CHAPTER I

THE EMERGENCE OF INDIAN NATIONALISM

Since the French Revolution, nationalism has been the most significant emotional factor in the public life. Henceforth, it has acted like a dynamic force and has brought about a new configuration of human groups, changing completely the political map of the old world as illustrated by the nineteenth century Europe. One characteristic feature of nationalism is that its emergence in history is connected with the rise of the middle class as a dominant political force. This class has played a historic role in ensuring the defeat of the forces of reaction and thus provided an effective leadership to the general masses of people in their fight for democratic rights against the hereditary claim. Democracy based on popular sovereignty has thus been a condition for the birth of nationalism. Indeed, the democratic state is now-a-days charged with an emotion which was unknown before the French Revolution. This idealization of the national State as the sole unit of man's supreme allegiance is the essence of modern nationalism. ¹

Nationalism has particularly played a most vital and creative role in the life of a people subjected to colonial rule. To such people, it has been a great cementing force in so far as it has infused in them a rare sense of unity and solidarity. Common subjection to the same political authority has always been a vital factor in generating national consciousness in men. It has inspired their minds
with a burning desire for freedom from the foreign yoke. The national struggle of the people of Asia and Africa against the European domination bears adequate testimony to the irresistible magic power of nationalism.

So it was natural that the freedom struggle of India against the colonial rule of England should be preceded by an all-round national awakening among her people. Without this dynamic consciousness, her freedom struggle would not have gained the necessary strength to end the colonial slavery once for all.

The history of Indian nationalism does not go beyond the rise of the British suzerainty. Indeed, the British conquest of India was one of the most fateful events in her political history. Before this, India was actually divided into many self-contained units. There were barriers of race, language, religion and custom. The inhabitants of different regions lacked altogether that consciousness which could induce them to look upon India as their common motherland. Mentally they were completely dominated by the medieval ways of life. In this climate, the British brought to India the Western culture which represented a new civilisation. As Pandit Nehru observed:

"The impact of western culture on India was the impact of a dynamic society, of a "modern" consciousness, on a static society wedded to medieval habits of thoughts,
which ... could not progress because of its inherent limitations.*

More particularly, the British rule had affected the socio-economic history of India in two very important ways. On the one hand, it destroyed ruthlessly the economic foundation of Indian society, and, on the other, it laid the material basis for a new social order.* Under the first head, may be included the annihilation of the village economy based on common possession of property, thus paving the way for the rise of capitalist economy. Under the second, comes the political unification of India, the establishment of modern communications, especially, the railways and telegraphs. What is more, the introduction of English education became the effective channel for the spread of Western social and political ideas which, by their impact on the mind of educated middle class, created the appropriate intellectual ferment.

The rise and growth of Indian nationalism may be traced to these processes. But this should not be taken to mean that there was a causal relation between them and the birth of Indian nationalism. They were only the preconditions. Secondly, it would be unhistorical to assume

* Karl Marx saw in these two processes "double mission" of England in India, one destructive and the other regenerating. (Karl Marx on Colonialism and Modernisation ed. by Shlomo Avineri, New York, 1968, P.125. Also, according to Marx, the village economy of India lacked the mechanism of internal change and, as such, the English had accomplished a historic task by destroying this economy (Ibid., P.11 and P. 89).
that the British ruling class in India, by a deliberate policy, had produced those conditions and forces which formed a social matrix from which Indian nationalism emerged. This would mean that the ruling class itself had contrived to foster the spirit of Indian nationalism. One should not confuse the conscious policy of the British in India and some of the unintended consequences following from that policy. The one, and the only one, aim pursued by them was to consolidate their position in India in order to exploit the Indian resources efficiently and in a better way. In doing this, they unleashed, quite unwittingly, the forces, which, by way of a reaction, fostered the growth of nationalism. Indeed, the national sentiment always arises out of a tension and conflict between two opposite forces, that is, between the rulers and the ruled.

Thus the political unification of India, accomplished by the British sword, had facilitated the rise of Indian nationalism. But any kind of unity, political or otherwise, imposed from above, especially by a foreign power, must crumble down without a sustenance from a profounder spiritual unity among a people. And the dynamism of Indian nationalism, as a great unifying force, must be found in a more deeplying spiritual unity among the Indian people which persisted from the remotest antiquity in spite of their patent political disunity. In the history of a people political unity may arise and dissolve for various causes which are purely
external, but its spiritual and cultural unity, in a more profound sense, is more durable even when in a latent state. By itself, a political unity is nothing if not sustained by some spiritual substance. The political unity of the Indian people became a permanent force because of the fact that this spiritual substance was woven into the ethos of Indian nationalism. Hans Kohn highlights the spiritual unity of India when he observes thus:

"... For many thousands of years India has been one, not merely in a geographical sense, but in religion, civilization, and customs.... Her sentiment of unity has found expression in ancient songs and traditions .... Her most important places of pilgrimage are scattered over the whole country, and these have always been meeting-places where men from all over India gathered together on the roads and in the woods, and where they learned at the feet of their great teachers ...."

