



Yajurvedic thoughts on nation, nationalism and national development

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Abstract

This paper is an endeavor to discuss some Vedic Mantras related to the Nation Building and concept of National Development which are found in the Vedic texts in general and Yajurveda in particular. The Indian concept of Nation was a cultural unit, not a geographical unit. To substantiate the concept we can analyze the facts as stated in the text of Yajurveda (special focus will be on *Māddhyandina samhitā* and *Taittirīya samhitā*).

Keywords: *Rāṣṭra*, *Janapada*, *Kṣātraśakti*, *Brāhmaśakti*, *Varṇa* system, nation building etc

Introduction

Nation and National Development are two vital aspects of the Political and Economic literature of ancient India. The development of this thought has also some historical and political background. From the Indian perspective, we can see Rig-Vedic concept of Nation and National Development was in a less improvised way, subsequently, when we came across the Yajurveda it is evident that the concept of Nation and National Development became more improvised and in the Atharvaveda period more and more improvement is observed. In due course of time, the Indian thought system lost the same glory and became fragmented. For a quite long period numbers of Sovereign States within the large Sovereign Nation (Bhrata Varsa) was the status of Indian political ideology. This may have a resemblance with the modern-day federal concept of governance. Again intruders tried to become rulers of those fragmented States and probably again re-introduced the geographical points into a single Geo-political Nation. Originally it was a combination of many geographical territories and the linking thread was the culture or religious faith followed by the indigenous people of the land. Probably simple geographic territorial State concept was never the Indian idea of Nation Building. Probably concept of Nation moves around the agents like People, Animal, Water, Wealth, Wealth (Minerals), King, Freedom, Sovereignty, Security, Knowledge, and Warriors. This paper is an endeavor to discuss some Vedic Mantras related to the Nation Building and concept of National Development which are found in the Vedic texts in general and Yajurveda in particular. The Indian concept of Nation was a cultural unit, not a geographical unit. To substantiate the concept we can analyze the facts as stated in the text of Yajurveda (mainly *Māddhyandina Samhitā* and *Taittirīya Samhitā*).

Meaning of the word *Rāṣṭra*/Nation

Rigveda is the first primary source where we can trace the word *Rāṣṭra* with its different forms and different contextual meanings. Once Rigveda has the opinion that Varuṇa was the master of many *Rāṣṭras*. (RG.7.34.11) probably seer had the intention to hint on Seven Islands (*Sapta Dvipā Pṛthivī*).

Rigveda also has the opinion that a nation shall be well protected by the warrior caste and never concurred by the enemy. (Rv.7.84.2). Similarly, we can trace references regarding National Wealth, Kingship, Happiness of subjects, etc. Vāk is also considered as the *Rāṣṭri* or the governing agency the supreme deity of *Rāṣṭra* or Nation. (Rv.8.100.10 and 10.125.3) From all these earliest references it is clear that the concept of Nation and Nationality was viewed by the *Ṛṣis* but the concept was not much matured.

English word Nation may be considered as *Rāṣṭra* in Sanskrit, which is developed from the root *rāj* and derived as *rāj+ṣṭran* ^[1] from which, words like *Rājya*, (State) *Sāmrājya*, (State) *Rājā* (King) etc. are formed. This root also signifies the meaning like *Dipti*, (Shine) *śāsana*, (Ruling) *deśa*, (State) *prajā* (Citizen), etc. The primary meaning of the word *rāṣṭra* is *prakāśamān*, *dīptimān* or shining. The word *Rāṣṭrī* in Rig-Veda has also the similar meaning ^[2] Again the word *Rāṣṭra* also can be derived as *rāṣṭr* (*śabde*) + *ṣṭran* which signifies the meaning *rāsante*, *cāru śabdām kurvate janā yasmin pradeśaviśese tad rāṣṭram* ^[3]. this suggests the explanation that a place where the residents use specific language and used to stay happy and should express their thoughts without any artificiality is a Nation or *Rāṣṭra*. When *Vācaspatyam* explains *Rāṣṭra* as *Janapada* (Place of habitation) *Śabdakalpadruma* ^[4] explains *Rāṣṭra* as *viśaya / Janapada (?)* (Place of habitation). In support of his statement, he has referred Manu-8.254.

