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SHINTO: The Substratum of Japanese Nationalism

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Abstract– Shinto has functioned as the *élan vital* for all the forms and facets of Japanese nationalism. The pervasive presence of Shinto as the substratum of identity is evident from the historical analysis of Japanese nationalism. Shinto is a rudimentary belief system that connects Japanese people’s history to their primordial myth. The origin of Japan and its divinity, imperial institution, and infallibility are deeply entrenched in Japanese minds. The imperial house has been the venerated institution, and the emperor serves as the chief priest of Shinto. These are the products of the Japanese myth and Shinto belief system, which translate into the structuring of Japanese identity. The nucleus of the idea of nationalism is identity formation and its articulation through innumerable media at different junctures. Shinto provides Japanese people with the foundation for this collective identity by indirectly influencing the Japanese heart and mind. The preservation of the spirit of Japan and the essence of Yamato has also been emphasised and expressed through the concept of *kokutai* since the Edo period. This work attempts to shed interpretive light on Shinto’s imprint on Japanese nationalism.

Keywords Shinto · Nationalism · Myth · Substratum · Kokutai ·

1. Introduction

Ethno-symbolic interpretation of nationalism provides the fundamental theoretical explanation for the construction of the idea of nationalism based on a set of beliefs, faith and religion. The primary significance of nationalism is forging a nation’s specific and distinct identity based on its objective and subjective factors. The identity thus formed functions like a cohesive force that binds the country’s people together and offers them a sense of belongingness. Also, the ideal future envisioned by the people for their nation and their brethren remains a shared vision that is materialised with the help of nationalism.

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A look at history clarifies that religious practices and faith play a pivotal role in building and sustaining the discourse of nationalism. In the case of Japan, Shinto as a set of socio-religious practices has been an anchor for nationalism at large. The faith, a set of beliefs, practices, and/or religious assumptions, distinguishes the adherents from other cultures and civilisations. This distinctness first provides a uniqueness which later assumes a sense of pride due to psychological associations. In some instances, the sense of pride integrates a sense of superiority which creates the idea of an inferior other as a contextual screen. These developments give rise to an aggressive and belligerent notion of nationalism, which motivates nations for their self-preservation even at the expense of the existence of others. However, the nationalist construct of identity generally accentuates distinctness and not division.

The idea to utilise Shinto as a unifying force for the people of Japan was first advocated by Aizawa Seishisai (1781-1863) during the Tokugawa period. This idea also has its origin in the backdrop of Westerners coming to Japan and promoting Western values, ethos and religion. As an insular nation, Japan had no such exposure to a new reality in which a religious indoctrination was followed so vigorously. Aizawa Seishisai observed that Christianity has functioned as a unifying motivational force that galvanised these spirited people to emerge as a significant force to reckon with. From this experience, Aizawa Seishisai got a flash of inspiration from using indigenous religion to fashion unity and forging the integrity of Japan. Here, the theoretical idea of building a narrative of nationalism based on religion which, in turn, can be used to mobilise people to realise national interests, can be seen at work. However, later other leading thinkers such as Sakuma Zozan, Fukuzawa Yukichi and others would develop more liberal ideas of nationalism. It is imperative to discuss the precepts of Shinto and nationalism for advancing the arguments and analysis.

2. Perspectives of Nationalism

Nationalism falls into contested concepts that defy a clear and precise definition. However, Scholars agree that nationalism is a new ideological construct that has played a pivotal role in shaping the world and determining the order that we see today. According to modernist thinkers of nationalism, an integral unit of world politics is the nation-state, which has been produced by nationalism to serve the socio-political purpose for the given human community. Contrary to this view is the idea of nationalism articulated by the scholars of primordialism and ethno-symbolism schools.

Primordialism advocates that the natural state of nationalism is a given entity for humans like speech, sense of fraternity and sociability. It assumes that nationalism has existed since time immemorial, and that is why this is also referred to as the

Primordialist or perennialist view of nation and nationalism. The origin of the idea of nationalism can be traced to human nature and its natural propensity to express one love and concern toward one's brethren. It is also referred to as the layman's view of nationalism and provides the simplest way to grasp it.

