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CONTRIBUTION OF INDIAN LEADERS TO INDIAN NATIONALIST MOVEMENT: A HISTORICAL STUDY

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Abstract

At present, India is the most growing powerful nation state of the world. though it came into being in1947, it was a colony of the British Empire. The British had ruled this land for more than 200 years. To become independent, it has to go through a long journey. In this long journey it was guided by its great leaders. These leaders gave Indians the tools to become independent that is Nationalist Movement. Hence, Indian leaders are called the soul of the Indian Nationalist Movement. In this paper to pay a tribute to these great leaders we would put an analytical light on the contribution of these leaders toward Indian Nationalist Movement. We will advance on the basis of chronological development of the British India history and evaluate how they keep this movement alive until the independence.

Keywords: Indian Nationalist Movement, British Colonial Rule, Indian Freedom Struggle, Nationalist Leaders, Indian Independence.

Introduction

The Indian Nationalist Movement isconsidered as a great movement against colonial power in the world history. The imperialist policies of British led to the growth of Indian Nationalist Movement which was characterized by unity of diversified Indians irrespective of religion, caste, region etc. The Nationalist Movement in India was the outcome of a large number offactors and the most important among them was British Imperialism. It was during the British rule that the whole of India was conquered and brought under one sovereign authority. The domination by any country over the whole of India enabled the people of India to think and act as one nation. Before the coming of the British in India, the people of the South were usually separated from the rest of India except for short intervals. British Imperialism

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helped the unification of the country. In the name of good government they exploited its economy. It was as a result of economic exploitation that the seedsof nationalist awakening were sown.

However, it was mostly dominated by the moderate leaders like S. N. Banerjee, G.K. Gokhale, Dadabhai Naroji and Ferozshah Mehta who were not forthe end of British Rule. It was during 1905-20, under the influence of the extremist leaders like 'Lal-Bal-Pal' and Aurobindo Ghose, the Congress acquired the status of mass organization and nationalist awakening rose to a considerable height.In the later period it was dominated by M.K. Gandhi who occupied a crucially important position. Hence, many English scholars stated,that it was Gandhi and his non-violence movement thatbrought the Independence to India.In one word without any doubt we can say that the growth and success of the Indian Nationalist Movement is nothing but the gift of great Indian leaders.

Origin of nationalism

The rise of nationalism is reflected in the spirit of Renaissance in Europe when freedom from religious restrictions led to the enhancement of national identity. This expression of nationalism was furthered by the French Revolution. The political changes resulted in the passing of sovereignty from the hands of an absolute monarch to the French citizens, who had the power to constitute the nation and shape its destiny. The watch words of the French Revolution - Liberty, Equality and Fraternity - inspired the whole world. Many other revolutions like the American Revolution of 1779, the Russian Revolution of 1917, etc. also strengthened the idea of nationalism. Here we will put light on the rise of nationalism in India which emerged in the 19th century after the revolt of 1857 and how the feeling of nationalism took India toward the Indian Nationalist Movement.

Rise of nationalism in India

For India, the making of national identity was a long process whose roots can be drawn from the ancient era. India as a whole had been ruled by emperors like Ashoka and Samudragupta in ancient times and Akbar to Aurangzeb in Medieval times. But, it was only in the 19th century that the concept of a national identity and national consciousness emerged. This growth was intimately connected to the anti-colonial movement. The social, economic and political factors had inspired the people to define and achieve their national identity. People began discovering their unity in the process of their struggle against colonialism.

The sense of being oppressed under colonial rule provided a shared bond that tied different groups together. Each class and group felt the effects of colonialism differently. Their experiences were varied, and their notions of freedom were not always the same. Several other causes also contributed towards the rise and growth of Nationalism. One set of laws of British Government across several regions led to political and administrative unity. This strengthened the concept of citizenship and one nation among Indians. As a result, the peasants and the tribes

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rebelled when their lands and their right to livelihood were taken away. Likewise, this economic exploitation by the British agitated other people to unite and react against British Government's control over their lives and resources. The social and religious reform movements of the 19th century also contributed to the feeling of Nationalism. In this regard Swami Vivekananda, Annie Besant, Henry Derozio and many others played a great role. They revived the glory of ancient India, created faith among the people in their religion and culture and thus gave the message of love for their motherland.

The intellectual and spiritual side of nationalism was voiced by persons like Bankim Chandra Chatterji, Swami Dayanand Saraswati and Aurobindo Ghosh. Bankim Chandra's hymn to the Motherland, 'Vande Matram' became the rallying cry of patriotic nationalists. It inspired generations to supreme self-sacrifice. Simultaneously, it created a fear in the minds of the British. The impact was so strong that the British had to ban the song. Alike, Swami Vivekananda's message to the people, "Arise, awake and stop not till the goal is reached", appealed to the Indians. It acted as a potent force in the course of Indian Nationalism.

Violent rule of British

British introduced different kinds of revenue, economic, political policies and socio – religious reforms in India to setup their domination in India. Almost all the policies and reforms of British were imperialistic in nature. These policies implemented by British entirely changed India's old peaceful conditions. They introduced many policies to drain the wealth of India to their home country. Finally, Indians recognized the object behind the British. So, different policies introduced by British resulted in the growth and development of Indian national movement.