The English word Nation has been designed from the Latin word *Natus*, which etymologically signifies that Nation and Nationalism mean the same thing. They are both derived from the Latin word *Natus*. The nation is an extensive aggregate of persons so closely associated with each other by common descent, language, or history as to form a distinct race or people, usually organized as a separate political state occupying a definite territory (Oxford Dictionary). Moneer William in his Sanskrit Dictionary has explained as – Kingdom, Realm, Empire, Dominion, District, People, Country, Nation, and Subjects. (p.875)

A western scholar like Burgees has the opinion that- A Nation is a population of an ethnic unity inhabiting a territory of a geographical unity. Similarly, J.W.Garner says

– A Nation is a culturally homogenous social group which is at once conscious and tenacious of its unity of psychic life of expression. From all these statements we can get support to the Indian concept of Nation as a land/territory having people of a single cultural identity.

From the generalization of eastern and western thoughts, one can conclude that *Rāṣṭra* is a particular geopolitical area where people of similar language, similar thought systems, similar socio-religious identity, and overall a well-accepted *mastership* (Kingship) has been accepted just like a single household.

The nationalist feeling of its citizens is the most vital aspect of National Development. In this context, Yajurveda has tremendous references where we can trace sky-touching thoughts regarding Nation, Nationalism, and National Development as well.

Different Aspects of *Rāṣṭra*/Nation

A sovereign *Rāṣṭra* should have some fundamental social aspects. A combination of all these aspects makes a Nation sovereign and almighty. Some of the conceptual aspects are – People, Cultural Unity, Religious Unity, Lingual Unity, Political ambition and some of the Subsidiary aspects are National Unity, Geographical Unity, and Belongingness. All these aspects have an immense role for Nation Building. Some other features of a Nation are

1. Nationalism within its subjects
2. Nationalists thought
3. The King or Administration
4. The territory (State)
5. Administrative Mechanism
6. Its Geographic conditions, etc.

References of Yajurveda: An Appraisal

One can trace different types of Vedic *mantras* in Yajurveda where Nation, Nationality, National Integrity and National Development have been hinted directly or indirectly. Those references are -

Yajurveda (*Mādhyaṅgīna Samhitā*)

10.1; 10.3; 10.4; 20.25; 20.26; 9.23; 12.11; 20.8; 20.10; 22.22

Yajurveda (*Taittirīya Samhitā*)

1.6.10.9; 1.7.10.1; 1.8.21.14; 2.1.2.16; 2.1.4.14; 2.1.7.8; 2.3.1.6; 2.3.1.8; 2.5.1.1; 3.4.6.2-4; 3.4.8. 1-10; 3.5.7.5; 4.2.1.11; 4.4.12.7; 5.2.1.7-8; 5.4.7.24-25; 5.4.9.7; 5.7.4.6-7; 5.7.4.9; 7.5.18.1-10

Yajurveda (*Maitrāyaṇi Samhitā*) 4.3.7; 3.11.8 Yajurveda (*Kāthaka Samhitā*) 27.8; 37.11

Seers of Yajurveda have used the word *Rāṣṭradā* to explain water (*jalam*)^[5]. Water is requested to extend *Rāṣṭra* for self as well as for others. This use seems very symbolic. Probably the intention of the seer in this regard is to establish the water as a source of Nation, and National Development. A Nation can't stand and can't flourish without water. Not only in Yajurveda the word *Rāṣṭra* has also been used for ocean or (*samudra*) and the ocean has also been requested to extend *Rāṣṭra*, probably that point of time was the time for sufficient expansion period of the landed area of the earth. Probably maximum expansion of landed area may be expected by the *Ṛṣi* of this mantra.

