economic system does not result in the concentration of wealth and means of production to the common detriment; (d) that there is equal pay for equal work for both men and women.

And, under article 43, it is required ‘to secure... to all workers, agricultural, industrial or otherwise, work, a living wage, [and] conditions of work ensuring a decent standard of life’.

Yet Nehru’s critics point out his constitutional democracy based on universal suffrage did not emerge from people’s demand; it was given to them by the political choice of an intellectual elite. According to Sunil Khilnani (1998: 34)^{vi} the Constituent Assembly was a remarkably unrepresentative body; around 300 men elected on on the provincial legislatures was

overwhelmingly dominated by upper-caste and Brahmin elites within Congress. There was no organised representation of India's Muslims, no presence of Hindu communal groups and after 1948, no socialist forces.

The Constitution endowed the Union with a steady political identity but it implanted two fundamental lines of tension in India's politics. The first was between the powers of the centre and those of the provinces that constituted the federal Union. Pre-independence nationalist had promised considerable autonomy to the provinces but the actual circumstances after 1947 encouraged the Constituent Assembly to retain the extensive central powers inherited from the Raj. Military powers and emergency provisions for constitutional dictatorship were concentrated at the Centre; so too were fiscal powers to print money or borrow commercially. The second enduring tension concerned citizenship. The grant of universal rights to all was offset by a recognition of historical injustice suffered by particular communities—the untouchables. A principle of positive discrimination was introduced in the form of a policy of 'reservation' of government jobs and educational places for members of these groups. "The Constitution," says Khilnani (1998: 36), "established a language of community rights in a society where the liberal language of individual rights and equality was compromised. Determining which groups and interests were eligible for the benefit of 'reservation' gave local politicians immense scope for political manipulation. The opposition gradually used this weapon to incite fierce contest around caste entitlement. The Constitution and the politics it sanctioned, reinforced community identities rather than sustaining a sense of common citizenship based on individual rights.

Just five years after Nehru's death the Nehruvian design of modern India seemed to lie in ruins. The Congress party, Nehru's instrument for the modernization of India, and the unity of which he had seen as being more or less synonymous with the unity of the country, was shattered in 1969 as a result of the struggles for power between his daughter, Indira Gandhi, and the old leadership of the party.^{vii} The new Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri (1964-66) died prematurely trying to live down the legacy of his illustrious predecessor. Indira Gandhi, came to office to confront a country in disarray and a party wreathing in mistrust and factional disputes. The opposition for the first time openly attacked the basic principles established under Nehru's leadership; the left calling for constitutional change in order to implement socialist policies and the right rejecting most of the programs of social transformation.

The Congress system of coalition and accommodation with a strong centre and strong governments in the states was no longer functioning and from this time there developed a bifurcation between national and state level politics. According to Rudolph and Rudolph “Congress party leaders confronted a complex and less manageable political world than that of the Nehru era and the Shastri interregnum when policy issues and factional struggles at the centre and in the states could be settled within the party.” On one hand Mrs. Gandhi used her populism to fast forward India’s program for self-sufficiency in food production, nationalisation of banks and promotion of a welfare state through the slogan, ‘*Garibi Hatao*’. On the other hand her image was tainted by the declaration of Emergency between 1975-77 and the authoritarian nature of the Congress-dominated centre in handling the problems in Punjab, Assam and in Kashmir. According to Sugato Bose and Ayesha Jalal^{viii} (2004: 186), negotiations between the Indian state and Sikh representatives (seeking separate statehood-Khalistan) were fitful; agreements were not implemented and Punjab was embroiled in waves of terror and counter-terror. A deep psychological alienation was caused by the Indian army’s assault on Golden Temple in June 1984, which resulted in the assassination of Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards in October 1984 and the anti-Sikh riots of November 1984. In her gruesome death Indira Gandhi gave life to the ‘national unity and integrity’ theme she had been working on as a political strategy for retaining power. Rajiv Gandhi, her son, began his five-year term as Prime Minister with a great deal of goodwill across the country. He was instrumental in taking some constructive moves, as he replaced his mother’s strategy of confrontation with a policy of negotiation and accommodation. Accords were reached with the Assamese, the Punjabis, the Mizo National Front and with disgruntled factions in Jammu and Kashmir. On the economic front he ran a halfway house between Nehruvian socialism and the promise of a hi-tech India of the 21st century. This involved lessening government controls and opening up the economy to free-market competition, selling off state companies to private shareholders and bringing in foreign investment. But the gravest and costliest political mistake of his government was to flirt with Hindu communalism while appeasing the Muslim community in the country for electoral success. The dominant-party system of the Nehru-Gandhi era that led to the formation of Congress majority governments gradually gave way to regionalized multiparty system and coalition governments. The Janata Party, which held the largest bloc of seats in the 545-member Lok Sabha, became the nucleus of India's first coalition government. Each of the four national elections since then had led to coalition governments in which parties based in single states have been key to electoral success. This shift, from dominant-party to

multiparty politics and the rise of state parties at the expense of national parties have ensured that multiple diversities—religious, caste, linguistic, cultural and regional parties are not merely represented, but that they have access to power at the national level.