The most pertinent view of nationalism that has presented a compelling theoretical critique of the modernist view is ethno-symbolism. Ethno-symbolic interpretation of nationalism maintains that nationalism has its roots in the ancient traditions and ethnicity of communities that became associated with their life patterns. The constituents of nationalism come from the myth, memories, ethos, values, and their varying forms transmitted through time. Anthony D. Smith, the proponent of this view, emphasised the need to analyse the elements of collective cultural identities over an extended period covering several generations. The regular cultural practices connect the community's past, present, and future. These continuing aspects of culture emerged as the characteristic features of the identity of the communities, which, in turn, became the foundation of unity of people. These elements come together to give the idea of nationalism a definite shape which the political dispensation would appropriate for galvanising people for a national cause.

Ethno-symbolism presents a more homogeneous and comprehensive view of nationalism than the views of modernism and primordialism. It supposes that nations' emergence, rise, and decline cannot be adequately comprehended without considering their ethnic aspects. It also stresses that the collective cultural units of the bygone eras and modern nations have only quantitative differences and not qualitative, for the cultural aspects have lasting persistence. The transformation of culture is also not free from its pre-existing elements. In light of the ethno-symbolic interpretation of nationalism, it can be said that today's nation is not a tabula rasa, and it is a phenomenon with its long cultural aspects as the substratum.

There is also a simplified way of understanding the ideas of nation and nationalism, which is derived based on objective and subjective factors.

Objective Factors: Based on objective factors, nations and nationalism are considered the product of varieties of socio-cultural factors that include a collection of people living in the specified geographical region and associated by a blend of racial, cultural, ethnic and traditional matrices. A powerful sense of belongingness evolves amongst people who assume to have the same descent, myth, memory and live by similar values and ethos. Other important aspects that help develop a collective identity for a group of people are speaking the same language and practising one religion. Also, these factors have persistent nature and get transmitted through generations. These factors play a significant role in

forging the idea of nationalism which would be appropriated by the socio-political needs of the people at different stages of time.

Subjective Factors: Objective factors provide a powerful emotive means of fostering oneness among people. However, these factors can also contend with each other for contributing to identity formation. In the case of many objective factors competing for identity formation, there is always a possibility of the rise of sub-nationalisms which might also have fragmentary and destabilising tendencies for the nation and hence nationalism. In the case of diversity of competing for objective factors, the oneness can be derived by the common aspiration of people who share a similar vision for their future. People's aspirations are often the expression of what the political philosopher Rousseau called the 'General Will' of the collectivity. This 'General Will' is often reflected in a document, manifesto or constitution that nullifies sub-nationalism's fragmentary tendencies. Here it is important to mention that the role of nationalism is to unify the people of a country in one thread who can be inspired by the idea of contributing to the nation's interest even at the expense of their stakes. As the realist school of International Politics interprets, nationalism is a great cohesive force that keeps the country together in times of crisis and empowers the nation for the power projection on the global arena.

Shinto as Substratum of Japanese Nationalism: Shinto qualifies as the indigenous religion of Japan and remains an integral part of Japanese culture. It is often interpreted as the way of the gods and has its origin in the creation myth of Japan. Shinto relates the two worlds through Japan's mythological origin and its uniqueness as a nation as a faith system. In the world of Gods, the principal deity is the sun goddess named Amaterasu, and in this world, the most revered figure is the Emperor or Empress who rules as the divine descendent of Amaterasu. The Emperor also serves as the chief priest of Shinto because Amaterasu remains the patron goddess of the imperial family.

