

***Identity: The Demand for Dignity and The Politics of Resentment*, Francis Fukuyama, (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018), 240**

Francis Fukuyama is an eminent and well-regarded scholar in the American political and academic circles. His book, *The End of History and the Last Man*, which he wrote at the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1992, was a must read for students of international relations in the 1990s. The book convincingly argued that in the Hegelian dialectical sense, the synthesis or outcome of the twentieth century social and political struggles was not a 'communist utopia', as theorized by Karl Marx. Instead, 'global capitalism' or 'liberalism and market economy' emerged as the viable and preferred system for people to organize their economy and society. In the book under review, Fukuyama further dives into the themes he has taken interest in since 1992: *thymos* (the part of the soul that craves recognition), dignity, immigration, nationalism, religion and culture.

As the title goes, the overriding theme of the book is the concept of 'identity', which is further explored to understand 'identity politics'. In the contemporary age, which in the author's opinion, has turned into a threat for liberal democracies. Identity politics encompasses large parts of the political struggle of the contemporary world - be it nationalism, Islamism, feminism, or activism for the LGBT community. Hegel had argued that human history is driven by struggle for 'recognition'. The rational solution to man's suffering, according to him, is 'universal recognition' of human dignity. However, universal recognition is challenged by partial forms of recognition: ultra-nationalism, religion, race, sect or gender. Ideas of 'universal recognition', 'individuality' and 'equality of all men and women' lie at the foundation of liberal democracies. Liberal democracies are, then, threatened by ideas of collective identities.

Identity probes into these themes to understand the rationale behind the rise of 'populist nationalism' and 'anti-immigration' sentiment in America and across Europe. He considers this rise, which has come about due to the identity politics, a threat to the liberal democratic system – a system

that was established during the latter half of the twentieth century. Major manifestations of rise of populist nationalism are the election of Trump in USA, and Britain's vote for Brexit. Populist leaders, the author points out, rely on liberal democratic institutions and principles to establish their authority, and then undermine those very institutions.

In an attempt to understand these events, the author refutes the economic model, which stipulated that humans act 'rationally to maximize utility'. It implies that all human actions are motivated by material interests. Fukuyama on the contrary argues that '*thymos*' is a part of human nature, which is also at the basis of today's identity politics. For instance, the communities striving to get gay marriages legalized reject the proposed title of 'civil union' for homosexual couples. Such a union, though, would accord legal cover as is applicable to heterosexual marriages, but they vehemently demand the right to marriage. The gays, in fact, want to be 'recognized' as equal to married heterosexual couples. Drawing on Socrates dialogue on the nature of a good citizen, the author explains that 'Desire' and 'Reason' are not the only forces guiding human behavior. There is a third part of the soul that craves for recognition and equality of dignity. The current identity politics, in the west, is not just the result of economic marginalization of certain groups, but is also driven by their social and political marginalization. The concept of identity is rooted in *thymos* according to Fukuyama.

The author traces the origin of the concept of individual identity with the help of ideas of thinkers like Martin Luther and Rousseau. He leads the reader through social and political journey of the centuries, which culminated in legal recognition of inalienable right of human dignity for all. According to the author of *identity*, modern liberal democracies originated from, and thrive on a curious combination of individual freedom (freedom to exercise human will) and political equality (guarantee of equality of opportunity as opposed to equality of outcome).

Fukuyama claims that the establishment of liberal democratic system, which glorified the 'individual identity' during the nineteenth century Europe, also engendered a more dangerous trend of 'collective identities'. This phenomenon explains the jingoistic nationalism culminating in two world wars. The basic idea here is that humans are social beings. Mere

recognition of their individuality is insufficient to satisfy them. They also have the inherent need to 'belong' – be part of a group.

Further discussing the idea of 'belonging', the author juxtaposes nineteenth century's violent nationalism and modern fanatical Islamism. Both were an outcome of alienation caused by dislocation, leading to an identity crisis in the individuals. During nineteenth century, modernization brought about by industrialization resulted in mass migration, a phenomenon absent in the preceding agrarian societies. Identity was never a problem for someone born into an agrarian community. Such a person would be born and live in the same place for the entirety of his life. The question of 'who am I?' was answered by his community and social setting. However, an individual in an industrialized society felt anxiety caused by disassociation. The anxiety would be heightened by the lack of trust in those surrounding him in the new location. This condition led to creation of imagined communities, which could either be a nation or a religious group but ideologies generated to consolidate imagined communities can easily be radicalized. In the end, both nationalism and Islamism are two faces of identity politics.

