

Bhutan 1960s to 1980s: From Civic to Ethnic Nationalism

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1. INTRODUCTION

Nationalism is an ideas and movement based on the promotion of the interests of a particular nation, with the intention of gaining and maintaining the national sovereignty of homeland. It holds that each nation should rule itself, free from outside interference (self-determination), and it is the only rightful source of political power (popular sovereignty). It further talks about to maintain a single national identity based on shared social characteristics such as culture, language, religion, politics, and belief in a shared singular history and to support national unity or solidarity. Nationalism, therefore, seeks to preserve and encourage a nation's traditional culture, and cultural revivals have been associated with nationalist movements.

There are many intellectuals and politicians in the world who has divided the nationalism into two categories. On the one hand, the Western European countries approaching the post-modern age, in which the conception of a nation-state would become outdated and replaced by a new multinational and multicultural entity. On the other hand, 'backward' neighbors in the East have been said to be prone to succumb to a resurgence of nationalism. However, to understand the type of nationalism, there exist nearly two different forms of nationalism: the enlightened Western, that is supportive of democracy, and the backward Eastern, that is an obstacle to any genuinely democratic society.

There is a various definition of a nation, which lead to different strands of nationalism. Historians, sociologists, and anthropologists have debated different types of nationalism, especially since the 1930s (Louis, 1936; 726). Generally, the most common way of classifying nationalism has been to describe movements as having either 'civic' or 'ethnic' nationalist characteristics. This distinction was popularized by Hans Kohn (1944) in the 1950s, who described "civic" nationalism as "Western" and more democratic and depicting "ethnic" nationalism as "Eastern" and undemocratic.

In the 1970s, the English historian John Plamenatz also argued that Eastern Europe's Slavic nations were doomed to adhere to Eastern nationalism, mostly illiberal (Plamenatz, 1997; 29). He claimed that German and Italian nationalism's underlying nature is Western nationalism because it was already culturally strong and relatively liberal in the 19th century. Thus, Germany and Italy were considered an integral part of the West (Western Europe). The Eastern European Slavic peoples had always been backward and were impeded in their development by traditions that were of little help in addressing modern times' needs¹.

¹ When Germans and Italians fought to establish their modern national states, they were already culturally prepared. However, the East's people had created both: their states and their nations "drawn gradually into a civilization alien to them... they have had, as it were, to make themselves a new, create national identities for themselves. These people were adopted alien civilization-were historically marked as Eastern, meaning virtually non-European; their relationship with the West was an ambivalent one (Plamenatz, 1997: 30).

2. Civic Nationalism

Civic nationalism defines the nation as an association of people who identify themselves as belonging to the nation, who have equal and shared political rights, and faithfulness to related political actions (Kate, 2001; 391). According to Kohn (1944), Western nationalism is a rational and universal concept of political liberty and man's rights, looking towards the city of the future (Kohn, 1944; 574). The principle of nationalism is that the nation is not based on common ethnic ancestry but is a political entity whose core identity is not ethnicity.

Civil nationalism claims that individuals need a secure national identity to have a meaningful life; without that security, there is the inherent risk of fragmentation within society. Unlike exclusive forms of nationalism, membership in a nation required choice rather than a predetermined ethnic identity. Furthermore, democratic regimes need national identities to function smoothly.

Civic nationalism believed in the sense of shared values amongst its citizens, such as openness and inclusivity. It also follows the liberal ideas such as public participation, tolerance, and individuals' rights. Given its overly liberal character, civic nationalism facilitates cultural diversity while rejecting those organizations' xenophobic chauvinism further to the right of the political spectrum. Earnest Renan (1882) and J.S. Mill (1861) have often advocated early liberal nationalism.