If England had brought about a far-reaching social revolution in India, which was both destructive and regenerative in consequences, she was hardly expected to complete the process. For that would have been self-defeating to her very object which was, to all intents and purposes, imperialistic. So a time came when the British rulers did everything to stop the changes in the progressive direction so far as India was concerned. Thus they came into conflict with the democratic hopes and aspirations of the Indian middle class.
which assumed the task of carrying the progressive changes to their logical conclusions. It was, incidentally, a great irony of history that the British rule, which was to promote and further the imperialist designs of England, released such forces as were destined, ultimately, to challenge the very basis of her power. Thus, as Marx pointed out, the twofold historic task — destruction and regeneration — performed by England in the Indian subcontinent must be followed by a third step, that of overthrowing the British yoke which stood on the way of Indian progress. This was the task which the Indian people themselves, under the dynamic power of their nationalistic aspirations, were to accomplish by initiating national liberation movement in future.

Bengal provided the original mould on which the image of Indian nationalism was forged. The Bengali intelligentsia, inspired by the Western democratic ideas had been the pioneering force to give early expression to India's democratic and national aspirations. Bengal had an experience of the British rule for a very considerable period before it spread out to other parts of India. Therefore, it was Bengal, and not India as a whole, which first underwent the transition under the impact of the British rule. Consequently, first of all, the rising middle class of Bengal came into conflict with the British ruling authorities.
The Bengali middle class applied the Western technique of constitutional agitations to voice political rights and demands. As Pandit Nehru observed:

"During the second half of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth, Bengal ... played a dominant role in British Indian life... A number of very remarkable men rose in Bengal in the nineteenth century, who gave the lead to the rest of India in cultural and political matters, and out of whose efforts the new nationalist movement ultimately took shape." 5

From the very outset of the British rule, Bengal had been a most tragic victim of exploitation which was as ruthless as it was unremitting. It was an outright plunder which gradually took the shape of legalised exploitation. It was not from any high motive that the British authorities destroyed the Indian village economy, which was characterised by a perfect union of agriculture and indigenous manufactures.*

The Industrial Revolution in England gave rise to a new class. It was in the interest of this class that the British Government in India made vigorous efforts to crush Indian manufactures by various measures. There was a time when the East India Company used to carry Indian goods to Europe. But later they took steps to close the European

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* Karl Marx held the Indian village economy responsible for the rise and perpetuation of Oriental despotism which prevented India's economic and political progress. (Karl Marx on Colonialism and Modernization, ed. by Shlomo Avineri, New York, 1969, p. 88).
markets to Indian products. On the contrary, the British goods began to invade Indian markets. Thus while the British goods had a free access to India, the Indian goods were losing even the home markets. The result was that the majority of the weavers and artisans in Bengal were thrown out of employment and began to swell the ranks of agriculturists. Thus India underwent an increasing process of ruralisation under the British regime. It is not surprising that this economic exploitation created a wide-spread discontent among the Bengali intelligentsia and brought it into open conflict with the Government.

However, in the midst of this devastation Bengal experienced an all-round awakening in every sphere of life-social, religious, moral, intellectual and political. The English educated middle class, which personified this re-nascent spirit, was radical in thought and outlook. It was well-prepared to apply itself to the task of building up a new social order inspired by democratic ideals and principles.

A study of the development of India's democratic and national consciousness must begin with Raja Rammohan Roy, the father of Indian enlightenment. He was the perfect embodiment of modern consciousness. He was pained by the stagnant and degraded condition of India. He symbolized the aspiration for the regeneration of the country.
The thought of Rammohan was the product of the best tradition of the East and West. On the one hand, he made a rediscovery of India in so far as he restored to her people her best tradition without being carried away by the glamour of the Western culture. On the other, there was manifest in him a passionate yearning for liberty and freedom of thought in the best tradition of the West.

