

Contribution of Western Culture in Nationalism of India

Sunil Kumar

Extension lecturer in GCW Tosham, India

Abstract: *The concept of Nationalism is linked to the idea of sovereignty and therefore it has to be associated to the principle of self-determination. This research paper intends to analyse the social, economic and political factors that had inspired the people to define and achieve their national identity in the late 19th century. This study also interprets the course and reasons behind the process of struggle against colonialism. The study of nationalism is important to analyse world politics today and nationalism can be defined as either political or emotional to one's nation or as a policy of national independence. Therefore a nation or the idea of nation must exist in order for a national identity to be founded. Indian nationalism developed as a concept during the Indian independence movement fought against the colonial British Raj. India has been unified under many emperors and governments in history. Ancient texts mention India under emperor Bharata. The Mauryan Empire was the first to unite all of India and South Asia. In addition much of India has also been unified under a central government by empires such as the Gupta Empire, Rashtrakuta Empire, Pala Empire, Mughal Empire, Indian Empire etc. Since the time immemorial India has been the abode of various castes and religions. There was no reason for the development of nationalism however the spirit of nationalism emerged in India owing to the impact of the British rule. The British regime created various differences among them as a result of which there emerged a spirit of nationalism in India. The first revolt of Indian independence and the rebellion of 1857 were mercilessly crushed by the English however, it aroused the country from the slumber and people began to make efforts for independence. No doubt the British authority made some dummy reforms to pacify the Indians and also started taking cooperation and support of the Indians in the administration of the country but this was not enough. The reality was that the speed of the reforms was too slow to satisfy the sentiments of nationalism. After the establishment of All Indian National Congress in 1885 various regional political organizations were established and these together contributed a lot to the national awakening in India. The second half of the 19th century witnessed the full flowering of national political consciousness and the growth of an organised national movement in India. Basically, modern Indian nationalism arose to meet the challenge of foreign domination. The very conditions of British rule helped the growth of national sentiment among the Indian people. It was British rule and its direct and indirect consequences which provided the material, and the moral and intellectual conditions for the development of a national movement in India. The consolidation of the British East India Company's rule in the Indian subcontinent during the 18th century brought about socio-economic changes which led to the rise of an Indian middle class and steadily eroded pre-colonial socio-religious institutions and barriers. The emerging economic and financial power of Indian business-owners and merchants and the professional class brought them increasingly into conflict with the British Raj. A rising political consciousness among the native Indian social elite including lawyers, doctors, university graduates, government officials and similar groups spawned an Indian identity and fed a growing nationalist sentiment in India in the last decades of the nineteenth century. The creation in 1885 of the Indian National Congress in India by the political reformer A.O. Hume intensified the process by providing an important platform from which demands could be made for political liberalisation, increased autonomy, and social reform. The leaders of the Congress advocated dialogue and debate with the Raj administration to achieve their political goals. Distinct from these moderate voices or loyalists who did not preach or support violence was the nationalist movement, which grew particularly strong, radical and violent in Bengal and in Punjab.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Around the 18th Century a number of important events took place in the world. One such event was the Industrial Revolution which took place in England. The European and the British traders initially came to India for trading purposes. The Industrial Revolution in Britain led to the increase in demand for raw materials for the factories there. At the same time they also required a market to sell their finished goods. India provided such a platform to Britain to fulfill all their needs. The 18th century was a period of internal power struggle in India and with the declining power of the Mughal Empire, the British officials were provided with the perfect opportunity to establish their hold over Indian

Territory. They did these through numerous wars, forced treaties, annexations of and alliances with the various regional powers all over the country. Their new administrative and economic policies helped them consolidate their control over the country. Their land revenue policies help them keep the poor farmers in check and get huge sums as revenues in return. They forced the commercialisation of agriculture with the growing of various cash crops and the raw materials for the industries in the Britain. With the strong political control, the British were able to monopolise the trade with India. They defeated their foreign rivals in trade so that there could be no competition. They monopolised the sale of all kinds of raw materials and bought these at low prices whereas the Indian weavers had to buy them at exorbitant prices. Heavy duties were imposed on Indian goods entering Britain so as to protect their own industry. Various investments were made to improve the transport and communication system in the country to facilitate the easy transfer of raw materials from the farms to the port and of finished goods from the ports to the markets. Also, English education was also introduced to establish a class of educated Indians who would maintain the British in ruling the country and strengthen their political authority. All these measures helped the British to establish, consolidate and continue their rule over India.