A third shift took place in the mid-90s as India witnessed the rise of Hindu nationalism in the country. One important reason for the rise of majoritarian politics was the controversial ‘reservation’ policy in favor of the Other Backward Classes in addition to already existing beneficiaries of the same—the Scheduled castes and the Scheduled Tribes. The Bharatiya Janata Party (torch-bearers of Hindu-ness or Hindu nationalism) argued that the *Mandal Report* encouraged caste and class conflict, weakening the solidarity of all Hindus as members of one culture. The Hindutva ideologues did not have any problem with caste, but with what some of them called ‘casteism’—referring to various forms of caste conflicts such as Dalits asserting themselves and demanding quotas. Casteism was harmful because it divided Hindu society. Their argument found much appeal among the upper caste Indians or those put under the ‘general’ category whose dreams of appointment to government positions or those wishing to teach in a university were shattered by the reservation policy. These nationalists promised a different route to modernization. The BJP did not reject economic liberalisation but its Swadeshi alternative suggested that India should become ‘a light unto itself’ rather than emulating western values and ways of life. It signalled its opposition to ‘pseudo-secularism’ as it saw “Indian secularism as an euphemism to appease the Muslims.” The so-called secular composite nationalism is neither nationalism nor secularism but only a compromise with communalism towards those who demand (a) price even for their lip-loyalty to the country.

India under the moderate Hindu ideologues were keen on enhancing its hard power capabilities. It conducted a series of nuclear tests, adopted a ‘carrot and stick’ approach towards Pakistan and pragmatically positioned itself towards the United States. There were sound policies on the domestic front and then Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee spoke about ‘unity in diversity,’ stressing that India has always been secular. He reiterated his party’s dictum *Saarve dharma sambhav* (respect to all religions) and appeasement of none. The radical Hindu ideologues of contemporary India, used the slogan of better days ahead to appeal broadly to Indian voters, but in reality the party has made every effort to promote Hindu nationalism in its first/second term in office. It put a ban on cow slaughter; gave air to the *ghar wapsi* (literally, homecoming) movement in Uttar Pradesh, aimed at converting minorities to Hinduism (on the presumption that they were all originally Hindus

who had been manipulated into abandoning the faith); history books had been rewritten to downplay Islamic contributions to Indian history and culture; the demonetisation policy with an aim to crack down on counterfeit money and funds flowing to religious terrorist organisations; the National Register of Citizens to curb on illegal immigration; nullifying Article 370 by bifurcating Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh into two Union territories now under direct central control. It put national security top on its agenda with an aim to secure Hindu lives. In the aftermath of the Pulwama attack, Prime Minister Narendra Modi confirmed that his government “conducted surgical strikes and air strikes against Pakistanbased terrorists to send our message to the world that India is well capable of defending itself.”^{ix} It also went ahead with a kind of ‘imposed nationalism’ by ordering universities to fly the national flag high and cinema halls to play the national anthem before all film screenings. “The state and judiciary,” says Ramchandra Guha (2016: XI)^x “wish to impose a feeling of national loyalty and so do the ruling party and its affiliates. This forced, homogenizing form of nationalism, is utterly counter to the pluralistic, voluntary love of country that the composer of the national anthem had himself advocated.”

But in a effort to promote Hindu nationalism the NDA government has inexcusably kept the real issues of *vikas* (progress) at bay: the promise of job creation by 2022; filling the backlog of surplus workers; the promise of stopping corruption and red tapism in government jobs; addressing income losses of poorer people in the villages; and the One Nation, One tax policy which has excruciated the condition of the have-nots in the country. The much-hyped ‘Make in India’ program like its UPA predecessor—National Manufacturing Policy of 2011 has so far been a failure in increasing the manufacturing percentage of GDP and *Skill India* has missed on skill training targets and has been badly implemented with poor employment outcomes.

One undergraduate student of Political Science while making her presentation on ‘Nationalism in India’ sadly pointed out:

Worrying unemployment rates ,a sluggish economy exacerbated by demonetization, rising petrol prices and prices of daily goods, exploitation of farmers and those associated with the agricultural sector, these are certain issue areas that remain important stumbling blocks to the narrative of nationalism in India.

I think now the people of India feels for India only for 2 days out of 365 days ,the 26th of January and 15th of August. Even the role of media has deteriorated with time ,they are more focused on their profit than delivering important/uncensored news to common people.

India today is gradually drifting away from its vows of secularism and it is cashing on a development program that many fears threatens to bring more misery to its people, forcing them to be eternally fixed in their weakness with very little choice to go after a nominally 'good' life.