Rammohan was the first to initiate a rationalist movement in India in the religious and social spheres. He revived and preached the Hindu theism based on Upanishadic ideal. This theistic movement successfully met the challenge of the proselytizing Christian missionaries. He stated the object of his religious reform in the following words:

"I regret to say that the present system of religion adhered to by the Hindus is not well-calculated to promote their political interest. The distinction of castes, introducing innumerable divisions and subdivisions among them, has entirely deprived them of political feeling... It is, I think, necessary that some changes should take place in their religion at least for the sake of their political advantage and social comfort." 6

He was associated with the foundation of the celebrated Hindu College (January 20, 1817). His object was to inculcate a critical faculty in the Hindu college students with the help of latest achievement of Western knowledge and science.
He was a pioneer to set the pattern for constitutional movement in India. First, he raised a voice of protest against the discrimination involved in the July Act of 1827 which denied the right of the Hindu and Muslim jurors to try the Europeans. Secondly, in 1830, he protested against the rent-free land being taxed by the Government. Thirdly, he was connected with the agitation started on the eve of the revision of the East India Company's Charter due in 1833 and demanded the abolition of the Company's trading rights and the removal of heavy export duties. Amit Sen observes:

"... He (Rammohan) put forward a programme of administrative reforms which were to become famous in Indian constitutional agitation, and included items like Indianisation of the services, separation of the executive from the judiciary, and the trial by jury." 7

As a champion of freedom of expression, he believed that a free press is not only useful but extremely beneficial to the supreme authority itself as an excellent channel of information about the country and its people. He had such a profound conviction in the sanctity of freedom of press that he at once suspended the publication of the Mirat-ul-Akbar, one of the two weeklies he edited to shape public opinion as a protest against the Press Ordinance of 1823.
He was a champion of liberty not only of India but of the world at large. That was why he took a keen interest in international affairs and instinctively felt identified with progressive movement everywhere in the world. When the political aspirations of the people of Naples were crushed by the Holy Alliance in 1821, he felt so hurt and depressed that he cancelled an engagement with one Mr. Buckingham. He was nevertheless full of hopes for a better future of mankind as illustrated by the concluding sentence of the letter he wrote to Mr. Buckingham explaining the cancellation of the engagement:

"Enemies of liberty and friends of despotism have never been and never will be ultimately successful." 8 On another occasion — the establishment of constitutional Government in Spain — he gave a public dinner at the Town Hall in Calcutta. 9

Rammohan's outlook had a catholicism which was perhaps attributable to his Upanishadic view of life combined with his great faith in the Western liberalism. For this reason some may argue that Rammohan, the nationalist, was completely over-shadowed by Rammohan, the cosmopolitan. It is true that his view of liberty transcended any geographical limits and embraced humanity as a whole. But his love of liberty was nevertheless deeply rooted in the Indian soil. He perceived that only in a world composed of free nations that India
could find true liberty. Indeed, the civilizing process of the British rule would, on his view, prepare India for a stage in which she would not only appreciate the value of liberty but would come to possess it to the fullest extent. In this conviction, he was no exception to other Indian thinkers of the nineteenth century who accepted the British rule as something divinely appointed. It was Rammohan's liberal convictions which led him to criticize the narrow and ill-conceived policies of the Government. His aim was, however, never an outright rejection of the British rule.

The democratic principles of Rammohan represented a primary stage in the development of India's political history. To do justice to Rammohan, it must be added that he never thought of the British tutelage as a permanent feature for India. He was foresighted enough to realize the direction of the Indian history. Indeed, he even visualized the prospect of a free India. As Amit Sen observed:

"Again and again, there flitted across his vision the prospect of a free India, after a period of British tutelage, and he expressed this view in an interview with Frenchman Jacquemont, in a discussion with Sandford Merton, in a letter on August 18, 1828, to Crawford. He felt that English rule was creating a middle class in India which would lead a popular movement of emancipation." 10

Even before the death of Rammohan, forces were at work to generate another intellectual movement known as the
"Young Bengal" movement which was confined to a section of the Hindu college students. It was tinged with a kind of ultra-radicalism hitherto unknown in this part of the world. The members of the "Young Bengal" were free-thinkers who held in utter contempt everything traditionally Indian. Their unconventionality in thought and activity took always outrageously aggressive forms, which were offensive not only to the orthodox sections of society but even to the sense of decency of Rammohan himself.

The ancestry of this movement may be traced to the tradition of the French Revolution and the British radicalism as represented by Godwin. The leader of the movement was Henry Vivian Derozio.* His habit of free-thinking made a profound impact on the minds of the Hindu college students. Consequently, he was removed from that college as a dangerous corruptor of youth. He passionately sought freedom from all sorts of dogmatism and traditionalism. It was his influence which instilled in his students a spirit of revolt against every kind of orthodoxy and authoritarianism.