Based on a story of *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 1.1.3.5 the demon *Vṛtra* was the prime substance of soil in the worldwide water body. This mutilated body becomes the source of soil and was extendable. This expansion was also established by the theory of Nirukta- *prathanāt pṛthivī*^[6]. (Due to the extensional character earth is called *Pṛthivī*)

There are some other adjectives used for *Rāṣṭra* – *Sūryatvacasaḥ*; *Sūryavarcasaḥ*; *Māndā*; *Vrajakṣitaḥ*; *Vāśīḥ*; *Śaviṣṭhāḥ*; *Śakvarīḥ*; *Janabhṛtaḥ*; *Visvabhṛtaḥ*; *Svarājāḥ* and *Madhumatīḥ*.

To understand the Vedic concept of *rāṣṭra* we should go through the meanings of these adjectives used for *Rāṣṭra* -

1. *Sūryatvacasaḥ* is known as *kṣātraśakti* or the power of warrior class or warriors.
2. *Sūryavarcasaḥ* is known as *brāhmaśakti* or the power of Brahmins.

From the combination of both the words with *Rāṣṭra* we can see the highest thought of the *Ṛṣi* which is the actual development agenda Nation building. The Nation should be well protected by the physical power of *Kṣtriya* and should be well established by the knowledge (power) of Brahmins. Probably in Vedic period this was the social system. Knowledge improves sustainability and physical power protects the dependents. By a combination of both, one Nation can grow and protect its human resource. Notably, *Varṇa* system was not caste system. In *Varṇa* system every human being had the liberty to choose his profession and his professional life was the indicator of once *Varṇa*. So combinations of the powers/energies of two upper *Varṇas* who are specifically dedicated to social development and social security have given priority in the social mechanism of Vedic period. A Nation adored with power and knowledge shall develop Nationalism and can protect the socio-cultural integrity of the same Nation.

3. *Māndā*: *Mādayati*, as the Nation extends happiness to all. It is an interesting feature exploring words used in Vedas. From this word, it is clearly understood that a Nation in a true sense is called a Nation if it becomes the cause of happiness to each citizen.
4. *Vrajakṣit*: As people used to stay at every corner of the geographical territory, it is known as *Vrajakṣit*. The human being takes shelter in the definite geographical territory of this earth which provides him life, shelter, and livelihood. All these natural gifts made the earth *Vrajakṣit*.
5. *Vāśī*: As Nation is expected by everybody on this earth, it is called *Vāśī*. Probably this word suggests the inherent concept *vāsam karoti iti* (as citizens live on it).
6. *Saviṣṭhaḥ*: As Nation is all-powerful and is above all. The sovereignty of the Nation is the most important factor, which is expressed by the word *Saviṣṭha*.
7. *Śakvarī*: As Nation can do anything in this world.
8. *Janabhṛt*: As Nation gives livelihood to its citizens. That is a Nation that offers food as well as sufficient livelihood to its citizens. This shows the responsibility of the State mechanism.
9. *Visvabhṛt*: As Nation gives livelihood to all. Indian concept *viśvam bhavatyekanīdam* has been observed. The word *Viśva* is probably used as a synonym for “all its citizens”.
10. *Svarāj*: As Nation governs itself or due to its self-governance. A sovereign state is expected by the *Ṛṣi*.

Absolute sovereignty makes the Nation bountiful and wealthy. A piece of land if it is self-governed then only a Nation becomes self-sufficient and developed in the true sense.

From the above-maintained adjectives, it is well established that the Indian concept of Nation is not merely a geographic area but also it includes the citizen, governance, and political, religious, and social activities of the subjects living in the same territory. In this context opinion of B.B.Uny may be considered quite worthy, in his language Nation is- "Where there is no water, there is not heavens settlement, where there is no human settlement there is no enlightenment, and where there is no enlightenment there is no Nation". Enlightenment within a Nation may be interpreted as a geographical territory where a specific language, culture, prolific literature, iconic religious thoughts, and indigenous knowledge systems are nourished with non-refutable governance. A group of people with good cooperation and with a concept of oneness in mind, act, and preferences can develop a term Nationalism or can be able to be a Nation. In this context, the famous stanza of Rig-Veda can be considered as Vedic concept of co-existence and Nationalism. *samānī va ākūṭiḥ sanāna hṛdayāni vaḥ samānamastu vo mano yathā vaḥ susahāsati Rg.X.191.4- be your intention the same, your hearts the same, your mind the same that it may be a good company for you.*