Internationalism and India

Like nationalism, internationalism in India has moved from its rhetoric of Non-Alignment to a more proactive strategy of NAM 2. NAM 2 is a multi-dimensional and proactive approach of India to tackle regional and global problems. As a rising power, New Delhi needs a foreign policy that projects its foreign policy and its future possibilities. It should not restrict its external policy to a narrow and proximate horizon; but refine its policy with the mixture of hard and soft power to combat the challenges of the 21st century. India initiated its Neighborhood First/Act East Policy since the mid-2014. This has infused a new drive in the country's relation with most South and Southeast Asian countries even though Pakistan remains an outlier. The relationship between India and China resembles a 'paradoxical' situation with two different narratives that dominates New Delhi's psyche. One is held by the hard realists who see China as inimically hostile to India and does everything to oppose her. These realists hold the view that China has built an encircling 'String of Pearls' of naval bases to dominate the Indian Ocean and it suffers from a dilemma of interpretation with regard to India joining the Quad along with US, Japan and Australia in the Indo-Pacific. Moreover all of India's neighbors are on board China's Belt and Road Initiative but India views the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor as a two-edged sword of violating its territorial sovereignty and one aimed at hurting its economy. China also opposes India's bid for membership to the UN Security Council and the Sino-Indian stand-off at the frontier areas are serious areas of concern. An alternative view is that India is one of China's priorities but not its dominant concern and elements of contestation, competition and cooperation are different shades to this relationship. China views India as a 'swing state' in its deeper rivalry with US and Japan.

With US, India hails its growing diplomatic and economic ties with the country. The two sides although having issues over trade, climate change, immigration policy, are keen on cementing their military ties. The Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), which allows the Indian and American forces to use each other's facilities was signed in 2016. The Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA), which allows the United States to transfer communication equipment to India for the secure

transmission of data and real-time information, was signed during the inaugural “two-plus-two” talks in 2018. During US President Donald Trump’s visit to India in 2018, he was all praise for US-India relationship and his fondness for PM Narendra Modi. The two leaders announced their plans to work together on counternarcotics and mental health. India agreed to purchase \$3 bn in US military equipment and US based oil company Exxon Mobil announced a deal with state-owned Indian Oil Corporation.

India no longer discriminates between Russia, America, Israel, Iran, and the ASEAN countries (although restrictions on Chinese investment remain significant, driven by security considerations). It is formally willing to do business with all, even those in its neighbourhood, through the South Asia Preferential Trade Arrangement (SAPTA). New Delhi is currently engaged in promoting economic development in Africa, securing oil fields in Central Asia, promoting trade and nuclear cooperation with the US, receiving remittances from its 3.5 million workers in the Gulf, and acting as Israel’s biggest arms market.

India’s pragmatism in foreign policy is also visible in its growing involvement with multiple formal and informal multilateral groups, including its diaspora. India has become a full member of the Russia- and China-led Shanghai Cooperation Organization, while New Delhi has promoted the idea of a community of littoral states adjacent to the Bay of Bengal. Under PM Modi’s watch, India hosted the BRICS Summit in 2016. This balancing of multiple networks is the clearest expression of India’s commitment to a multipolar global order premised on the notion that a world with multiple centers of power is a guarantor of strategic space and autonomy for India.

But as the saying goes that a country’s foreign policy is an extension of its domestic politics. Lofty rhetoric notwithstanding, India has been less successful at enhancing its hard power capabilities—failing to undertake significant economic reforms at home or plug gaps in its defence capacities. Certainly India’s effort to transform itself from a ‘balancing’ to a leading power will run aground in the absence of economic prosperity, its rising inflation and falling growth, rising unemployment and crushing rural/urban poverty; its communal divisions and its increasingly fractured politics that erodes its moral basis of a secular, liberal country—the basis on which it championed the cause of Asian unity and fought against any discrimination on the basis of race, religion or color. In an effort to be everything to everyone, India is criticized both at home and abroad for lacking vision and a unified strategy of its role in the world.

One undergraduate student of Political Science reflecting on ‘*Internationalism and India*’ pointed out: *Foreigners, Indian settled abroad look up to India for spiritual and cultural emancipation. Life in India is very much different from others as it has a large number of social, economical, political, ideological communities. India, due to some internal factors, lately has been unable to be present and active for the countries that seek help from her. It is not the first one to come up and help others even when it can. Due to the kind of politics that runs the country, the promptness in the aids offered by India is missing.*

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to quote Amartya Sen (2012)^{xi}, who argued in his book titled, ‘*Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny*,’ that many of the puzzling and tragic features of social confusion arise from a common tendency of not paying sufficient attention to the fact that any human beings belongs to many different groups and thus has many disparate identities, none of which can be taken to be the person’s only identity. We are all individually involved in various associations and affiliations in different contexts, in our own respective lives, arising from our birth, our background, our social activities, or the company we keep. The same person can be a British citizen, of Indian origin, a Muslim..., a non-vegetarian, a linguist, a poet..... All these identities can exist together... only when the basic plurality of identities is adequately appreciated and taken on board. The plurality for which India was distinguished from the rest, as Rabindranath Tagore in one of his famous poems about India wrote: “No one knows at whose call so many streams of men flowed in restless tides from places unknown and were lost in one sea—here Aryan and non-Aryan; Dravidian, the bands of Saka and the Hunas and Pathan and Mogul, have become combined in one body.”^{xii}

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