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Reading the question of nationalism with Deleuzian ‘concept’

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ABSTRACT

The paper attempts to read together two otherwise unrelated questions – Deleuze’s views on philosophy and the question of nationalism in India – to explore what both can offer to each other without reducing the specificity of each. The paper, however, attempts to do this also keeping in mind two immediately topical concerns: the rising popularity of Deleuze studies in India and the political debates concerning nationalism. With such an attempt at reading one concept in an-other’s context, the paper thus attempts to raise broader questions concerning the conceptualisation of nationalism, philosophy and politics. Aiming to explore such concerns from the question of ‘other’, the approach can be summed in the following entangled sequences: conceptualising nationalism in relation to minoritarian perspectives, politics in relation to philosophy and western ideas in relation to non-western contexts. The paper, however, engages in such an approach as a cautionary experimentation of reading entanglements, divergences and contingencies without searching for some corrective or messianic possibilities.

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The establishment of the Deleuze and Guattari Studies in India Collective (DGSIC) in 2015¹ played a crucial role in popularising Deleuze studies in India. Attempts to read postcoloniality through Deleuze and Guattari studies is not something immediately new, and the call for such reading can be traced from Robert Young’s seminal rereading of the epistemic and physical violence of colonialism as a desiring machine’s production, coding and re/deterritorialisation of colonial desire (Young, 1995, p. 173). As Lorna Burns and Birgit Kaiser (2012, pp. 1–20) note, ever since Young’s application of the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari to ‘think through’ postcoloniality, such approaches in different parts of the world have followed in various ways (Bignall & Patton, 2010; Hallward, 2001). However, though such earlier approaches to read postcoloniality through Deleuze and Guattari have variously attempted to justify the specificities as to what such bringing together can contribute, in the context of India, such questions need to be further explored. Though the first collectively published approach attempted to engage elements of Deleuzian philosophy with Indian philosophical concepts or cultural, political and cinematic practices, the papers in the volume were more towards comparison and application of Deleuzian thought in the Indian context. As such, though the volume claimed their approach as “‘becoming Indian” of Deleuzian philosophy or the

becoming-Deleuzian of Indian philosophy' (Patton & Varghese, 2018, p. 2), such 'becoming' carries always (maybe sometimes unintentionally) the threat of a metaphorical reading that (dis)places one in terms of the other. Rather, as Burns and Kaiser (2012, p. 02) reflect, instead of applying one theory in an-other's context or comparing them, an approach to read together enables exploring the shared problems that both Deleuzian and postcolonial thought seek to address, of reconstructing the shared ground of critical thought on which new theoretical concepts (or new assemblages, as Deleuze might say) may be created between these two fields: of neither substituting one for the other nor producing a hybrid successor to the two, but, as in Deleuze and Guattari's well-known example of the wasp and the orchid, initiating a process by which each is variously de- and reconstructed by the other. Similarly, the question of nationalism remains an area not much explored within existing approaches to Deleuze and Guattari's studies, especially from the perspective of India. Based on the debates concerning the concept of nationalism that has triggered in recent times in India, such an approach also gives it an extremely topical and political concern. The paper thus attempts to read together – Deleuze and Guattari's views on philosophy, and the always slipping concept of nationalism – with an attempt to see what one can offer for the other, in this case, from the vantage point of the specificities of nationalism from an Indian perspective. Such an attempt, I submit, not only enables further exploration of situating Deleuze studies in India but also continuously de-situates general ideas of philosophy, politics and nationalism.

One may assert in this respect the fact that Deleuze never wrote much on the topic of colonisation, therefore why Deleuze for discussing nationalism from an Indian perspective? Such suspicion was raised much earlier by Gayatri Spivak (1999, p. 249) in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* who, using an Althusserian critique of both Deleuze and Foucault, argued that both fail to recognise the ideological biases inherent in their own privileged positioning as Western intellectuals while arguing for the deconstruction of ideologically inflected subjectivities such as 'the other' (Burns & Kaiser, 2012, p. 2). However, as Kathrin Thiele (2012) reminds us, such dismissal remains problematic as even within Spivak's oeuvre, significant elements of her thought resonate with crucial dimensions of Deleuzian philosophy. Obviously, Spivak's critique of Deleuze and Foucault has its own specificity in the contexts they are directed; however, that does not mean in any way as a call for foreclosure of or chastisement for engaging with some ideas in some other contexts or approaches. Paul Patton (2000, pp. 120–131) reminds us that such facts do not mean that their views cannot have any relevance to the issue since their concepts of deterritorialisation and the resultant metamorphosis of assemblages, the state as apparatus of capture, etc., enable us to understand the mechanisms by which new territories and peoples are subsumed under the sovereignty of existing states. In a similar way, questions regarding *why* Deleuze also reminds us of such categorical specificities that tend to contain concepts within certain closed parameters. The way Deleuze and Guattari re-present the relations between 'concept' and 'philosophy', it opens newer possibilities for thinking conceptualisation itself and therefore enables re/de-conceptualisation of the existing ideas on philosophy–politics relations. With such awareness, this paper thus can be seen as a humble attempt to read together: Deleuze and Guattari's idea of the 'concept' (as in *What is Philosophy?*) with the concept of nationalism from an Indian perspective. With Deleuze's commitment for a philosophy–politics entanglement that calls for becomings from a minoritarian aspect, such attempt to *read-with* the other (in this case,

exploring nationalism from a non-western vantage point and in relation to Deleuzian 'concept') enables newer avenues of thinking the existing situation without losing the specificities of each or reducing one in terms of the other.