Shinto has no complex and abstruse set of metaphysical and philosophical precepts, and it has no book of rules and commandments for people; hence, it is not considered religion as the term is often used and understood. It is a powerful polytheistic cult that evolved through time and touched the lives of Japanese people across generations, including the present one. It is perhaps the greatest strength of Shinto that it continues to determine, to a greater extent, the traits and proclivities of the modern Japanese. It is a religion of hope that provides great courage and strength to live on by trusting nature and its various manifested facets. It may lack the features of great religions, but it indeed entails the primal divinity that promises a life of simplicity and eventual transcendence to the world of *kami*. Arthur Schopenhauer explains in his celebrated masterpiece *Essays and Aphorisms*:

The fundamental distinction between religions does not lie in whether they are monotheistic, polytheistic, pantheistic or atheistic (as Buddhism is), but whether they are optimistic or pessimistic (1970: 229).

During the early years of Japan as a nation, people believed in the manifestation of gods and spirits in all aspects of nature. According to Shinto belief, the natural world is suffused with divinity, and various kinds of gods and spirits dwell in it. These gods and spirits are referred to as *kami*, and they resided in woods, rivers, rivulets, streams, rocks, mountains, seas, clouds and the sky. Even the animals like foxes and snakes are considered *kami*. The ancestors of Japanese people are also revered and worshipped as *kami*. These gods, *kamigami*, were the bulwark against the destructive forces of nature, ailment and other threats. People lived in the shadow of the grace of the gods (*mitama-no-fuyu*). The world for a Shinto believer has a pervasive presence of *kamigami* around him/her. It renders the Japanese psyche subsumed in the milieu of divinity, which has had further implications for Japanese culture. It markedly expresses the importance of Shinto as a mythic-religious entity in immemorial imagination for the Japanese populace. Joseph Campbell, an authority on mythology, observes:

Man, apparently, cannot maintain itself in the universe without belief in some arrangement of the general inheritance of myth. The fullness of his life would even seem to stand in direct ratio to the depth and range not of his rational thought but his local mythology (1976: 4).

It is no exaggeration to say that Shinto, rooted deeply in Japanese mythology, has a tremendous sway on the collective consciousness of people, and it is evident that its influence has transcended the temporal confines. A deep sense of affinity with nature and purity of heart and mind are cardinal elements of Shinto. Even the words were assumed to have their spirit, generally referred to as *kotodama* (*Kotoba no tamashi*), and *norito*, the words of prayer used for the invocation of the *kami*, were/are considered absolutely sacred. Joseph Campbell notes the importance of the mythical aspect of a nation in the following words:

Clearly, mythology is no toy for children. Nor is it a matter of archaic, merely scholarly concern, of no moment to modern men of action. Its symbols (whether in the tangible form of images or the abstract form of ideas) touch and release the most profound centres of motivation, moving literate and illiterate alike, moving mobs, moving civilisations (1976: 12).

The impact of Shinto can be observed in every aspect of Japanese culture. Going to the shrines on auspicious occasions to offer prayers, celebrating festivals, folk traditions, rice cultivation, innumerable gods collectively called *kamigami*, and the divine status of the Emperor are some examples of Shinto practice as the guiding features of Japanese culture. In the modern world, it symbolises

globalisation, the Shinto consciousness functions as the fountainhead of national morality. Shinto may not be visible to a layman's eye amid modernity as an elaborate ritualistic cult. However, that is not necessary; what is essential is to understand and presage the power of religion about conduct and character.

It is delineated from the characteristics mentioned above of Shinto that why it serves as the *Volksseele* of Japan. *Volksseele* is defined by the German philosopher Joann Gottfried von Herder as an 'ethnic soul' which functions as a defining collective identity of the communities. It helps communities preserve their true nature and authenticity amid all the influences that may dilute their culture. Anthony D. Smith (2009) have identified some recurring themes and motifs of nationalism. These are autonomy, unity, identity, authenticity, the homeland, dignity, continuity and destiny. In the Japanese context, all these motifs are coeval with Shinto ideas. It forges cultural nationalism necessary for moral regeneration at critical historical junctures, which, in turn, sustains the national identity. Shinto has played a significant role in creating, cultivating and sustaining the distinct identity from the genesis to the golden days of Japan. Anthony D. Smith adds in the same vein:

Myths of ancestry and origins translate into symbolic terms the process of self-definition; myths and communal election comprise the most influential element in myth-and-memory cultivation; devotion to sacred landscapes is perhaps the most intensive and affecting aspect of territorialisation; and myth memories of ethno history, and especially of ethnic golden ages, present an idealised image of distinctive public cultures (2009: 91).