When the industrial revolution started in Europe these small states did not have sufficient raw materials for their industries or markets for their finished goods. These countries now started looking for markets in Asia and Africa. England succeeded in controlling trade with India and established the East India Company in 1600. This company was supported by the British government. With its help England was able to extend her territorial frontiers to the Indian subcontinent. The first factory was established at Surat in 1613. In 1615 Sir Thomas Roe got permission from the Mughal emperor Jahangir to open more factories at Agra, Ahmadabad and Broach. It was the battles of Plassey in 1757 and Buxar in 1764 which provided the ground for the British success in India. Through these battles a long era of British political control over India began. The Battle of Plassey was won by the English in Bengal. The British made Mir Jafar, the new Nawab of Bengal in return for which they receive an enormous sum of money as well as the territory of twenty four Parganas from the Nawab. But Mir Jafar was not able to make further payments to them. As a result he was replaced by Mir Qasim who proved to be a strong ruler. Mir Qasim was not ready to meet their demands for more money or control. As a result Mir Qasim was removed and Mir Jafar was made the Nawab again. Mir Qasim then joined hands with the Nawab of Awadh Shiraj-ud-daula and the Mughal emperor Shah Allam II in plotting against the British, the battle took place at a place called Buxar on 22 October 1764. Their defeat proved to be decisive. Mysore emerged as a powerful state under an able leadership of Haider Ali and his son Tipu Sultan in the second half of the eighteenth century. Four wars took place between Mysore and the British. Finally the Fourth Anglo-Mysore War in 1799 ended in the heroic defeat and death of Tipu Sultan. With this a glorious chapter of struggle between Mysore and the English came to an end. The Marathas were another formidable power in western and central India during the second half of the eighteenth century. But the struggle for power among themselves gave the British an opportunity to intervene in their internal matters. Many wars took place between the British and the Marathas mainly on account of the Subsidiary Alliance. The Third Battle of Panipat against the Marathas in 1761 had already provided the stage for the success of British in India. Soon many more native states came under British control. This was done by a system of alliances called the Doctrine of Lapse and Subsidiary Alliance. Doctrine of Lapse led to a number of independent kingdoms being annexed to the British Empire. These were the states that were enjoying British protection but their rulers had died without leaving a natural heir to the throne. Their adopted sons could now no longer inherit the property or the pension which was granted to them by the British. In this way Dalhousie annexed the Maratha States of Satara in 1848, Sambalpur in 1850, Udaipur in 1852, Nagpur in 1853, Jhansi in 1854 and Awadh 1856. In Subsidiary Alliance, the Indian States that were under British protection had to suspend their armies and instead maintain British troops. They also surrendered their control on their foreign affair and let go of their right to make alliances with other foreign states for any purpose, economic or political. In return, they were given protection by the British from their rivals.

Another major economic impact of the British policies in India was the introduction of a large number of commercial crops such as tea, coffee, indigo, opium, cotton, jute, sugarcane and oilseed. Different kinds of commercial crops were introduced with different intentions. Indian society underwent many changes after the British came to India. In the 19th century, certain social practices like female

infanticide, child marriage, sati, polygamy and a rigid caste system became more prevalent. These practices were against human dignity and values. Women were discriminated against at all stages of life and were the disadvantaged section of the society. They did not have access to any development opportunities to improve their status. Education was limited to a handful of men belonging to the upper castes. Brahmins had access to the Vedas which were written in Sanskrit. Expensive rituals, sacrifices and practices after birth or death were outlined by the priestly class. When the British came to India they brought new ideas such as liberty, equality, freedom and human rights from the Renaissance, the Reformation Movement and the various revolutions that took place in Europe. These ideas appealed to some sections of our society and led to several reform movements in different parts of the country. At the forefront of these movements were visionary Indians such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, Aruna Asaf Ali and Pandita Ramabai. These movements looked for social unity and strived towards liberty, equality and fraternity. Many legal measures were introduced to improve the status of women. For example, the practice of sati was banned in 1829 by Lord Bentinck, then Governor General. The British had come to India with the idea of making immense profits. This meant buying of raw materials at very cheap rates and selling finished goods at much higher prices. The British wanted the Indians to be educated and modern enough to consume their goods but not to the extent that it proved detrimental to British interests. Some of the Britishers believed that Western ideas were modern and superior while Indian ideas were old and inferior. In reality this was not true.