Regarding the question of nationalism, one may turn towards a famous section from Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*:

... nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time. But if the facts are clear, their explanation remains a matter of long-standing dispute. Nation, nationality, nationalism – all have proved notoriously difficult to define, let alone to analyse ... 'no "scientific definition" of the nation can be devised; yet the phenomenon has existed and exists'. (Anderson, 1991, p. 3)

Anderson traces how nation-ness has baffled thinkers all these years as an 'uncomfortable anomaly' that continues to remain a lived condition, and engaging further with such a long continuing 'anomaly' acquires a more immediate concern when one realises the politicised character that the question of nationalism has taken up recently in India. Exploring the question of nationalism today with an awareness of the recent political debates in India then transforms the topic as an immediately political one. With the extract taken from Anderson's book, one may raise certain crucial questions that remain directly linked even with the contemporary debates on nationalism in India: how nation *as a concept* comes to acquire a value that determines a sense of belongingness (nation-ness)? How the concepts of universal and legitimate come to be associated with the concept of nation? How such conceptualisation of the nation affects the conceptualisation of political? And, how nation (a concept after all) comes to acquire the force of a normative category applicable collectively for all? Such questions remain linked always with *how* we conceptualise nation, and such approach thus demands exploring the acts of conceptualisation through which concepts are constituted, disseminated and comprehended. It is in this aspect, I submit, that Deleuze and Guattari's *What is Philosophy?* enables us to open the conceptualisation of nationalism in newer aspects, just as conceptualising nationalism from an Indian perspective enables us to engage with a non-western point-of-view without losing the specificities that such attempts to read-together demand.

In its continuous becoming through post/coloniality, thinking nationalism as a concept in its absolute singularity in the context of India remains an impossibility; while on the other hand, Deleuze and Guattari had reminded us of such impossibility in any approach of thinking the 'concept' in its absolute singularity. In the Indian context, this remains a fact that is too easily recognisable today for anyone who is aware of the multifarious aspects of its historical, cultural, ethnic, territorial and religious diversities. Still, in recent years, the question of nationalism has acquired a strong hegemonic political character with respect to the various ideologemes it remains exposed to. One of such aspect remains the Hindutva ideology and its hegemonisation of a normative 'concept' of nationalism that remains a point of immediate tension today within Indian socio-political scenario. A conjuring of the past for asserting the continuity of a singular concept of nationalism fails to realise the futility of any such approach to contain the concept of past (that remains never available for access in its entirety) within certain hegemonic categories. This also brings us to the questions of ontology and temporality of thinking nationalism, none of which remains available to us within any definite singular framework

for conceptualising nationalism. One may recall in this context Gopal Guru's fine example of the 'live charcoal' whereby certain hegemonic ideas of nationalism are always used as symptomatic of instrumental reason. Guru (2016, p. 22) reminds us how dominant forces always hide the ideological interests by discursively elevating the concept of nationalism into the domain of sacred whereby it becomes easy for such forces to monopolise it by way of seeking insulation of critical voices from engaging with the multifarious entity called nation. Such modalities of conceptualisation thus place the concept of nation with certain metaphysical obligations whereby the 'ethical' duty of the citizen too comes to be framed in terms of the hegemonic construction of nationalism:

'Do not think what the nation does for you but think what you can do for the nation.' To put it differently, you have a duty to protect the honour of the nation, but the reverse is never the case in the sense that these political forces never raise the point as to what moral duty the nation has towards a large section of tormented humanity ... Such forces latch on to a self-serving notion of the truth of nationalism. And for retaining their hold on such a truth, they indulge in a thorough and constant construction of the other. (Ibid, p. 23)

As Romila Thapar reminds us, the capacity to include (and not exclude) is what shapes the concept of nation and this is where nationalism feeds on the inclusive potentials of history. Using Eric Hobsbawm, Romila Thapar (2016, p. 184) thus presents the relation in an interesting way: history is to nationalism what the poppy is to the opium addict. The concept of nationalism always feeds on conceptualisation of the history of nation, and such an approach demands establishing an essential spatio-temporal continuity with the past. History thus provides a framework, to conceptualise such continuity, to connect multiplicities, and nationalism must operate with such unifying role of history:

Nationalism emerges as a concept or an idea in modern times as a response to historical changes ... History is essential to a national ideology but it has to be a shared history that binds people together. History has to be the bond. It cannot be a history dominated by only one identity because nationalism doesn't exist only on one identity. It has to be all inclusive. (Ibid, p. 185)