The impact of Shinto as a determinant of nationalist identity is pervasive. However, some agencies engage dedicatedly in the preservation of Shinto ideals. Some of these agencies, such as the Imperial Institution, the Ise Jingû and Yasukuni Shrine, deserve special mention.

The Imperial Institution: Shinto is an integral part of Japanese life, and people follow Shinto rituals and practices as if it is an eternally existing reality of Japanese society. Shinto relates the mythical and divine imperial institution as the pivot of the nation and its uniqueness. The mythological faith also needed a tangible embodiment for expressing itself amid the changes, and it was made possible by *arahitogami*, the god himself manifesting as kami. The emperor was the embodiment of yamato damashi, the Japanese spirit, and the chief priest of Shinto. It means that the continuation of the imperial system is tantamount to the nation's existence in its true spirit. The emperor emerged as the most significant figure and sacred symbol of unity of people. This argument also brings the critical observation to the light that nationalism in Japan must fashion a cohesive force to coalesce people together, particularly in times of crisis, to ensure the existence

safely and securely. A good look at the history of Japan makes it clear that the rallying point of nationalism has been and will be the Emperor and Imperial institution along with its vibrant symbols, primarily Shinto constructs.

The Ise Shrine (Ise Jingû): The Ise Grand Shrine complex is dedicated to the sun goddess Amaterasu. The Japanese myth attaches great importance to Amaterasu and the three treasures brought to earth by Ninigi, which later became the symbols of Imperial Regalia. It is one of the most important shrines and considered holiest for the sacred mirror (*Yata no Kagami*), one of the three symbols of Imperial Regalia, which is placed in the shrine's inner sanctum.

The scholars who have reflected on nationalism agree unanimously on the importance of ancient symbols that it captures people's imagination and hence act as a testimony of the oneness of people. These symbols play a significant role as an objective factor in forging the idea of nationalism by their ability to relate to everyone who belongs to the religious-cultural environment of the nation.

Yasukuni Shrine: The Imperial Shrine of Yasukuni is perhaps the most important shrine from the point of view of Japanese nationalism. The Meiji Emperor founded it in 1869 to commemorate those nationalists who died in the service of Japan in their efforts to restore the absolute authority in the hands of the Emperor. Many people died in the name of the Emperor while fighting the shogunate forces in the *Boshin War* (1868). They laid their lives for saving the great spirit of *Yamato* by subjugating the *bakufu* and bringing the famous Meiji Restoration in 1868.

The shrine honours the souls of 2,466,532 men, women, children and pet animals. It also includes the 1068 Japanese people who fought for Japan during the Pacific War but were later declared as War Criminals by the Tribunal for the Far East set up by the allied forces for punishing those responsible for causing war and ensuing death and destruction. However, Japanese people maintain that these people were fighting only for Japan and revered as martyrs. One of the conscience-stricken judges of the Tribunal, Radhabinod Pal, also observed who referred to the verdict as *Victor's Justice*.

Yasukuni Shrine has found itself in the centre of controversy due to the visits paid to the shrine by prominent politicians, bureaucrats and statesmen to express their reverence to these spirits. Several Prime Minister, mostly from conservative LDP, have also paid visits to the shrine and offered prayers to the departed souls. This practice is not acceptable to China and Korea because they consider some army men as perpetrators of war crimes in their countries when they were subjected to violence and mistreatment of women, children, and older people. However, many Japanese do not agree to such considerations and pay respect to these figures for the supreme sacrifice they did for Japan.

