

Historiography of Indian Nationalism: Various Issues and Debates

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Abstract : The origin, development and consequences of Indian nationalism is an overly sensitive subject. There is no end of debate among historians about this. Differences in their views, evaluation of facts and individual mentality lead the reader of Indian history into a maze. Nationalist leaders such as Dadabhai Naoroji, Romesh Chunder Dutt have presented their own narratives about Indian nationalism. On the other hand, few European scholars undertook to write the history of the Indian national movement, but most of their writings had the mentality of conquerors' pride and self-conceit. In the 1970s to current times several books are written by various Indian historians were published in protest against Europeans and historiography of Indian nationalism gained a new dimension.

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Liberal Englishmen Viewpoint: -

The genre that has been particularly effective in historiography of the Indian national movement up to the mid-60s is the Liberal Englishmen Viewpoints. According to historians of this genre, British rule created an English-educated middle class in India whose class aspirations were not being met within the British rule structure. To fulfil these high aspirations, they conflict with the ruling class. It was expressed through the national movement. In this case the role of the British ruler was the catalyst. This line of reasoning is very beautifully illustrated in Thomson and Garrett's research book.¹

Nationalist Viewpoint: -

In the mid-60s, another reaction against English liberalist view became active. which came to be known as the Nationalist Ideology or "Nationalist Viewpoint". Adherents of this ideology believed that, while it is true that the national movement was initiated for self-interest, but its main theme lay in the search for self-identity. Self-identification here means the expression of one's identity on a territory through language, dress, traditions. Therefore, to highlight the identity of Indianness, different protests against the rulers should be integrated into a political formula. When the middle-class intelligentsia took responsibility for completing this task, the nationalist movement progressed to perfection.

That is, while setting up the identity, the clash of the Indians with the British rulers became inevitable, because the interests of both were completely different. Indians realized that there was a huge gap between information and its actual implementation in British politics under colonial policy. As such the Indian middle-class intellectuals saw no shadow of representative rule in British India. This was the anti-British rule of the British ruling authorities in India which was beautifully illustrated in his research by the nationalist leader, The Grand Old Man Dadabhai Naoroji.² Another nationalist leader, Romesh Chunder Dutt, has presented the picture of economic exploitation of British rule in his research.³ However, Ramesh Chandra Majumdar and other nationalist historians were also somewhat sceptical about the existence of national entities in India.⁴ Even the scholar like Bipan Chandra explained Indian nationalism as purely a modern ideology and organizing principle.⁵

Cambridge School Viewpoint: -

A major breakthrough in the historiography of nationalism came in the mid-1960s when a Cambridge University man inspired new historians to write a history of the Indian national movement based on the ideas of John Gallagher, a disciple of Lewis Namier. The historical clan was known as the Cambridge School. The first book on the Indian national movement of this school was published by Anil Seal. In this book, Anil Seal exaggerates the role of caste and community in the Indian National Movement and denies the importance of leaders and ideals. According to him, Western-educated people were concentrated in the three major cities of the Indian presidency. This weak community has created weak nationalism to counter weak imperialism. Since the imperial regime depended on cooperation with its Indian allies, there was always a tendency to court allied groups. As a result, some fixed factions and strong interest groups have emerged. These narrow-minded and selfish personal and group leaders were the directors of the Indian National Movement. These rulers negotiated power and patronage with the British in varying degrees of loyalty from top to bottom. Therefore, in the Indian national movement there was no place for ideologies, there were narrow caste interests.⁶ Another research book in this area was published by Gallagher, Johnson and Anil Seal and looks at the regional level where power was concentrated in the hands of regional leaders.⁷ According to the Cambridge School, Indian nationalism is a local elite power struggle. According to them, there was no place for ideology in the Gandhian movement. The assassination of Mahatma Gandhi teaches us how hollow is the Indian's search for self-identity, because it was an Indian who killed Gandhi.

Among the other books written by C.A Bayly, published in this genre, is important. This book shows that the educated middle-class leaders of Allahabad are actually just the favoured spokesmen of the Shetty class.⁸ For them, the relationship between patrons and followers is bigger than the unity of the country. D.A Washbrook in his book on Madras Presidency states that the main goals of

politicians here were power and status.⁹ Other books published in this genre are C.J Baker's *The Politics of South India 1920-1937*,¹⁰ Judith M. Brown's *Gandhi's Rise to Power: in Indian Politics 1915-1922*,¹¹ *Gandhi and Civil Disobedience: The Mahatma in Indian Politics 1928-1934*,¹² etc. Every one of them implicitly expressed cynicism about Indian nationalism.

Criticism of Cambridge School: -

Hence, we see that the Cambridge interpretation has identified a perverted taste in India by identifying vested interests, favouritism, communal strife, power demand etc. as the driving force behind nationalism in India. For them, ideology and self-sacrifice for country are less important to revolutionaries. According to Tapan Roy Chowdhury, the Cambridge School bring down India's national movement to the level of Animal Politics.¹³ When they ignore the nationwide fines, beatings, indiscriminate police caning and firing, brutal imprisonment, gallows and the self-sacrifice of countless known and unknown men and women, there seems to be something seriously wrong with their analysis. Leaders either think of ministerial or business benefits, have lamented the greed of good jobs. Are the people so?