Any attempt to constitute a specific brand of nationalism as the universal 'truth' of nationalism thus demands re-constitution of the past itself, and therein lies the paradox. As emphasised already, such constitution demands an ability to access the past in its own ontological and temporal being. Such an impossibility thus presents the project of re-constitution always dependent on a logic of exclusion of whatever remains inaccessible or uncontrollable. Thus, the contingencies of the past, the diversity of cultures and the plurality of individuals are all reduced to a hegemonic framework of conceptualising nation: a normative Hindu nation. However, as mentioned already, such disavowal of the contingent and multifarious ways in which past remains entangled does not mean that past can be reduced in its entirety to a specific singular entity; it only reminds us of the ignorance of such approach, as if closing one's eyes to the world means the world does not exist. It is also symptomatic of a violent arrogance by which one refuses to hear the other voices of history. Besides, such construction also remains vulnerable to its own internal contradictions. Gopal Guru points out one such contradiction that the present conceptualisation of a Hindu nation remains exposed to in terms of constituting its own ontological territory:

The right-wing forces use extraterritorial loyalty as the negative criterion to define who is a nationalist. Thus, ontological association with 'Bhumi' or land (motherland) becomes an absolute criterion to define the nation. But they do not want to factor in the ontological reduction of the Dalits to spaces that continue to exist in this 'Bharatvarsha' for millions of years. Within this 'Bharatvarsha' or 'Parishkrut Bharat' (sacred India) there continues to be a Bahishkrut India ('quarantined India'), to use Ambedkar's expression. One can see this paradox in the right-wing imagination or formulation of India, its stand on territoriality as the core criterion of defining nation is backed by self-authorized assertion, while it completely lacks moral stamina to critically reflect on the predicament of 'Bahishkrut Bharat' or quarantined India. (Guru, 2016, p. 26)

This works as a small reminder of such limits of conceptualising nationalism in absolute terms. If one turns at 'nation' as a concept that contains its people, then it is the inclusiveness of nation as a concept that is what needs to be turned at, but by constituting the concept of nation in certain hegemonic terms, the same inclusive nation is turned into its own ontological fragmentation.

If one has to think nationalism as a concept that is inclusive, then turning towards Deleuze one may realise that thinking any 'concept' in itself remains a task that always demands inclusivity. Reading the concept of nationalism in India with a Deleuzian view of 'concept' enables us not only to read a western view of 'concept' in relation to a non-western context but also to elaborate the question of nationalism in India from a much broader trans-national perspective. Such a reading thus offers us also with an inclusive approach that any attempt at reading nationalism and the 'concept' demands: a reading that embraces differences together without reducing one in terms of the other, one that reads concrete with abstract, particular with general, politics with philosophy.

In their collaborative work *What is Philosophy?* Deleuze and Guattari (1994, pp. 20–21) remind us that the 'concept' in its inclusivity always stands for a continuous becoming – 'the event, *not* the essence or the thing' (emphasis added) – and is therefore simultaneously absolute and relative. Using their view of the 'concept', if one attempts to read nationalism also as a concept, then we may assert that when one views nationalism as whole it is absolute but insofar as it is fragmentary it is relative, and the event that the concept of nationalism initiates is thus a continuous play of (dis)appearance of difference. However, the difference does not emerge from some outside but from within the same act of conceptualisation; in other words, it is the same concept that gives birth to its own divergences and deviations and the same remains applicable with the question of nationalism as well. One may turn in this respect towards many examples of divergences that the same concept of nationalism had brought in the context of India's anti-colonial resistance. The incident of Chauri Chaura may be seen as one such case where a group of protesters, participating in the Non-cooperation movement, attacked and burned a police station in the Gorakhpur district of the United Province, British India on 4 February 1922. Shahid Amin (1987) traces this incident to show how the concept of 'Mahatma' appealed to them differently and they understood the concept of nationalism in a different manner compared to the elites. The essay was part of the Subaltern Studies Collective project whereby the focus was to re-present the slippages that always haunt nationalist histories and to reveal the politics operating in constructing identity and consciousness. A coterie of thinkers strategically contributed to this approach, notably Ranajit Guha with Chandra's death, Dipesh Chakraborty with the eurocentrism in writing history, Shahid Amin with the

Chauri Chaura case, Sumit Sarkar with Kalki Avatar, Partha Chatterjee with outcasts of 'nation', and Gayatri Spivak with the figures of Bhubaneshwari Bhaduri, Dropdi, Jashoda, and Rani of Sirmur – all of them attempted to re-present, among others, the contingencies that always haunt nationalism as a concept. When seen through the question of subaltern, nationalism emerges as a contingent concept even today, especially when one recalls the question of the internal 'bahishkrut' India of casteism that problematises all claims of an egalitarian nationalism. This is a haunting reminder that Gopal Guru too reminds us. If nationalism is supposed to provide the people of its nation a unifying identity based on equality and liberty, then it must also offer for the subaltern self-realisation instead of social stigma and segregation:

... the nation provides a framework to evaluate the performance of the nation state. The nation is not something which is either a supernatural entity or has a superhuman image; in fact it is the standard by which one can measure the ethical, material standing of the state. In other words, nation offers us the analytical opportunity to decide on the ethical/moral stamina of the state ... The dignity of the individual is coextensive with the dignity of the nation. It is in this sense that the nation state is the earthly expression of the nation ... The state has to play a transformative role in the material life of people that constitute the nation [and not reducing all material lives to a supernatural idea of nation]. (Guru, 2016, p. 25)

However, as long as conceptualising nationalism feeds on certain specific normative categories that discriminate people (instead of unifying them), the same nationalism as a concept will continue to question its own modalities of exclusion.