Civic nationalism believes that nationalism is specifically associates with the progressive and supportive development of liberal democracy. The liberal defenders of nationalism are mostly indebted to the nation's original Enlightenment ideal as an agency of democratic power that challenged the old suppressive order of the 'ancient regime.' French and American nationalisms have traditionally regarded as the epitome of civic nationalism. They followed the political ideas of revolutionaries who fought for the 'sovereignty of the people' (Auer, 1997; 2). Thus, the community's membership was defined primarily in political terms; civic virtues were more critical for the new republic than ethnicity, common culture, or even common language. The only means of exclusion were the territorial boundaries of a country.

3. Ethnic Nationalism

Ethnic nationalism is closely connected with the concept of belongingness, being a part of the imagined community of what Anderson says. Ethnic nationalism, also known as ethno-nationalism, is a form of nationalism defined in terms of ethnicity. The concept has built on the understanding that nations are defined by a shared heritage, which usually includes a common language, shared faith, and common ethnic ancestry. It also includes ideas of culture shared between members of the group and with their ancestors.

George Schopflin states that there is a long tradition of using or abusing nationalism for political purposes in Central and Eastern Europe, which is the opposite of nationhood. Furthermore, nationalism in Central and Eastern Europe shows characteristics that are 'in many respects substantially different from Western Europe (for both historically and contemporary reasons).' According to Schopflin, the most crucial factor influencing current developments in the traditional backwardness of these societies, a consequence of which is 'the weakness of the civic elements of nationhood' (Schopflin, 1997; 49).

According to Schopflin, what would happen in ethnic nationalism, the weakness of the civic elements of nationhood, and ethnicity's emphasis had several results with further consequences of their own. In Central and Eastern Europe, the politically conscious sub-elites were small, certainly well under 10 percent of the population, and they were not politically masters of their fate because of alien, imperial rule. By and large, the sub-elites divided in their attitude to the empire. Some accepted the benefits, whether personal or communal, to derived from service, others did not; loyalty to the dynasty was, in some cases, given willingly, in others only grudgingly or with resentment.

In Western Europe, the protagonists of the new doctrine of nationalism, the intellectuals, defined and proclaimed their ideas in relatively complex societies, in which the contest for power took place among various social groups (the declining representative of the old order, the rising entrepreneurs and emerging working class). As a result, the power diffused, and the intellectual could not establish a preeminent position for themselves. Whether in Central and Eastern Europe, however, the older order was more substantial, and societies were far weaker, so intellectual came to dominate the scene and acquired an authority that they deployed in the nationhood (Schopflin, 1997; 53).

Ethnic nationalism is usually contrasting with civic nationalism, where the nation's membership demanded the common descent or heredity, which articulated in terms of common blood or kinship. In civic nationalism, a nation ideally conceives of a voluntary association, where the latter believed in a community of fate (Smith, 1991; 13). Hence, nation-states with strong traditions of ethnic nationalism tend to define nationality or citizenship by *jus sanguinis* (the law of blood, descent from a person of that nationality), and countries with strong traditions of civic nationalism tend to define nationality or citizenship by *jus soli* (the law of the soil, birth within the nation-state). Ethnic nationalism is, therefore, seen as exclusive, while civic nationalism tends to be inclusive. Rather than allegiance to common civic ideals and cultural traditions, ethnic nationalism emphasizes common descent narratives.

More generally, it seems to state whether ancient and modern, with the primary role in creating ethnic communities or nations. Indeed, the state and political action play essential roles in crystallizing ethnic sentiments and national identities, notably through protracted warfare and territorialization. Nevertheless, the various factors are associates with ethnic ties and national sentiments, like ecological, social, and primarily cultural and symbolic, such as religion, language, and the arts.

4. Bhutan from Civic to Ethnic Nationalism

Among the two types of nationalism (civil and ethnic) discussed above. The civic or western nationalism is a more unifying force that brings together people of diverse backgrounds at the price of subordinating their ethnic identities to the larger territorial unit dominated by the secular state, which is also very inclusive and liberal in form. Whereas non-western or ethnic nationalism is more hostile, illiberal, oppressive, and dangerous, it is more irrational and mystical that looked back to the past in search of its roots and the lost folk-soul or folk-spirit blueprint for its regeneration.