The celebrated scholar of nationalism Benedict Anderson (2012) has explained that nothing inspires the people of a country as the tomb of an unknown soldier who laid his life in the line of duty for the nation. He becomes the symbol of supreme sacrifice, putting the nation first in times of crisis. In modern times, such a tomb emerges as a great symbol that leaves a lasting imprint on people's minds and reminds them of their duty of protecting the nation in times of grave crisis. Yasukuni Shrine serves a similar purpose for the people of Japan and often becomes the rallying point for the nationalists. However, it has also been utilised as political capital by the conservative leaders to project themselves as the champion of the nationalist cause.

No more arresting emblems of the modern culture of nationalism exist than cenotaphs and tombs of Unknown Soldiers. The public ceremonial reverence accorded these monuments precisely because they are either deliberately empty or no one knows who lies inside them, has no true precedents in earlier times (1983: 9).

The creation myth of Japan assumes the divine lineage of Japanese people rendering an air of racial and ethnic exclusivity. It has also entrenched the idea of Japan as a superior nation, and hence other nations are subordinated to the land of the rising sun. It is not essential to argue about the validity of these claims and assumptions but to assess their power to influence the mind's psyche, which works on and in this world.

Varieties of Nationalist Experiences: In the historical evolution of Japan, we observe four kinds of nationalism, with Shinto as substratum, that emerged at different junctures and shaped the national trajectory in time. These are as follows:

Religious Nationalism: Shinto has also successfully instilled faith that gods protect Japan and its people. A Buddhist monk in Kamakura, Japan, Nichiren used religion to exhort people's ethnocentric sentiments. This faith strengthened when Japan survived the deadly attack by the Mongol invasions. It happened due primarily to a timely typhoon that saved Japan by destroying the Mongolian fleet in 1274 and 1281. People of Japan called it *Kamikaze*, the divine wind that safeguards Japan from external evil forces. It also entrenched the belief that Japan is a divine country and Japanese people are most superior to humans. However, religious nationalism was indeed advocated by the Mito scholar and nationalist thinker Aizawa Seishisai (1781-1863), who advocated the importance of Shinto as a unifying force for the Japanese populace during the early Tokugawa period. He observed that the unifying force amongst the Westerners is their unflinching faith in Christianity which enforced conformity and oneness for the masses. He derived this conclusion after observing the dedication and diligence of Christian missionaries who were ready to take immense trouble in their stride of

propagating the message of their religion in farther lands. Aizawa imposed his observation on Japan and advocated to unite people with one seamless nationwide identity. His logical choice of the element that could forge such identity was Shinto. He further formulated the concept of *kokutai* in his book *Shinron*, which expressed the national essence of Japan. It assumed that Japan was the only nation with its unique spirit and soul. The ideas of Aizawa Seishisai proved to be the inspiration for the *sonnō jōi* movement during the late Tokugawa era. The work of *kokutai* was further developed, and later the idea of national essence was also revisited and contextualised by future thinkers of Japan.

Cultural Nationalism: Fukuzawa Yukichi and other proponents of the *Bunmeikaika* (Civilisation and Enlightenment) Movement agreed with the notion of the unique spirit of Japan; however, they disregarded the claim that this idea is exclusive to Japan. Fukuzawa Yukichi argued that other nations also have their spirit and essential polity. The ideas of Yukichi and the *Civilisation and Enlightenment Movement* influenced various aspects of Japanese life. However, the blind imitation of Western ways triggered discriminating sentiments towards Western ideals and prototypes. Western values like individualism, utilitarianism, capitalism and materialist practices promoting consumerism were subjected to criticism and viewed as against the spirit of Japanese ethos. Three critical figures who inspired carried forward the movement of Cultural nationalism were Motoori Norinaga (1730-1801), Motoda Eifu (1818-1891) and Yoshida Shoin (1830-1859), who were active during the Tokugawa period. They were all for preserving Japanese values, ethos, literature and culture from foreign influence. They also tried to purify Japan by purging it from alien elements. The emphasis on purity and preservation of culture also has a Shinto imprint.