As it is with Deleuze and Guattari's view of the 'concept', thinking nationalism as a concept also remains operative with a certain openness, and not closure, which enables the emergence of newness from within the same movement that shapes the act of conceptualisation. The 'concept' remains operative as a continuous interaction and negotiation of the opposites that haunt the act of conceptualisation and as such, '... the concept is real without being actual, ideal without being abstract' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 22). Nationalism too can be read as a 'concept' in the Deleuzian sense of the term that is multifarious yet has a certain sense of constitutive singularity, abstract yet always remains linked with the concrete, absent yet always present. Some have conceptualised nation as an 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1991), while for some others, it has a certain fluidity like narrative textuality or a space of hybridity.² Even such conceptualisations also have been questioned and forced for reconsiderations as, for example, in Anderson's case, the question of 'whose imagined community'³ raised a new set of questions which remain always problematic to find specific, absolute answer in relation to the multitudes and fragments that shape the conceptualisation of nation. Thinking nationalism in terms of a singular, unifying plane then remains always linked with its internal constitutive multiplicities. The thinking of India as an independent nation has always involved an attempt to come out of the colonial influence where, quite paradoxically, the exteriority symbolised by the 'post' colonial (as coming out) remains connected simultaneously with the interiority of the embodied structures of western modernity shaping the thinking of liberation and 'nation' itself. As a 'concept', I propose, it is this continuity between the exterior and interior that shapes the thinking of a post-colonial nation (where the hyphen has been used strategically by many thinkers to reflect such continuity and negotiation). In the context of India, as Chatterjee (2010) notes it, the nation-making project had always remained fragmentary and incomplete. The

constitution of a nationalist consciousness that is distinctly Indian has always involved a two-way mutually dependent process: to get rid of the colonial influences (both material and ideological) and to claim a distinct character as a symptom of difference. Thus, the emergence of the nationalist consciousness in the nineteenth-century colonial India was crucially shaped by the constitution and separation of spaces: us/them, home/world, spiritual/material, tradition/modern and so on. The different stages Chatterjee notes shaping the nation-making project – the moment of departure, the moment of manoeuvre and the moment of arrival, as he calls them⁴ – though focused on the constitution of a distinctly singular concept of ‘nation’ had always been haunted by internal contradictions that had always problematised the thinking of Indian nation as a concept in its absolute singularity. However, despite its multiplicities, fragments and contingencies, nation remains operative also as a constitutive concept whereby it also shapes the thinking of other concepts (such as duty, patriotism, citizenship, democratic rights and so on). As such, even as a concept, thinking nationalism remains always relative and dependent on thinking other concepts: nation, history and identity.

As Deleuze and Guattari emphasise, the concept and plane remain operative in a mutually dependent relation, and in a similar way, the nation too remains connected to the conceptualisation of location and space in a co-constitutive way. The conceptualisation of space has always been linked with the conceptualisation of women’s body (as the ability to ‘contain’), and the bringing together of them shapes not only the concept of nation but also that of chaos, cosmos, universe, world, regions, cities and home⁵ as the space that contains. Such co-constitutive relation of nation and space thereby enables the conceptualisation of ‘nation’ as ‘motherland’ where the concepts of both ‘nation’ and ‘mother’ come to constitute each other in terms of certain normative expectations. It is through such relational processes of constructing the realm of the normative that hegemonic categories come to be constituted for judging the ‘ethical’ considerations and the question of duty (be it of motherhood or of nationalism). Therefore, as it is with many other nations, in the case of India also, the conceptualisation of the nation comes to be seen through that of a mother. As Sugata Bose (1997, pp. 50–75) notes, the thinking of nationalism during nineteenth-century colonial India remained crucially linked with imagining India as the mother in chains (of colonialism) calling to its children for freedom. Such images emerge clearly from conceptualising nation-space as the womb of the mother that gives birth to and nourishes its children, thus enabling the conceptualisation of India as ‘Bharatmata’ (mother India) and ‘matribhumi’ (motherland). Despite such spectral eruptions of the contingent within the concept, the thinking of nationalism in its singularity always depends on the question of continuity of experience that comes to be shaped by the identification with a unifying nation-image and nation-time. The visualisation (image) of the concept of nation remains operative as an attempt to bring the concept within the domain of presence where the visible would mark the unavoidable facticity of the nation in terms of its locationality. However, as we have already seen, the thinking of the nation-image remains always multifarious and contingent yet all such multiplicities must also be connected by some framework of continuity. It is in this process, I submit, that the thinking of progressive teleological time comes to acquire a constitutive role that enables the constitution of a progressive history of the nation. Thus, while the thinking of the singularity of nation-image comes to be constituted through maps, cartographies, pictures, depictions and so on that attempt to locate the spatial