Since the history of two types of nationalism is about the idea of nationalism practices in Western and Eastern and Central Europe. Apart from its geographical limitation, this particular type of nationalism can be practice beyond its border. Significantly, in the context of Bhutan, during the 1960s, the trend of modernization under the reign of late King Jigme Dorje Wangchuk can be seen as the advocate of civic nationalism. After giving up its isolationist policy or nature, the country focused more on infrastructural development and public welfare irrespective of ethnic background. The nationalist movement of the 1970s to 1980s is based on homogenization, has been contradictory and more fitting into the second definition of nationalism, i.e., ethnic nationalism. The people from *Ngalung* elite group of Bhutan tried to assimilate the existing ethnic community under the old age *Drukpa* tradition in Bhutan is associated with the Shabdrung Nawang Namgyal, who was the founder The of Bhutan in the 17th century, who unified Bhutan culturally and politically and he belongs or followed the *Drukpa*² sect of Buddhism.

Until the 1950s, Bhutan followed the isolationist policy; the monarchy was its sole power and maintained a socio-economic status quo. On the one hand, Bhutan's neighbor countries were towards the wave of modernization and development. The country kept their society isolated, backward, underdeveloped, and

² They started questioning the ethnic background and blood relation of the population to attain the country's citizenship.

untouched by the modernization trend. Their economy was based on pastoral, non-monetized, and bartered, and affords made to keep the country isolated from the modernization and development, as far as possible (Upreti, 2004; 60).

Before the reign of the third King (Jigme Dorji Wangchuk), Bhutan was a medieval state in its character. The most prominent medieval Bhutan characteristics were religion in society, where its spiritual ethos primarily informed the country's culture, art, governance, and worldview, and religion played an essential role in both state administration and ordinary lives (Phuntsho. 2013; 531). After establishing a hereditary monarchy in 1910, the theory of separation of power between the spiritual (Dharma raja) and temporal head (*Penlop*) has abolished. Bhutan thus shifted from theocracy to the sovereignty of King. They had established a highly centralized governance system, where the administration run on an autocratic feudal pattern (Sinha, 2004; 218). The landlords controlled the bulk of the state's income and sent the residue to the government treasury. They introduced the patrimonial system³.

Moreover, the elites or royal family members were assigned higher positions in the administration. There were no trained people, and the illiteracy rate was almost 100%⁴.

The government was so scattered and isolated; the administrative responsibilities were over to a few officials. The capital moved with the Maharaja (King), and nobody bothered a great deal about anything. The ethnic demarcation was strictly maintained, where the Nepalese population or the southerner were not allowed to settle in the northern part of the country. The inter-caste marriage between the Nepalese and *Drukpas* was very rare. The demography of the country has also been designed based on the ethnic community. *Ngalongs* are dominant in western and northern Bhutan, including *Thimpu* (Bhutan's winter capital), whereas *Scarchopas* are dominant in eastern Bhutan and *Lhotshampas* in southern Bhutan.

However, the attitude of Bhutan's monarchy underwent a fundamental change, especially after 1952. The ideas of nation-building and planned modernization based on the perception of civic nationalism had begun in Bhutan when the third King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck came into power. After a year of ascending the throne, the first thing he did was opening the Tshogdu (National Assembly) in Punakha to share the decision-making process, which gave the people of Bhutan a platform to voice their concern (Phuntsho. 2013; 566).

He opened the *Tshogdu* (National Assembly)⁵ in Punakha to share decision-making with the country's elders. It gave the people a platform to voice their concerns and the King to share his aims and plan (Phuntsho, 2014; 566). Earlier, the kings secured political power and now redistributed and shared with the relevant groups. It helped the King to mobilize the people and create an efficient governing system. In 1965, he took another step by setting up the *Lodoe Tshogde* or Royal Advisory Council of eight members to advise the King and government. The council also serves as a body of the review and often deliberated the judicial appeals made to the King.

