Patriotism: An outdated concept?

By Sana Deshpande

"*Patriotism is the virtue of the vicious.*" – Oscar Wilde.

Wilde states that people can justify their wrongdoings with patriotism, cloaking their actions with "devotion for their country." Social injustice, discrimination both hide behind a pretence of love for a nation – and you can't fight love. Of course, patriotism is seemingly innocent until a certain extent, and up to that point, surely it shouldn't be too harmful? After all, patriotism and chauvinism are two different things -chauvinism being an extreme form of patriotism-, and anything taken to an extreme can be dangerous. "Patriotism" is the love, devotion and vigorous support for one's country. The word originates from the Greek "patriŏtēs," meaning fatherland; this backs up the fact that many feel a deep and personal connection with their country, which is essentially what patriotism is. Stephen Nathanson (1993, *Patriotism, Morality and Peace*) claims there are four ways to define patriotism, these being, an affection towards your country; a sense of identification with this country; concern in the welfare of the country; and being willing to sacrifice for the country. However, it is too difficult to define in a single sentence, as it differs from person to person: patriotism is an ambiguous feeling and isn't set in stone as it can be viewed in many different ways and can be a source of both conflict and harmony.

In this day and age, patriotism is becoming increasingly out of place as with the rise of globalisation, so many different countries are interconnected leaving little room for one to devote themselves to their own country. As every country is dependent on each other, patriotism could act as more of a hindrance when in need of aid. Patriotism isolates countries. For example, one may say that Brexit arose out of patriotism and now the United Kingdom is left alone to fend for itself, which isn't necessarily something that benefits the country. Especially since Covid 19 has emerged, the world no longer has borders and people from different countries and walks of life have to collaborate and interact in order to create a safe and sustainable future. This simply will not work under the shadow of patriotism.

In itself, there is nothing harmful about patriotism, about loving your country, but it can become damaging when people take it too far or use it as a guise to conceal their own views. Leaving patriotism aside for a moment, the problem may lie in the way people display patriotism, rather than in the belief itself. If people are "loud" and aggressive about this, it will not be received very well and can inspire conflict within a country. The key aspect in determining if patriotism is damaging, is whether or not people stand by and support their own country, or actively try to "tear" another country down. In this way you are effectively seeking conflict which is not the intention of patriotism.

Patriotism may also cause irrational thinking – it takes root in human emotion and has always stayed and grown within the mind. As a result of this, people could slowly become less tolerant, leading to clashes in and outside a country. Some could even argue that in extreme cases, patriotism may lead to xenophobia and an unwillingness to adapt to a changing environment; patriotism is a thing of the past and must be set aside so we can move forward and live together without prejudice. Leading up to World War I and during the Balkan Crisis, tensions were high and you could blame this on patriotism. Rather than separation into different countries and groups, we will have to integrate as humanity otherwise we will be stuck in the same place for years to come.

On the other hand, patriotism has the power to unite the citizens of a country, as it promotes togetherness, and working with each other for the betterment of a nation. Love and devotion cannot be defeated easily, and if used in a non-discriminatory way, can help strengthen a country. In World War II, America used patriotism to claim a victory by rallying support and making people feel as if they had a duty to care for their country – which ultimately brought the whole community together. This opposes my earlier point as you could say that patriotism solves conflict. The very famous "Uncle Sam Poster" would be one of the first things you'd associate with patriotism: a figure that represents the government imploring the public to perform a service for their country. And how can that cause harm?

Patriotism is not the same as nationalism. George Orwell states that patriotism is more "defensive" while nationalism is a hunger for power and prestige. Defending your country rather than attacking another is not damaging in any way, therefore in theory, patriotism shouldn't affect anyone other than the person who believes in it.

To conclude, I believe you can't clearly "assess" whether patriotism causes damage or not as it is impossible to precisely define – it varies depending on how you perceive it and how you act on it. While there do seem to be a lot of negative consequences to patriotism, it is something that is part of society and even though the meaning has changed over time, at its core it has good intentions. Being a

British Indian myself, there is always a dilemma about "which country I should feel patriotic about." As people come from so many different backgrounds, like me, many find the idea in itself complicated to identify with. I think it is something we should try to leave behind but if people find safety and comfort in it, and are not using it to mask ulterior motives, that is their choice.

The true meaning of patriotism has been distorted by years of misinterpretation and the word is being misused today.