Indians had a rich traditional learning that was still relevant. By this time in England there was a group of Radicals who had a humanistic ideology towards Indians. They wanted India to be a part of the modern and progressive world of science. But the British government was cautious in undertaking rapid modernisation of India. They feared a reaction among the people if too much interference took place with their religious beliefs and social customs. The English wanted perpetuation of their rule in India and not a reaction among the people. The British took a keen interest in introducing the English language in India. They had many reasons for doing so. Western thinkers like Max Mueller and Annie Besant encouraged vernacular languages and literary works to instill a sense of pride in Indian heritage and culture. It enabled Indians to revive India's cultural past. The important role of press in arousing political awakening and exchange in ideas is also noteworthy. The newspapers and journals gave opportunities to share ideas and problems. They spoke the language of the people demonstrating their everyday lives, joys and sorrows. Along with newspapers and journals, they promoted the feelings of self confidence, self-respect, awareness and patriotism, thereby developing a feeling of national consciousness. The Indians found it difficult to adjust to the new system of administration introduced by the British. The Indians were denied political rights and the British officers treated them with contempt. Indians were excluded from all higher positions in the civil administration and military. The British also introduced a new system of law and justice in India. The adverse impact of the British rule on the political, economic and social spheres resulted in sharp reaction of the Indian people against the foreigners. This led to a series of the anti-British movements throughout the country. Peasants and tribes rebelled against exploitative rulers. All these factors helped to spread anti-British feeling which ultimately culminated in the revolt of 1857. The British were not very sensitive to the feelings of the masses they ruled ruthlessly. The English East India Company's rule in India witnessed a large number of uprisings and rebellions. The Revolt of 1857 had a major impact on our national movement. For the first time it unified and brought together people having different ethnic, religious and class background against the British rule.

The revolt brought an end to East India Company's rule, along with changes in the British policy towards Indian States. One of the most important outcomes of the revolt was that it gave rise to nationalism. Indian people became more aware of their heroes who sacrificed their lives for the country so that others might live in free India in times to come. The revolt however scarred the relationship between Hindus and Muslims with the Divide and Rule Policy which was adopted by the British. They felt that if they wanted to continue their rule in India it was important to divide the Hindus and Muslims. A large number of British and Europeans stayed in our country during this period which also brought cultural transformation. Some of the cultural and legal changes that took place as a result of British rule continue to affect our life even today. The rails, the club life, the imperial buildings like the Rashtrapati Bhavan and the Parliament are reminiscent of the British rule in India. Many food items like bread, tea and cake that we consume today are a direct result of our interaction with Europeans during the British rule. The idea of introducing Indian civil service started

during this period. The Indian armed forces still retain many aspects of European training and culture. The medium of our instruction or learning itself is predominantly English. The Supreme Court and the High Court pass their judgments in English. This language itself is a legacy of the British rule and continues to be the lingua franca of Indians seeking employment in their own country. The consolidation of the British East India Company's rule in the Indian subcontinent during the 18th century brought about socio-economic changes which led to the rise of an Indian middle class and steadily eroded pre-colonial socio-religious institutions and barriers. The emerging economic and financial power of Indian business-owners and merchants and the professional class brought them increasingly into conflict with the British Raj. A rising political consciousness among the native Indian social elite including lawyers, doctors, university graduates, government officials and similar groups spawned an Indian identity and fed a growing nationalist sentiment in India in the last decades of the nineteenth century. The creation in 1885 of the Indian National Congress in India by the political reformer A.O. Hume intensified the process by providing an important platform from which demands could be made for political liberalisation, increased autonomy, and social reform. The leaders of the Congress advocated dialogue and debate with the Raj administration to achieve their political goals. Distinct from these moderate voices or loyalists who did not preach or support violence was the nationalist movement, which grew particularly strong, radical and violent in Bengal and in Punjab.

REFERENCES

- [1] Jaffrelot, Christophe (1999), *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics*: Penguin Books India, pp. 13–15.
- [2] Acharya, Shiva. *Nation, Nationalism and Social Structure in Ancient India* by Shiva Acharya". Sundeepbooks.com. Retrieved 2011-11.
- [3] Leifer, Michael (2000), *Asian Nationalism* pp. 112.

Citation: Sunil Kumar. " Contribution of Western Culture in Nationalism of India." *International Journal of History and Cultural Studies (IJHCS)*, vol 3, no. 4, 2017, pp. 22-25. doi:DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.20431/2454-7654.0304002>.

Copyright: © 2017 Authors. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.