existence of the nation, on the other hand, the thinking of the continuity of nation comes to be shaped by the thinking of time as a linear progression. Therefore, the thinking of nationalism as an experiential category always involves the bringing together of nation-image and nation-time within the framework of progressive time, where though the nation-image and nation-time remain operative within its own specificity, they also remain dependent on a unification at the level of generality in terms of thinking an experiential continuity of nation. However, as discussed already, the subaltern and minoritarian perspectives mostly deviate from the majoritarian views of nationalism, primarily because of the former's inability to relate to the latter's views on the progressive continuity of nation-image and nation-time. One may here recall Tagore's famous essay *Nationalism* where he reminds us of the various internal discriminations that always prevent a nation from finding a unifying concept of nationalism that unites all people without discrimination of caste, creed, race, sex or religion:

The problem is whether the different groups of people shall go on fighting with one another or find out some true basis of reconciliation and mutual help ... India has never had a real sense of nationalism. Even though from childhood I had been taught that the idolatry of Nation is almost better than reverence for God and humanity, I believe I have outgrown that teaching, and it is my conviction that my countrymen will gain truly their India by fighting against that education which teaches them that a country is greater than the ideals of humanity (Tagore, 1917, p. 51).

When seen from Tagore's perspective, the majoritarian views of nationalism can only operate in hegemonic terms that tend to control others in terms of one's dominant self. Tagore (1917, p. 55) had reminded the necessity to realise that '... in human beings differences are not like the physical barriers of mountains, fixed forever – they are fluid with life's flow, they are changing their courses and their shapes and volume', and a nationalism that fails to recognise that fluidity can become a 'menace'. Turning towards the present context of lynching, casteist discrimination, rape cases, poverty and unemployment, one may rethink why Tagore was against a majoritarian view of political nationalism. The question of the 'bahishkrut' India that Ambedkar reminded us, therefore, remains a haunting presence today within any attempt to conceptualise nationalism in its singularity.

Singularity, as a concept, gains its emphasis always in relation to the multiple (thus a relationality shaping the thinking of singularity as well). The thinking of singularity insists on the irreplaceability of each and every 'one'; however, the each and every one also remains always already 'singular plural' and as such always with-in-among many others (Kaiser, 2015, p. 1). Singularity thus understood resists generalisation and as a concept remains operative with certain openness. Singularity is therefore 'produced, not given in advance, and its emergence is also the beginning of its erosion' (Ibid., p. 6). By including heterogeneity within each and every 'one', singularity as a 'concept' thus does undermine or destabilise unified, homogenous notions of collective and subjective identity. Operative in an iterable movement, singularity as a concept remains always tied up with a simultaneous being-with, and thus though singular yet remains simultaneously 'singular plural' (to use Jean-Luc Nancy's understanding of the term from *Being Singular Plural*). The thinking of the concept of nationalism in its singularity, I propose, also involves a similar play of contingent relationalities. As a concept, nationalism operates

as an assemblage that is multifarious yet remaining constituted through a unifying yet continuously (trans)formative plane. As such, in the context of conceptualising nationalism, the relation shaping the concept and the plane can never be seen as unilinear or unilateral but remains functional as a co-constitutive relationality.

When Deleuze and Guattari attempt to re-present the 'concept' in *What is Philosophy?* they reflect such (trans)formative openness that always shapes the 'concept'. Besides, the relationalities shaping the 'concept' reflect Deleuze's understanding of singularity as well, which can be traced back to Deleuze's early works especially *Difference and Repetition*. For Deleuze, the thinking of singularity remains always linked with the thinking of difference. Whereas the thinking of difference remains dependent on multiplicity, the thinking of repetition (as conduct and as a point of view) concerns non-exchangeable and non-substitutable singularities (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 1). It is in this thinking of the non-exchangeable that the concept of singularity is opposed to the general, and as such exchange-ability comes to constitute the criterion of generality (ibid., p. 2). However, as Deleuze asserts, even the non-exchangeable singularities include within it multiplicities and as such remains repeatable; at the same time, singularities by virtue of having within it a certain uniqueness which enables it its non-exchangeable identity also resists generalisations and as such its repetition remains always already linked with the eruption of difference. Tied to the play of repetition and difference, the singular for Deleuze thus enables us to think inimitable entities as not preceding but rather being produced as effects of different, where the different itself erupts from *within* the singular. Singularity, which is repeatedly called for emphasising the specific, particular and immediate, thus remains always already embedded with multiplicities. As such, the force of the collective that nationalism as a condition and identification calls for also initiates a movement towards its own transcendence. The immediacy of presence marked by contemporaneity projects the concept of singularity as a symptom of the specific and is thus turned at repeatedly to find some 'ground' or locatedness in terms of thinking the specificity of nationalism. However, the problem emerges when we realise that as a 'concept' singularity too remains contingent and continuously shifting, and the same remains with any attempt at conceptualising nationalism in its absolute singularity. Tracing the diverse ways in which 'singularity' has been conceptualised, Birgit Kaiser (2015) even goes on to declare that 'Singularity is an overdetermined and contested topos, with a wide range of meanings and diverse theoretical investments'. In the Indian context, a certain sense of crisis had always marked the various attempts of searching for a unified and singular concept of nationalism, and as it is with the case of thinking nationalism in its generality, the thinking of nationalism in its singularity also remains embedded with multiple paradoxes.