Earlier the decision-making process in Bhutan was a very narrow one, involving only a small number of officials, especially in the governmental establishment (Rose, 1977; 213). However, the new system demanded new skills and capacities, which forced the traditional elites either to acquire the required skills and capacities themselves or to recruit from the excluded social groups who have such skills. Thus, by the 1960s, some of the

³ Mostly get their bride either from the royal family of Sikkim or from Tibet.

⁴ Schools were unattended because teachers were not paid and had to find other means for survival

⁵ The Assembly has some 138 members, including the representatives of the people, monastics, and government. *Tshogdu* possesses the power to remove the King with a two-third majority in favor of the next succession.

top officials in administration came from non-elites families with little or nothing to lose from introducing cautious programs of change and modernization.

In 1965, the Royal government had decided to depersonalize the bureaucratic procedures, particularly concerning appointments and promotions. The National Assembly, for instance, has assigned a role in the process through its power to approve the appointment or removal of ministers who head various departments of the government. So far, most of the ministers have come directly from the bureaucracy, and their appointment to ministerial status placed them at the top of the administrative system. However, making them responsible to the Assembly could serve to expand and depersonalize the appointment process to some extent. The King has also formulated the institutionalization of the administrative system by enacting rules of procedures that are merit-based and very specific in defining the criteria on the personal matter (Rose, 1977; 218)⁶.

The third King's reign also saw two other socio-political developments that would significantly change Bhutan's social structure and demography. The first was the emancipation of bonded laborers. Serfdom has officially abolished, and the former serfs were given land by the state to start new lives (Phuntsho, 2014; 568). The former social order was maintained a hierarchical structure based on social class and familial descent has discarded in favor of a generally egalitarian system based on equal rights and opportunities⁷. The second development concerned immigration and the citizen's official bestowal to the Nepali immigrants who settled in the country's southern lowland. After the demonstration led by the Bhutan state Congress in 1958, the Nepali immigrants got Bhutanese citizenship, and there was strong encouragement for their assimilation into mainstream Bhutan⁸. The enactment of the Bhutan Citizenship Act 1958 provided a status to the Nepali population, and they are called *Lhotshampas* (Southerners in Bhutanese)⁹.

The most encouraging aspect of the modernization or civic nationalism trends in Bhutan is introducing political and economic change programs within the framework of the existing political system (Monarchy or the King is the country's sole power). The successful accommodation of new groups like *Lhotshampas* (leading Nepalese families of southern Bhutan) into the elite structure and their absorption into the existing factional system has been particularly impressive.

As Gellner claims, nationalism imposes high society's culture by replacing the local, low, and multiculturalism. According to him, in agrarian society or society before industrialization and modernization, there is no high culture imposition due to the lack of standardized education, and there were clear boundaries between the communities and classes. He claims that the changes brought by the rise of industrialism, where there are no

⁶ The public administration theorists consider the Bhutanese regulations as a model for emulation in other developing countries. However, Bhutan's bureaucracy is still such a tight body that its operation's broad-scale depersonalization is not possible, even if it were desirable. Nevertheless, overt nepotism or patron-client relationships are exceptions. A young, ambitious bureaucrat may still require support from above, but in most cases, he must earn his promotion through a good performance record as well.

⁷ Civic nationalism, which is shaped by liberal ideas, generally talks about the people's participation and individual rights.

⁸ The state adopted a conscious policy of assimilating *Lhotshampas* into the *Drugpa* fold. They were encouraging inter-ethnic marriages by granting some amount. First, it was Rs.5000 then increase by Rs.10000 as incentives.