This anti-authoritarian attitude of the "Young Bengal" became all-pervasive, and made them potential rebels against the establishment. The political history of Europe with its revolutionary tradition, especially the revolutionary philosophy of France, fired their imagination so much so that they looked forward eagerly and wishfully to the outbreak of a similar revolution in India. 12

* A teacher of the Hindu College from 1826 to 1831.
It is evident that the views and ideas of the "Young Bengal" were coloured by a romanticism. Indeed, the spirit of revolt as represented by them could not be effective just because the contemporary socio-economic condition of the Indian society was not favourable to it.

Paradoxically enough, Derozio and Kashi Prasad Ghosh, one of the Hindu college students, who flouted and repudiated everything Indian, gave first expression to the spirit of Indian patriotism.13 *

At any rate, they displayed a political awareness to the degree which was simply astonishing. In one of the articles, "India under Foreigners," published in their organ "The Hindu Pioneer", the British rule was subjected to a most incisive criticism. This is borne out by the following quotation:

"The Government of India (under the English) is purely aristocratical; the people have no voice in the Council of legislature; they have no hand in framing the laws which regulate their civil conduct. We need not expatiate on the monopoly of the State-Service, the law's delay, the insolence of office, the heavy expenses of Government... and the enormous taxation to which the country is subjected — evils too well-known in India." 14

* Derozio regarded himself as an Indian. He and his disciple, Kashi Prasad Ghosh, wrote patriotic verses in which, recalling proudly the glorious past of India, they shed tears over her present misery. (Majumdar, R.C., History of the Freedom Movement in India, Calcutta, 1962, PP.324-25).
It is difficult to identify the exact place of the Derozians in the political history of India. Their difference with Rammohan was too obvious. While the latter made a wonderful synthesis between the thoughts of East and West, the former totally rejected the values of the East. Herein lies the fatal weakness of the "Young Bengal" movement. Faith in the Indian heritage became a source of national dignity and self-respect of the people. Therefore, the outright rejection of India's past isolated the movement from the main stream of India's national history. This made it not only superficial but rootless. The Derozians failed to create a living and enduring tradition.

Nevertheless, the "Young Bengal" movement was not without any historical relevance. After all, the emergence of any movement, whether intellectual, social or political, is largely determined by the prevailing condition of a society. The ultra-radicalism of the Derozians represented at least a widening range of the impact of Western culture on the Hindu society, however aberrant it might have been from that social tradition. The reform movement of Rammohan did not cut much ice with the Hindu society during his lifetime. But the "Young Bengal" movement may be regarded as the reaction to the dead-weight of that society completely dominated by the medievalist thoughts and habits. The politics of the Derozians was perhaps the precursor of the politics of extremism of the later Indian history as
represented by Balgangadhar Tilak of Maharastra and Bipin Chandra Pal of Bengal, two outstanding exponents of militant nationalism in India. The difference was that while the Derozians were completely divorced from the national tradition of India, Lokmanya Tilak and Bipin Chandra Pal had their feet firmly planted in that tradition. Thus, in form, if not in content, the Derozians had foreshadowed an important trend of the subsequent Indian political history.

But very soon a reaction developed against the sweeping current of Western radicalism of the Derozians. This revivalist movement was represented by Rajnarayan Bose and his associate, Nabagopal Mitra. Rajnarayan started a vigorous campaign to make his countrymen aware of the glory and greatness of the Hindu culture. In a famous lecture he asserted the superiority of the Hindus. He was stirred by the revolutionary zeal and established a secret society on the model of Italian carbonaries. The word 'national' acquired such a charm at the time that his associate, Nabagopal Mitra, started a national school, a national press, a national paper, a national gymnasium till his countrymen came to refer to him as national Mitra.