The constitution of a hegemonic framework of nationalism as an essential political category also remains problematic since it not only limits the openness characterising nationalism as a concept but also does the same with the conceptualisation of politics. In *What is Philosophy?* Deleuze and Guattari remind us that as concepts philosophy and politics share a relation that is not so easy to separate. In their attempt to re-present philosophy as the creation of 'concepts', they also open up the modalities of conceptualising politics in a way that blurs the separation of philosophy and politics. The division of philosophy and politics goes much deeper within the structures of conceptualisation whereby a tendency to search for universals always shape such exclusionary division of

philosophy and politics. The thinking of nationalism in absolute terms, I submit, also remains haunted by such a tendency to search for universals. Therefore, when Deleuze presents the 'virtual' as shaping the concept of the 'real', it should not be taken simply as a detached abstract idea but rather as an enmeshed, co-constitutive idea-matter, abstract-concrete, general-particular, absence-presence simultaneity (Deleuze, 2004, p. 44)⁶. In that sense, Deleuze's concept of the virtual, though includes crucial differences, also comes closer to Derrida's 'signification'⁷, and in a similar way, the Deleuzian 'concept' though remains to a large extent singularly Deleuzian also remains connected with many other concepts within the continental philosophical tradition. Similarly, the thinking of nationalism, though remains premised upon a concept of nation in its singularity, remains always multiple and open to its own internal (trans)formations. The multiple 'machinic assemblages', as Deleuze calls it, that posits the 'real' as a unifying plane thus also carries the threat of being transformed through the movements of its own progression, and the same remains applicable also with the concept of nationalism. The concept of nationalism, as it is with the nature of reality as well, remains functional thus as a 'chaosmos' whereby the question then becomes one of thinking when, under what conditions and how much an assemblage can be pushed, and quite interestingly in the same processes of asking questions the questions themselves keep pushing forward in a ceaseless movement initiated by the concept itself. If one reads nationalism also as an assemblage in the Deleuzian sense, then it should be kept in mind that

Assemblages are thus always at risk, and the working of assemblages is therefore not one of following a set of rules but rather of engaging in cautious experimentation, *a continual process of trial and error, a continual learning* [emphasis added] (Bell, 2016, p. 64).

At the same time, as Ian Buchanan's (2015, pp. 382–392) reminds, assemblage can also be seen as a simultaneously constituting and constricting category if it is detached from its (trans)formative openness, and the same remains with the case of conceptualising nationalism, be it as a virtuality or as a plane of assemblages. It is the openness of a 'concept' that operates as the constitutive and (trans)formative capacity of nationalism. Any attempt at confining the concept within the expectations of the normative thus ignores its own futility.

Thinking politics in terms of certain hegemonic framework, just like questions such as why Deleuze or why philosophy, relies on the constitution of categorical specificities that not only constitute normative boundaries of separating politics and philosophy but even constitute them as contradictory (and not as co-responding) concepts. Question such as whether to read Deleuze as a political thinker or a philosopher⁸ (Patton, 2000, p. 1) seems to feed on such categorical specificities that limit the concept of reading itself in terms of doing philosophy and doing politics, and similarly led thinkers to even read two absolutely different types of Deleuze as, for example, Žižek did between 'Deleuze proper' and 'Guattarised' Deleuze (Žižek, 2004, p. 20). When seen in relation to the earlier view of 'becoming' as proposed in *A Thousand Plateaus*, where Deleuze in the context of thinking politics and minoritarian asserts they are not something 'given' but involve 'becoming' – 'Even blacks, as the Black Panthers said, must become-black. Even women must become woman. Even Jews must become-Jewish' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1977, p. 321) – it makes clear that the thinking of reading also involves such continuous becoming. In other words, ethics of reading is not given in terms of *a priori* norms but involves a continuous

becoming through the acts (historically sedimented as well as individual) of reading, and in the same way, I propose, reading nationalism and politics also involves similar continuous yet contingent process of becoming. Such view not only enables us to realise the assemblages that shape the process of becoming but also the continuous play of continuity and rupture that shapes it, and as such the reading of 'two' different ethics (of *doing* philosophy and politics), like the reading of two different Deleuze, emerges as always already connected with each other. Real, nation and political, all of which remain linked when seen through the Deleuzian perspective emerge as 'concepts' that are 'concrete assemblages' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 36) and operate as a plane of immanence to produce a virtual, unifying, holistic effect bringing together nation-image/nation-time, interiority/exteriority, idea/matter in shaping the thinking of continuity. In creating concepts, the philosopher produces an assemblage that both problematises the presupposed identity that makes representational thought possible and simultaneously allows for the emergence of new individuated identities, and hence for newer representational thoughts (Bell, 2016, p. 67). Politics also calls for a questioning of the existing relations, to invite for newer understanding, to call for newer concepts and futures to think. As such, politics, with its focus on changing existing structures, also calls for the creation of concepts that are utopian in the sense of 'other places'? As Deleuze and Guattari assert,

So long as there is a time and a place for creating concepts, the operation that undertakes this will always be called philosophy, or will be indistinguishable from philosophy even if it is called something else. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 9).