Enlightened Nationalism: The idea of enlightened nationalism originated from the works of Sakuma Zōzan (1811-1864), which prepared the ideological ground for including the best from other cultures without compromising the spirit of Japan and its moral character. Sakuma advocated *wakon yosai*, Eastern morals and Western science and envisioned a rich and powerful nation but still very much rooted in its own culture and civilisation. Sakuma felt that incorporating Western science has become indispensable for Japan to stay relevant as a nation on the international stage. However, he also wanted to keep the spirit of Yamato intact amid all the Western influences. This kind of nationalism that maintains its cultural specificities and still assimilates the higher values even from other nations is called enlightened nationalism. This idea was further developed by Nishimura Shigeaki (1828-1902), Shiga Shigetaka (1863-1927), Miyake Setsurei (1860-1945), and Kuga Katsunan (1857-1907) during the Meiji period. It can be seen how nationalism based on Sakuma's thinking is in sync with globalisation and internationalisation. It is perhaps the future archetype of nationalism in the

new world (*shinsekai*) which, in the words of Marshal Macluhan, is fast reducing itself to a “Global Village.”

Nishimura Shigeki (1828-1902), an active member of *Meiropusha*, also followed the ideas of enlightened nationalism and emphasised the need to instil in people, particularly in the school children, the morality of Japan. This variety of nationalism is in line with the ideas emphasised by the liberal thinkers and presents a good face of nationalism devoid of a jingoistic and violent streak.

Imperial Nationalism: It refers to an aggressive form of nationalism that could be appropriated by the political and military dispensations to build a sphere of influence in the name of the Emperor. This kind of nationalism was displayed by Japan after Meiji Restoration in 1868, especially from 1885 to 1945 when it tried to build a Japanese Empire. After Meiji Restoration, Shinto was declared the State religion, and the Emperor held the central position as an ultimate authority like the Hobbesian Leviathan. The tolerant and secular tendencies ended abruptly, and persecution of Christians and Buddhists ensued in the wake. Augmenting the power and influence of the emperor beyond the known boundaries of Japan emerged as the new ambition which took it to the course of bloody conflict with nations.

The officials of the Meiji government and military leaders followed the Western nations who built empires by using religion and Imperial institutions for colonising and exploiting other nations with utter disregard of the interests of these nations. From an ethical point of view, this kind of nationalism is considered flawed and ideologically untenable, which often leads to death, destruction and loss of faith in the spirit of human fraternity. Japan also went through a similar experience, and finally, its ambition came to a rude awakening when it lost the Pacific War at the hands of the Allied Powers. However, in the post-war period, Japan followed a peaceful path of co-existence, cooperation and collective prosperity.

3. Japanese Nationalism in present context

Today Japan is facing daunting challenges on both internal and external fronts. It is struggling to keep the economy afloat and has already lost its coveted status as the most prominent and second-largest economy in Asia and the world. The tension is increasingly felt due to impaired relationships with neighbours emanating from historical discontents and territorial issues like Senkaku and Takeshima island disputes. However, the most critical factor continually troubling Japan is the security dilemma due primarily to the rise of China and its assertiveness. Also, the belligerent attitude assumed by North Korea has been a disconcerting development for Japan.

The present geopolitical conditions coupled with internal strife would unleash the national instinct of self-preservation that might prepare the ground for radical measures as Japan have taken in the past, most notably during the Meiji Period (1868-1912). Let it be said that the religious impulse will play a vital role in determining the course of future trajectory as it did during Meiji Japan when the Emperor was apotheosised as the omnipotent, inviolable and sanctimonious figure above all authority. This legendary status was derived from mytho-religious testimonies. Lafcadio Hearn observes:

The events of Meiji reconstruction strangely illustrate the action of such instinct in the face of peril.... the readjustment of internal relations to sudden environmental changes. Moreover, in the hour of greatest danger, the national instinct turned back at once to the moral experience upon which it could best rely, —the experience embodied in its ancient cult, the religion of unquestioning obedience. Relying upon Shinto tradition, the people rallied about their ruler, descendant of the ancient gods, and awaited his will with the unconquerable zeal of faith (1955: 376).