Peasants of Bardauli and Midnapore, laborers of Bombay, tribals of Andhra, border provinces Khoda-e-Khidmatgar? Inspired by which chant or dream, they forgot about their temporary happiness and benefits? Bipan Chandra and Sumit Sarkar both analysed the nationalistic ideology and showed that nationalism was mixed with the blood of the agitators. Amalsh Tripathi posed the question: The response to the destruction of indigenous industries, extraction of resources, the increase in poverty and consequent famines due to rising revenue pressure, the exploitation of landlords, misapplication of tenancy acts, and the evils of the colonial economy haven't fuelled the fire of discontent at all levels of the country?¹⁴ Are these reasons not the main motivation of nationalism? However, the Cambridge group have now made significant changes to their earlier style of interpretation, as exemplified in CA Bayly's new book which was published in 1998.¹⁵

Marxist Viewpoint: -

Orthodox Marxists historians explained the national movement in the context of economic development. They blamed the bourgeoisie in particular because they had neglected the interests of the people and had cheated them. However, such a class narrow view and the theory of Economic Determinism were later much refined in the writings of S.N Mukherjee, Bipan Chandra and Sumit Sarkar. Sumit Sarkar believes that class consciousness is an essential tool for social analysis. But they have to be interpreted with skill and flexibility. According to him there were two levels of nationalism in the struggle against imperialism. One is Elite-Class Nationalism, the other is Subaltern-Class Nationalism. The complex interaction of these two levels resulted in the model of continuity in change.¹⁶

Bipan Chandra and his colleagues turned the Marxist interpretation towards nationalism. According to them the national struggle was not only under the control of the bourgeoisie. The main opposition here was between the interests of the British rulers and the interests of the Indians. Besides, there were various secondary oppositions in the society, but as the anti-colonial struggle increased, there was an understanding between the main and secondary oppositions. So, the Indian national struggle was not a class, caste or religious struggle. It is through understanding between them that the nationalist struggle is transformed into a mass struggle.¹⁷

Subaltern Viewpoint: -

Ranjit Guha in 1982 AD argued at the beginning of Subaltern Studies, that nationalist historiography has long been dominated by the upper class, so it has been side-lined. The role of the common people in the progress of nationalism, freed from the dominance of the elite, is absent in previous historiography.¹⁸ Therefore, the nationalism which culminated in the Indian national movement at the level of nation-state formation is the hollow nationalism of the upper classes. True nationalism lies in the nationalist struggle of the subaltern classes, because the bourgeoisie has always failed to speak loudly for the whole nation. Hence the authority of the bourgeoisie was repeatedly questioned by peasants and workers, who had different styles of movement. But since the Indian Nation-State has set up bourgeois dominance and ideology, so Indian nationalism is incomplete.¹⁹

Criticism of Subaltern Viewpoint: -

But today this materialistic concept has ended, so the central discussion is no longer class, but community. The discussion shifted to people's right to culture, mind and Self-Identity. Sumit Sarkar talks about the decline of the Subaltern Class because the colonial intellectual class has slowly entered in the discussion of the nature of subaltern class.²⁰ Dipesh Chakraborty has argued that Elite-Class groups can also have Subaltern-Class pasts.²¹

Post-Colonial Viewpoint: -

Researcher Partha Chatterjee, who has studied the nationalism of the upper crore people, argued that Indian nationalism is 'Different', but it is a 'Western interpretation'. It is created in three stages 1) Moments of departure. 2) Post Enlightenment Rationalist Thought. 3) Moment of Manoeuvre.²² However, this theoretical explanation has now been further developed in Partha Chatterjee's most recent book.²³ Today, the subaltern class interpretation of nationalism has gone a step further in recent works of Gyan Prakash scholarship on postcolonial theory. Revising Chatterjee's statement, he showed that there was no fundamental difference at the inner level to the external life of the Indian nation as a nation-state. The Indian nation-state was not a blind imitation of the West. Western modernity is considered here from a unique position arising from the fusion of scientific perspectives and spiritual cultural traditions. That is, the state will be governed by moral behaviour and ideals that will not be imported from the West. However, the idea of such a national state comes from the failure to achieve solidarity, so the issue of solidarity remains at the level of rational discussion.²⁴

Conclusion: -

Nationalism has been discussed with all these different ideologies and viewpoints hence it is a very deep and controversial argument-based discussion. However, it is difficult to imagine the existence of synergistic decisions in this case. A nation that used to speak with one voice where the voices of women and Dalits are constantly accused of being suppressed. Since Indian society is pluralistic, there are bound to be many voices of nationalism here. Hence, class, ethnic and religious identities have manifested and intersected

each other in a multifaceted and well-organised manner. The colonial state reinforced these rifts. Nationalists also tried to show an alternative path to national integration. In order to avoid the conflict and disharmony of the harsh reality, the concept of Indian unity of one nation was conceived due to religious sentiments which did not accommodate many groups and hence the unity achieved was very weak. However, Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal opined that separatist thinking or going into anti-state will not be the right way for this.²⁵ Nation-Building is an ongoing process of constant understanding, adaptation and contestation, so nationalism must be judged by acknowledging the multidimensional responses of Indians. To consider the different levels of consciousness, to analyse how they interacted with each other and to see how the internal contradictions of Indian society judged that consciousness, these consciousnesses considered their various competing positions in front of colonial rule.

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