When seen in this relationship with philosophy, which remains an indispensable and integral component of the effort to think, the borders separating it from politics seem to blur slowly.

Any attempt at thinking the concept of nationalism, I submit, always involves such a paradoxical and indefinite approach: one that cannot give up the continuous urgency of bringing-together multiplicities within some unifying plane, yet simultaneously cannot fix the contingency of the plane within any definite framework. It is to hint at such irreducibility that Deleuze and Guattari present philosophy as the creation of concepts that are 'untimely' – which they use in the Nietzschean sense of 'acting counter to our time, and thereby acting on our time and, let us hope, for the benefit of a time to come' (Patton, 2000, p. 3). Thinking the concept of 'nationalism' (which today has become a strong hegemonic category for normative discrimination) from such an approach thus forces us again to not only re-consider the *doing* of philosophy but also politics. As such, it becomes clear that what Deleuze and Guattari (1994, p. 108) attempt is not simply to re-present the 'concept' in terms of what is always already available but also the enabling relationalities that shape the thinking of futurity 'to come'. It is this play of same and newness, presence and absence, abstract and concrete, possible and impossible that shapes the creation of 'concept' and therefore leads Deleuze and Guattari to assert that the philosopher is simultaneously 'expert in concepts and in the lack of them' (Ibid, p. 2). As such, the plane of immanence which shapes concepts cannot be taken as a fixed entity or space. 'The plane of immanence is neither a concept nor the concept of all concepts' (Ibid, p. 35), it is rather like 'a section of chaos and acts like a sieve' (Ibid, p. 42). Immanence does not mean immanent to a transcendent but rather enables transcendence from within its own

modalities. Since any attempt at thinking involves an inevitable encounter with otherness, the same remains applicable to the thinking of politics as well. A politics that attempt to foreclose the possibility of that encounter thus forecloses the possibility of its own evolution.

Deleuze and Guattari's reading of 'concept' can be taken as one such early attempt to unsettle the boundaries separating philosophy and politics. At a time when the thinking of nationalism continues to operate as a major political category (not only in India but in many parts of the world), turning towards such an approach reminds one of the entangled normative structures of thinking that always constitutes the conceptualisation of political and nationalism within certain specific networks of relation. Such an approach of questioning the conceptual boundaries separating philosophy and politics thus enables one to realise that as a concept nationalism too remains operative as simultaneously philosophical and political. Whether as a marker of identity or location, the thinking of nationalism always involves such a contingent process of becoming. With Deleuze and Guattari remaining focused on the affirmation of the openness and continuous (trans)formation that shape 'life' itself, such an affirmative re-thinking of conceptualisation (as the act of creating 'concepts') thus enables one to re-think the existing conceptual structures (of nation, political and real) in newer ways. Such a gesture towards the question of nationalism, I humbly submit, enables one to engage with a plane of simultaneity – of doing together philosophy and politics. Deleuze and Guattari remind us of the essential openness of conceptualisation where concepts must stand for delimitations beyond its specific ontological origins and gestures towards more embracing assimilations and (trans)formations. With such an approach philosophy becomes an inclusive possibility and not exclusive foreclosure, and a reading of nationalism with such an assimilatory openness thus projects nationalism as a political concept that remains always already philosophical. As discussed in the beginning sections (using Birgit Kaiser and Lorna Burns), such attempts at bringing Deleuzian thought into dialogue with the question of nationalism (here, in the Indian context) should not be approached as a corrective to certain theoretical inconsistencies or failings within the field, but rather as a humble gesture to explore the shared problems that both Deleuzian thought and the question of postcolonial 'nation' seek to address:

Since the figure of resistance must be identified as minoritarian, the so-called subject of desire must be one that follows minor lines of becoming, employs rhizomatic strategies of thought and operates within 'smooth' spaces that escape the 'striations' of power ... 'the agency of the oppressed, the voice of the subaltern, is not characterized by true representation or self-presence. Rather, it contains original production, an expression of the primacy of desiring- production over social production'. (Burns & Kaiser, 2012, p. 3).