⁹ The act provided the reorganization of their language and started to teach in primary schools. They were permitted to build their shrines and teach Sanskrit, the language of their scriptures. Further, the *Lhotshampas* were encouraged to participate in the National Assembly (*Tshongdu*). They were also sent abroad on scholarship for higher studies, appointed as bureaucrats, accorded membership to the Royal Advisory Council, and ministers' council.

barriers between communities, which has broken due to a standardized, mass education which allows for economic and social mobility. Gellner notes that industrialization does not spread equally among all of the communities within a particular state. Therefore, the community which lags behind started feeling threatened by the process.

In Bhutan, before the advent of modernization, the society was strictly demarcated between the communities and the hierarchical bases. After the adaptation of modernization or industrialization principles of development, those boundaries have been fall, and society has mobilized socially and economically based on modernity's standardized culture. Gellner noted that industrialization does not spread equally to all the sections of the state. In Bhutan, the privileged traditional elites started feeling marginalized from the process and the mainstream of development since they were less educated or skilled, unable to fulfill the standardized culture's demands, and started feeling snubbed.

However, in Bhutan's case, the fruitful era of modernization has suddenly vanished after the death of third *Druk Gyalpo* (King Jigme Dorji Wangchuk) in 1974, where the insecure elites (traditional, less educated, or inefficient) have revised the 1958 Citizenship Act in 1977. The period of the late 70s and early 80s marks the acts of ethnic nationalism accomplished by the Royal Government of Bhutan. The process of modernization and socio-economic development of the country possesses many challenges. The governing elites conceive threatened by demographic forces with the amalgamation of different ethnic communities into the country's administrative function. Subsequently, there is growing resistance among the citizen for the *Ngalong*/central Bhutanese monopolization of authority and privileges positions in the wake of democratization.

We can discuss the process of ethnic nationalism in Bhutan based on the four approaches of ethnic nationalism offered by Smith's 'Politics of Ethnicity And Nationalism' (1996), they are state-centered, purification of culture, universalization of chosenness, and territorialization of memory, this section converse the condition of Bhutan. At first, the state-centered approach claims that the nation is the product of nationalism, recognized ethnicity, and culture as secondary in the state-making process. The approach also asserts that the state and political action play an important role in crystallizing the ethnic sentiment and national identities through protracted warfare and territorialization. Politics is about capturing and holding power, and nationalism is an argument for doing so. The Royal Government of Bhutan, as a state, played a crucial to crystallized the ethnic sentiment of *Ngalung* people. State, as nationalist, has mobilized and legitimized its policy of cultural homogenization for the interest of the *Ngalung* elites and sub-elites in their quest for power.

The second approach is the purification of culture; there is a process for a particular culture to purify. First, the ethnic past's rediscovery should be an inspiration for the new community's contemporary problems, followed by the process of vernacular symbolic code, artifact, and achievements. They went through the process to reconstruct a picture of the earliest time's collective native life, through the present community drive the sense of dignity and continuity. The *Ngalong* elites of Bhutan purify the *Drukpa* culture by rediscovering the history of the advent of Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal (First Dharma Raja), his contribution, dedication, teachings, and achievement. They authenticate and genuineness of the *Ngalong* culture by identifying it as the earliest one.

The third approaches claim that the ancient religious concept of chosenness, i.e., the sacred missions, is entrusted to the particular community and universalized by the nationalism doctrine. In the universalization of chosenness, nationalism fosters the belief that the people who form a nation are unique and incommensurable. In that sense, they see themselves as 'chosen' and have a particular cultural task to be performed only by them; no others can perform. By universalizing the *Drukpa* culture, Bhutan's ruling elites, especially the *Ngalong*, mostly following the *Drukpa* sect of Buddhism, believe that the *Drukpa* is a unique and

distinct Bhutanese culture among the Bhutanese citizen. They justified their hold on power based on their ancient achievements, which were chosen by the god to rule the country.