The greatest achievement of Rajnarayan and his associates was the organization of an annual fair, the Hindu Mela, in order to promote the national feeling, sense of patriotism and a spirit of self-help among the Hindus.
One characteristic feature of this period was that the educated people began to organize themselves under various institutions and associations for political purposes. This new development in the politics of Bengal pointed to the political maturity of the middle classes. Political institutions not only embody the unity of men but guarantee the permanence and continuity of ideas and activity from one generation to another and thus ensure sustained political actions. The political organizations which came into existence during this period and after were precursor to similar organizations springing up later in other parts of India. Of these, a special mention must be made of the British Indian Association founded on October 29, 1851. It was mainly sponsored by the landowning class of Calcutta to give voice to the political aspirations of India. Indeed, its formation was a landmark in the political history of India in so far as it made a singular contribution to the development of political consciousness among wider circles. It was a truly representative organization reflecting all shades of opinions — radical, moderate and conservative. From the very outset, it tried consciously to inculcate and promote an all-India outlook in politics. So it was not without reasons that Pandit Nehru regarded it as one of the forerunners of Indian National Congress. 19

This is, in brief outlines, the historical background which Sisirkumar found in 1868. In this specific
background of growing political awakening, he made a very significant contribution to the ethos of Indian nationalism. It may even be claimed that he added to it a new temper and tone. His specific contributions, detailed later, can, however, be conveniently summarised.

It was in 1868 that he started the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*. He used it as a medium of his political views and agitations.

Even before the birth of the *Patrika*, he travelled in rural areas as Jessore correspondent of the *Hindoo Patriot* to inspire the indigo ryots to wake up against the European planters during 1859-60.

Secondly, he began to challenge every form of exploitation under the British rule through the *Patrika*. He criticized the land tenure as provided by the Permanent Settlement because it gave the strong, that is, the zemindars, coercive power over the weaker sections of society, that is, the peasants. Again, it was also he who came forward to defend the interests of the zemindars against the encroachment of the foreign Government. His object was to narrow down the scope of conflict between the interests of zemindars and peasants so that they could stand united against the Government in the greater interest of the country.

Thirdly, he vehemently attacked the taxation policy of the Government which imposed greater burden on the common people. He was well aware of the fact that the entire
apparatus of the British administration in India was directed against the basic interest of the people. At every stage, which will be detailed later, he took the side of the exploited commoner. In this way the Patrika became an organ of justice for the country.

Fourthly, he started an agitation through the Patrika for the incorporation of a broad constitutional framework in the British system of Government in India in order to fulfil the democratic aspirations of the people. Specifically, he demanded that the people must have a voice in the making of financial policy which vitally affected them. Indeed, he raised a demand for an Indian parliament in 1870. Thus he tried to give the Indian national aspirations a new direction.

Fifthly, he started a crusade against the attempt on the part of the Government to abolish English education. English education was the medium through which the intelligentsia imbibed the democratic ideas of the West and thus personified the democratic aspirations of India against the absolutism of the foreign Government. Therefore, he saw in the attempt of the Government to curtail English education a conspiracy to undermine the democratic aspirations of the people.

Sixthly, he fought for freedom of the press against the incursion of the Government. As a matter of fact, the press became a formidable weapon in the hands of Sisirkumar
to fight for the rights of the people against an absolute Government.

Seventhly, he was a scathing critic of the economic policy of the Government which impoverished India in a systematic way. He showed that India was being increasingly ruralized due to a deliberate policy adopted by the Government. While the movement of all civilized countries was towards progressive industrialization, here in India an opposite movement was brought into operation. Sisirkumar exposed the true relationship between England and India, as one of exploiter and exploited. In this way, he sharpened and deepened the national feeling of the Indian people.

Eighthly, as a counter to this mischievous economic policy, Sisirkumar emphasized the virtue of self-reliance of the Indians in the economic field. He called upon the middle class, whom he considered the vanguard of Indian progress, to adopt the Western technology to initiate India's industrial development. He pointed out that industrialization was the only answer to the problem of Indian poverty. Moreover, he also pointed out that England would continue to disregard India's political ambition so long as the latter remained poor and weak. Thus he wanted to infuse in the Indian people a national dignity and self respect.

Ninethly, it was also Sisirkumar who advocated Hindu-Muslim unity. He pointed out that the foreign
Government, by a policy of divide and rule, would try to foster communal disharmony in order to keep India politically subjugated for ever.

Lastly, he started a campaign for the expansion of the scope of local self-government based on full elective system. His idea was that this would provide the Indians a preliminary training and experience in the art of government.

Therefore, Sisir Kumar’s contribution to Indian nationalism was more constructive in nature than theoretical. On specific issues, he highlighted the inner tensions. He was truly a pioneer in this field, though he was initially inspired by the tradition of Rammohan.

References


9. Ibid.


11. Ibid., P. 16.

12. Majumdar, R.C., Ibid., P. 325.

13. Ibid., PP. 324-25.


15. Sen, Amit, Ibid., P. 42.


17. Sen, Amit, Ibid., P. 42.