There is no reason why history will not repeat. The set of crises that Japan faces today is compelling it to revisit its fundamental ideological edifice on which modern Japan is built. The Article-9 of the Peace Constitution of Japan denies it the right to maintain a regular army and use war as a policy imperative. The status of the Emperor also has been reduced to a mortal human, and he stands relevant only as a symbol of unity of people and integrity of the nation. The Emperor, according to Shinto, is the divine pivot of Japan, and without it, the spirit of the nation will lack the necessary vigour and inflatus. It leaves nationalists with troubling thoughts about Japan as not a normal country. The rallying point for the nationalists today is to regain the normal status of Japan as a nation by revising the constitution and reinstating the Emperor as the mythical divine entity. It is likely to gain momentum as the challenges posed to Japan will precipitate into crisis due to emerging geopolitical scenarios.

4. Conclusion

The seeds of the idea of nationalism began to grow with the sense of oneness and fraternal bond nurtured by shared myth, legend, folklore, songs and their emotive narratives in the primitive era of Japan. The primordial and ethno-symbolic approaches to study nationalism maintain that the rise of a culture distinguished the human communities, and the relativity of cultures provided distinct identities of people preserved and sustained by nationalistic spirit. In the modern world, the idea of nationalism grew stronger, invented nation-states and placed it as a fundamental unit of global politics.

In the Japanese context, the edifice of oneness and the sense of distinct communal identity were nurtured by Shinto. People lived with the same beliefs, practised similar rituals, and shared their fears and hopes collectively. In the past, Japanese people shared the moments of glory and defeat, the exuberance of triumph and despair of calamitous Atomic Bombings. Japan has seen it all from a crestfallen nation in 1945 to the global economic and technological powerhouse. The people of Japan remained united in all these moments, and nationalism played a significant part in it. The emperor remained an inspiration and a rallying point for the people of Japan in trying times. In Japan, the imperial institution emerged as the intermediary between the earthly and heavenly realms. The divinity of the Emperor and Japanese race graced by the constellation of *kamigami* fostered the idea of Yamato spirit (*yamato damashi*), which functioned like a connecting thread running across generations that preserved the homogeneity of Japanese people.

From the foundation as a nation to its development as a significant economic powerhouse in the modern world, the history of Japan has been characterised by varying remarkable stages, each defining a new paradigm. In all these paradigms, nationalism has played a crucial role in shaping the trajectory of Japan's evolution. Further, the influence of Shinto has proved to be a distinguishing feature of Japanese nationalism in all its forms. Today, Shinto nationalism is inspiring efforts to revise the peace constitution for making Japan a normal nation. The argument is put forward that the previous status of the Emperor must be regained to provide a prime pivot to the nation.

The modern approaches to studying nationalism do not emphasise the religious aspects and note the importance of the 'General Will' of people and a shared vision for the emergence of nationalism. In the case of Japan, the advocacy of enlightened nationalism also offers a point of departure from the established idea of nationalism which has the potential to emerge as internationalism. In such a case, the utilitarian aspects from other nations can be assimilated into one's own culture without compromising one's indigenous characteristics. Shinto has a pervasive presence on Japanese nationalism; however, the progressive elements have also been absorbed in modern times.

All the factors that come together to construct the idea of nationalism are present in Japan, and therefore, it can be said that nationalism will continue to play its role as a socio-political imperative. Some sociological studies have indicated that religious fervour is waning in Japan, but that is only a circumferential interpretation of reality. A faith system like Shinto operates at a much deeper level and dramatically influences the collective consciousness. It provides the substance that fashions the collective character of a nation. It is like a perennial river that flows underneath and occasionally resurfaces itself in trying circumstances.

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