Conceptualising the question of nationalism from such an emphasis on minoritarian becoming thus not only enables us to view nationalism as a hegemonic construct but also opens up the slippages and fragments haunting it. The minoritarian tendencies thus always operate *within* the majoritarian frameworks as a vehicle for the emergence of unforeseen openings, for the creative production of newness. Such attempts at reading one with the other (instead of reading one in terms of the other) thus enable critical analysis to uncover the common strategies employed by both in order to overcome the striations of power and hegemony. Attempts at reading Deleuze in other contexts, as, for

example, in India, therefore must realise such an ethical task that reading demands: of (re) constituting the shared grounds of critical thought that enables the eruption of newness from the dialogic space between two fields, which, while gesturing towards an intimate embrace of each-other, also retains the specificities of each. This paper in its attempt to read together – Deleuze and Guattari's 'concept' with nationalism in India, philosophy with politics, western theories with Indian contexts – can be taken as one such humble gesture at an affirmative reading that while exploring the entanglements also does not foreclose the possibilities of newer critical thought.

Notes

1. This body was formed as a result of the Third International Deleuze Studies in Asia Conference that was held at the Manipal Centre for Philosophy and Humanities, Manipal University in Karnataka, India from 5 to 7 June 2015, which also marked the first Deleuze conference in India. The conference hosted internationally renowned Deleuze scholars like Jeffrey A. Bell, Barbara Glowczewski, Emine Görgül, Tatsuya Higaki, Bruce Kapferer, Paul Patton, Patricia Pisters, Anne Sauvagnargues and Daniel W. Smith, and therefore enabled the formation of a group (including both Indian and western scholars of Deleuze and Guattari studies) that would play a crucial role in the coming years in the frequent organisations of Deleuze conference in India. For further information, see Paul Patton and George K. Varghese's 'Introduction' in their edited special issue titled 'Deleuze in India' (*Deleuze and Guattari Studies*, Vol. 12, Issue 1, February 2018. pp. 1–2); also see the website <http://www.deleuzeindia.com>.
2. Bhaba notes how the complex strategies of cultural identification and discursive addresses function in the name of unitary and unifying concepts like 'the people' or 'the nation' that make them the immanent subjects of a range of social and literary narratives. However, the concept of 'nation' remains always operative in a certain ambivalent manner. As he notes in the 'Introduction' of *Nation and Narration*, 'Nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realise their horizons in the mind's eye'. For further details, see 'Introduction: narrating the nation' in *Nation and Narration* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990) and 'Dissemination: Time, Narrative and the Margins of Modern Nation' in the *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994).
3. This is the title of Partha Chatterjee's essay where, referring to the ways western scholars view the history of Indian nationalism and also how Anderson views it, Chatterjee suggests that there is a tendency to homogenise the fragmentary, multifarious side of the history of nationalism and thus seems to continue the orientalist discourse in a different manner. For further details, see 'Whose Imagined Community?' from the book *Empire and Nation* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2010) and 'Anderson's Utopia' (<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1566381>).
4. The moment of departure shapes the attempt to counter the colonial orientalist view with the assertion of the spiritual superiority of India while retaining the promise of development that western modernity promises. It can be summed up, in Bankim's language, as "'to unite European industries with Indian *dharma*'" [emphasis in original] (Chatterjee, 2010, p. 45). The moment of manoeuvre comes with the arrival of Gandhi and the focus on reconciling the peasant consciousness with the rationalist forms of an 'enlightened' nationalist politics. The moment of arrival comes with independence and the arrival of the newly achieved identity as post-colonial 'nation', the Nehruvian nation-making project and the challenge to reconstitute a legitimate state ideology that would balance with this moment of arrival.
5. Bachelard in his famous book *Poetics of Space* notes that it is the sense of security, belongingness and emotional attachment that transforms a concrete room into home, and all these qualities have been stereotypically associated with the feminine. Therefore, Sue Best asserts, 'For many male writers, most notably Gaston Bachelard in *The Poetics of Space*, the house is a woman – a warm, cosy, sheltering, uterine home. Bachelard explicitly refers to the "maternal features of the house" while also implicitly conjuring images of the house as the realm of

perfect maternal care' (Best, 1995, p. 182). For further details, see Best, S. 1995. 'Sexualising Space', in E. Grosz and E. Probyn (eds.), *Sexy Bodies: The Strange Carnalities of Feminism*, pp. 181–194, London and New York: Routledge.

6. Here, Deleuze would explain the virtual as '... the mode of that which does not act, since it will act only by differentiating itself, by ceasing to be in itself, even as it keeps something of its origin. Precisely, however, it follows that the virtual is the mode of what *is*' (Deleuze, 2004, p. 44). Thus, the virtual though remains operative as an absence yet is not only enabled by the immediacy of 'what is' but shapes it as well.
7. Paul Patton too in *Between Deleuze and Derrida* observes certain crucial similarities (and differences as well) between both the thinkers since both attempt to destabilise established institutions and majoritarian views.
8. When Deleuze and Guattari assert that the aim of philosophy is the creation of new 'concepts' that have not yet been thought of and in that sense the task of philosophy is 'utopian', it should be remembered that they do not mean so in the conventional sense of the transcendental or metaphysical. The term 'utopia' if one recognises the etymological connections came into existence from the Greek 'ou' ('not') and 'topos' ('place'); however, mistakenly the Greek 'ou' was taken to be Greek 'eu' ('good') and thus the term came to be associated with 'good place'. Their concept of utopian also remains linked with the exploration of otherness as well as the paradoxes of such exploration.

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