Apart from diplomacy, inheritance, marriage alliances, and conquest, the memories of heroic figures and turning points can also determine a state's boundaries—subsequent demarcations of the historic homeland, which includes sites and territories associated with consciousness of a particular event. As a case, Bhutan can be an exciting example of the territorialization of shared memories. The late 17th-century war between Shabdrung Nawang Namgyal and the Tibetan army (discussed in detail in the previous chapter) helped redefine Bhutan's territory. The existing cultural and religious monuments, monasteries, *Dzong of Haa*, *Paro*, *Bumthang*, and *Punakha* all signify Buddhism's attitude in general and *Drukpa* in particular.

Practicing ethnic nationalism in a multi-ethnic society like Bhutan may pave the way for radical homogenization, which led to severe consequences like ethnic cleansing, mass expulsion, displacement, and many refugees. According to Gellner, there are two possibilities in ethnic nationalism, assimilation, and lack of assimilation. If both communities share the common language and culture ('ethnicity'), then assimilation is possible through standardized education. However, if there is no shared 'ethnicity', then assimilation will not occur but rather are excluded from society (Cuff, 2013). In Bhutan, there are three major ethnic groups: *Ngalong*, *Sarchop*, and *Lhotshampa*.

Furthermore, *Sarchopas*, though they speak a different language, they practice common culture following the same religion as Buddhism. Hence, *Lhotshampas* who speak different languages, i.e., Nepali, mostly follow the Hindu faith to share the different histories similar to other parts of the country. Therefore, it became natural for the Bhutanese Nepali is the distinct community excluded from the country. In the case of Tibetan refugees, since they shared the common culture and looks toward Tibet for their historical existence, they opposed the Bhutanese government; because they belong to a superior sect, i.e., *Gelugpa* and *Drukpa* belong to the inferior sect *Kagyupa*.

In the concern of practicing standardized education, Smith calls 'vernacular mobilization,' in which the 'genuine membership' of the ethnic nation re-educated in the 'true culture,' their ancestors' pristine culture unsullied by contact with modern civilization (Smith, 1994; 192). The *Bhutanisation* process has practiced with the code of *Driglam Namza* (one nation, one culture), which has extended the social custom and dress of elite and monastic circles to the general populace and made it compulsory. Later they banned the TV satellite dishes and antennae; promoted the Dzongkha (Language of *Ngalong* people) as the national language; banned the Nepali language (which was allowed earlier to teach in primary school); tightened and modified the Citizenship Act and Marriage laws. They further stated that all Bhutanese should be obliged to remake the formal pledge of loyalty to the King and the *Drukpa* political system.

Smith claims that this process 'can so easily end in excluding other non-nationals values and ultimately their barriers, lest they defile the rediscovered and regenerated original culture and that 'citizenship becomes coextensive with the membership of the dominant ethnic community (Smith, 1994; 193). He points to the 'tendency of ethnic nationalism is to single out and categorize minorities within as 'aliens' (Smith, 1994, 191). He wrote that:

Ethnic nationalism does not involve a specifically racist component but manages to exclude non-members within and deny their rights while preserving their essential humanity. Instead of being exterminated, they are rendered homeless. As indigestible minorities in their own homes, they suddenly find themselves deprived of their homeland. They felt to constitute a threat to the continued existence and purity of the emergent ethnic nation. Therefore, they must be denied citizenship in their hand, rendered defenceless and homeless, and ultimately driven out (Smith 1994; 195).

The process of 'vernacular mobilization' or *Bhutanisation* has created tension among the ethnic minorities of the country (Tibetan and Bhutanese Nepali), and there emerged resistance from the Nepali Bhutanese, who had demanded to soften the policies. After assimilationist policies, there left the work for Bhutan's government to justify their acts. Simultaneously, the resistance has been mobilized in the southern Bhutan region and started getting support from outside the country. In response to this Bhutan Government has justified their act of mass expulsion or generating a considerable number of refugees, that the resistance by a classifying a large portion of the southern population as non-nationals (illegal immigrants) and present them to the world as a terrorist. They claim that the growing robberies in southern Bhutan possess the threat of demographic invasion and describe the issue as a threat to their survival (Hutt, 1996; 419).

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