Yajurvedic Concepts: An Analysis

There is a famous Vedic stanza available in Yajurveda. (Yajurveda Madhyandin Tradition 22.22) which is considered the National anthem of the Vedic age. In this mantra, one can see the high-sounding thoughts of Vedic seers. It says our Nation should produce citizens adored with knowledge (*brhāmaṇo brahmavarcaṣi.....*), bereave warrior (*kṣatriyas*) good characters, milking cows, able oxen, good horses, women with good fate, sacrificer should gate such upspring who can overwhelm the enemies and can able to sit within the learned people. It is also expected that *Indra* should rain in need, trees should produce ripen fruits and each man in the Nation should be nourished properly. Ideas in this mantra can also be re-interpreted as-

1. Yajurvedic concept on initiation of knowledge and growth of knowledge.
2. Yajurvedic concept of National security.
3. Yajurvedic concept of combination of two power sources (*Brāhmaṇa* and *Kṣatriyas*) i.e.- knowledge source/agent and governance source/agent. From different socio-political studies, it is clear that Nation was headed by *Kṣatriya* (warrior) and monitored by Brahmins (Elites). This shows a combination of power and knowledge for the real development of Nation and Nationalism. If knowledge drives properly, then power can do well for the common man and if the power will not be guided by knowledge then there is every possibility of miss utilization of power and knowledge deprived of power center (*Kṣatriya*) probably Nation can't grow.
4. Yajurvedic concept of Nation of sufficient food production.
5. Yajurvedic concept for utilization of animal power for transportation and milk.
6. Yajurvedic concept of women empowerment.

7. Yajurvedic concept for the birth of healthy, bits of knowledge, and vigorous upsprings.
8. Expectation for rain at the time of need.
9. Yajurvedic concept of plant sustainability
10. Yajurvedic concept of human resource management for the development of work- culture.

Fortunately, every word of this mantra of Yajurveda has tremendous thoughts of Nationalism. Here each aspect of Nation i.e. Human Resource, Animal Resource, Plant Resource, and intellect have been dealt with and the National anthem embodies all those aspects. Each aspect analyzed here has a tremendous ability to grow the Nation to the apex.

Again (YV-M 20.25.26) also has a similar concept. There *Ṛṣi* expects union of *Bāahmaṇa* and *Kṣatriya*, an association of human with deities like *Agni*, *Indra*, *Vāyu*. *Ṛṣi* expects the Nation where this combination is available, that state can't decline. Yajurveda (YV-M.9.23) has the opinion that the Nation should always be active. An inactive Nation can't prosper. It is also evidential that Vedic mantra (YV-M.12.11) express the thought that the king of the Nation should be expected by its citizen and the Nation should not think about separation for the king. Very cunningly here the *Ṛṣi* has expressed his democratic idea of popular statehood, where the king should not be discarded by citizens by which National integrity can be well protected.