The growing inequality, that has come about alongside rising global wealth, would suggest greater class consciousness and formation of communities along class lines. However, the reality is starkly different. There is greater awakening amongst nations and religious groups, manifested by election of Trump espousing zealous nationalism, and rise in radical Islam. This phenomenon demonstrates the value of identity and need for recognition of one's dignity. Association with a certain class, especially the lower income class, does not provide a sense of belonging in the way that belonging to a culturally integrated entity like a nation or religious community does.

Fukuyama asserts that resentment felt at the lower rung of the economic ladder has less to do with lack of resources, and more to do with loss of dignity. This explains why the native populations feel resentment against the immigrants. They feel that immigrants are reaping benefits out of economic growth of their nation – benefits to which only the natives are entitled. The need to climb up the economic ladder is not for the sole reason of fulfilling material needs and enhancing pleasure. Such a need is

explained by need for recognition of one's dignity and reaffirmation of one's identity.

Therefore, modern social and political struggle has shifted its focus from economic inequality towards marginalization of certain groups. Problematically, such groups, instead of demanding equality with the dominant group, like the early feminist and civil rights movements, demand special treatment and respect for their culture. They demand recognition of their unique lived experiences, and identity politics grows fiercer by the day.

As expected, the situation has drawn a backlash from the dominant groups, who feel their perspectives and feelings are being ignored and underrated. Populist national leaders, like Trump, capitalize upon this resentment to enhance their political influence. The divisiveness and polarization in modern western society is ultimately an outcome of the combative identity politics.

Fukuyama further claims that a sense of 'national identity' and patriotic pride is conducive to social, political and economic development. Mass immigration of people from diverse cultures shakes the foundation of national identity, which genuinely irks those who want to hold on to their national identity. They become anxious as they believe that virtues of their national unity are under threat. The populist leaders in the western hemisphere have exploited the anti-immigration sentiment to further their political agendas.

Finally, the solution Fukuyama offers to reverse the damaging consequences of the fierce identity politics is to fashion broader national identities. Achieving it would require developing fresh narratives. Such a 'national identity' is needed to avoid polarization of the society. It can maintain a social unity needed for growth, development and national integration. Moreover, for mitigating the problem of immigration, Fukuyama offers a middle way to the two extremes of stopping immigration completely or glorifying the unique cultures of the immigrant groups. The diversity created by immigration can sometimes encroach upon the mainstream culture of the host country. These encroachments create anti-immigrant sentiments in those who feel deprived of resources and exclusive claim over their country. Answer to this problem, for Fukuyama, is to integrate the immigrants with the host

society and assimilate them into the mainstream culture. In this way, democratic values can be upheld simultaneously with maintaining social integrity and national cohesion of the host nations.

The main idea of the book is summarized in the last paragraph – “Identity is the theme that underlies many political phenomena today.....Identity can be used to divide, but it can and has also been used to integrate. That in the end will be the remedy for the populist politics of the present.”

Book chapters are small, 1 but comprehensively discuss a particular theme. The chapter, ‘Revolutions of Dignity’ analyzes how the events beginning from the French Revolution in the late eighteenth century to the overthrowing apartheid in the twentieth century, to the Arab Spring of the 21st century were all underlined, according to the author, by the struggle for ‘equal dignity’ for everyone. Fukuyama develops and articulates his ideas through deeply analyzing and contrasting historical events and modern politics. Moreover, he presents to the reader a combination of abstract thinking and factual information related to current international political developments, which adds credence to his arguments.

The author has objectively analyzed multiple political phenomena. He points out the shortcomings of the modern right and also explains the problems with the politics of the left. His language is simple but artfully descriptive and the style is direct and to the point. When discussing a particular issue, the author’s narrative remains totally focused on the subject. Fukuyama uses short sentences and commonly used lexicon. This keeps his reader completely engaged.

The book will be a worthwhile read for anyone with the basic knowledge of contemporary politics and its historical roots. It will be specially interesting for the scholars of IR and political philosophy as it gives a fresh perspective on the current understanding of global politics.

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