The famous stanza *yad vai yajñasya sāmna kriyate rāṣtram.....*(YV-T.1.6.10.9) has the message that the job performed in sacrifice with the assistance of *Sāman*, the whole fruit goes to Nation and the part of the sacrifice made with the *Rig-Veda*, the fruit goes to its citizen. Here the relationship between of *Ṛk* and *Sāman* has exemplified to justify the relationship between the Nation and Citizen. As *Sāman* depends on Nation likewise *Ṛk* depends on its citizens. If the citizen bears good morals then the strength of the Nation grows. In one more mantra ^[7] *Ṛṣi* expects *purohita* to be active. Probably the word *purohita* may signify the stalwarts of the Nation or the leading elements of the Nation. This suggests that in a democratic state the elected leaders who are placed by the subjects in the front row should be more active for the National Development. If those stalwarts or *purohitas* become active and think about the National Growth, the Nation shall grow automatically. From a story/*ākhyāna* (YV .1) (TS.2.5.1.1) it is evident that for protection of Nation (*Rāṣtra*) from the enemy, even *Indra* killed *Viśvarupa*. Probably slaying an enemy for the cause of National protection was considered as a right practice. Even for the National development we can see sacrifice like '*Rāṣṭrabhṛt* (*abhyātāna* and *jayā āhuti*) it is also established by an example that with the oblation of *Abhyātāna* & *Jayā* even gods concurred over the demons, so it is known as *Rāṣṭrabhṛt* (TS.3.4.6.2-4) to establish the *Rāṣṭrabhṛt* sacrifice there are several stanzas, where we can see the idea of *Ṛṣis* that citizens, animals, anything good, is called as *Rāṣtra*. Performance of *Rāṣṭrabhṛt* sacrifice shall make the Nation powerful and prosperous ^[8]. In several places even we can trace stanzas where the *Ṛṣi* expresses his expectation to be well protected by the deities. (YVT.4.4.12.7, 5.2.1.7-8, etc). In a passage (TS 5.4.7.24-25) Nation has been narrated as *Vaiśvānara* and citizens as *Maruta*. According to this mantra oblation made for *Vaiśvānara* and *Maruta* binds its citizens with the Nation. Probably oblation to these deities makes the citizens more

Nationalist. In expectation of Global peace the *Ṛṣi* *symbhadram pasyanta upa sedugre tapo dikṣamṛsayah*.....etc. (TS. 5.7.4.6-7)

In *Maitrāyaṇi Samhitā* (YS-M 4.3.7) we can see one-word *Ratnī*, which is used for the development of the Nation. According to *Ṛṣi*, if the leader of the Nation is *tejasvi* (lustrous) then the Nation will be *tejasvi* (lustrous). Here the word *tejasvi* can also be understood as enlightening. If the master of the Nation becomes equipped with a bounty of wealth, power, and knowledge then only the Nation shall prosper. In many places, we can see *purandhir yosā*, which suggests the meaning that women should bear fullness or bearing a baby or be prolific, bountiful, magnificent, abundant, and copious. (*Maitrāyaṇi Samhitā*.3.11.8, *Yajurveda*-M.22.22). Women can become prosperous if the male/female becomes prosperous. So ultimately prosperity to every aspect of the Nation was apprehended. National growth cannot be possible without the growth of that sector. Even in today's world economy, it is well observed that the society where women sector is more prosperous, (active in National Growth) that society becomes more and more prosperous. Probably *Ṛṣi* has the concept of a rural economy where less dependency was expected. Less pressure of dependents on a family economy gives support to the National Development.

A stanza of *Kāṭhaka Samhitā* 27.8 expresses its opinion that a Nation shall decay if it has no *purohita*. The word *purohita* may be a symbolic use. *Purohita* may be the priest, the Brahmin, king or fire establisher, or the potential or the advisor of the State, leader of the Nation. *Kāṭhaka samhitā* 37.11 has the noble statement that *Āditya* is the Nation. Probably leadership of *Āditya* is accepted for the prosperity of a Nation.

Concluding Lines

After a thorough study of many other references available in Yajurvedic tradition, it is evident that after Atharvaveda probably Yajurveda is the finest Vedic text where Nation, Nationality, and Nation Building have given foremost priority. From the study of the above-discussed Vedic stanzas of Yajurveda tradition, we can observe the following points.

1. Water is considered a vital source of a Nation.
2. The nation is considered a combination of two powers *kṣātraśakti* & *brāhmaśakti*.
3. The nation is considered as a cause of happiness to its citizens.
4. Each corner of the Nation should make habitable.
5. Nationhood is expected by all. (No human being should be deprived of his Nationality and no human should live like a refugee)
6. Nation empowers the citizens. (probably the governing agent)
7. The nation can do anything and is considered the all-powerful agent.
8. It protects its citizens from any crisis.
9. The sovereignty of the Nation was expected.
10. Citizens/animals/water etc are resources and properties of Nation.
11. Everything good in a Nation may be considered as National property.
12. Agricultural improvement, women empowerment, and social prosperity were expected.

13. Animal productivity, development of the human resource, on-time rainfall, sufficient productivity of plants was expected for the enrichment of the Nation.

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