Unwillingness of British to give India more to say in government

During the rule of the East India Company, the Indians were treated as slave. They governed the country only to fulfill their interest. They never asked anything to Indians nor gave any chance to raise their voice. Even when the British Crown took over the power from the East India Company in 1857, they hardly gave any chance to the Indians to say anything in government. Although democracy began with the British, they did not allow the Indians to practice democracy in India.

Economic Exploitation of India

The British economic policy in India led to impoverishment of the country. The main object of British policies was a systematic destruction of traditional Indian economy. The Indians' reaction to the discriminatory economic policy of the British government was the rise of economic nationalism in India. India became a supplier of raw materials to the British industries, a market for the sale of British goods and a place for investment of British capital. Indian economy was sacrificed for British economic interests. Economic exploitation by the British was increasing India's poverty.

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The British Indian administration was extremely costly. Systematic attempts were made to destroy the indigenous industries of India to make room for manufactured goods from England. Gradually the people realized that it was drain of wealth from India which made India poor. As all classes suffered economically because of the British rule, they realized the necessity of uprooting the British rule from India. It gave a great impetus to the spirit of nationalism.

Unification by British

In the pre-colonial India the people were not socially and economically integrated in the absence of a unified national economy and efficient and extensive means of communication. Common subjection, common institutions, common laws began to unite India in a common bond. In the words of Edwyn Bevan, "the British Raj was like a steel-frame which held the injured body of India together till the gradual process of internal growth had joined the dislocated bones, knit up the torn fibres and enabled the patient to regain inner coherence and unity". Thus establishment of political unity, uniform system of administration, uniform reign of law and a uniform currency system generated the idea of India as a nation. British rule brought the entire geographical area of the country under a single administration. It unified the country by introducing a uniform system of law and government.

Improvements of Means of Transport and Communication

The improvements in the means of transport and communication also quickened the pace of the nationalist movement in the country. It is said that but for railways, motor buses and other modern means of communication, political and cultural life on a national scale would not have been possible. It can be said that if these became the means of consolidating and preserving British rule in India, they also played their part in organizing the political movement of the Indian people on a national scale against their rule

Practice of one (English) language by Indians

The English language played an important part in the growth of nationalism in the country. It acted as the lingua franca of the intelligentsia of India. Without the common medium of the English language it would have been impossible for the Bengalees, Madrasis and the Punjabis to sit at one table and discuss the common problems facing the country. The English language also made the Indians inheritors of a great literature which was full of great ideas and ideals.

Influence of Indian Press and Nationalist Literature

The Indian press, both English and vernacular also aroused national consciousness. Great was the influence of the news papers like the Amrit Bazar Patrika, the Hindu, the Kesari, the Bengalee, the Hurkura and a lot more. These became a powerful instrument of political education for the middle class and stimulated the growth of national feeling by making public the grievances of the people and also by exposing the failings and deficiencies of the foreign

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rule. B.B. Majumdar has mightily remarked, "Western education and the Indian press were the two of the most important agencies destined to infuse into the people of India the spirit of national unity and to inspire them to achieve independence without bloodshed."

The growth of Indian Press was phenomenal and by 1875, there were no less than 478 newspapers in the country. The Indian press helped in mobilizing the public opinion, convening national and provincial conferences, organizing political movements, building up public institutions and fighting out public controversies. There was no issue of foreign policy or internal administration which escaped the notice of the newspapers.

Establishment of Indian National Congress

The Indian National Congress was formed in December 1885 by a group of 72 politically conscious educated Indians. Mr. A.O. Hume a retired English Indian Civil Service officer played a significant role in its formation. Among its members were Pherozeshah Mehta,Badruddin Tyabji, WC Bonnerji, Surendranath Banerji, Anandamohan Bose and Romesh Chandra Dutt. This organization was by no means the first such association of the Indian people. The English educated class in India was slowly becoming politically conscious and several political associations were being formed between 1875 and 1885. But among those associations what made the Indian National Congress (INC) different from the other associations was its attempt to provide a common political platform for the people of India which enabled it to claim that it represented the country.

Impact of Western Education

Perhaps the greatest contribution of the British rule to the growth of India nationalism was the introduction of western education in India The study of English language not only helped build up a democratic and national outlook, it also did a great service to the cause of Indian nationalism by providing a medium of communication for the educated Indians throughout India to exchange views on a national scale. It cut across personal barriers and served as a lingua franca. Educated Indians began to meet and discuss common problems through the medium of English and to meet on a common platform to devise plans for independence of the country.

Religious and Social Reforms

The religious and social reformers like Ram Mohan Roy, Keshab Chandra Sen, Debendranath Tagore, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Swami Dayanand sraswati, Ramkrishna Paramhansa, Swami Vivekananda and others inculcated a spirit of confidence, courage, selfrespect and pride in the ancient heritage of India. It is contended that political awakening in India began with Raja Ram Mohan Roy. The socio-religious reform movements also known as the Indian Renaissance were the first expression of national awakening. They represented attempts to revise the old religion in the spirit of the new principles of nationalism and democracy. To quote or Zachaias; "The Indian national movement was a part of the Indian

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Renaissance of India which manifested in the form of a general reform movement and produced striking religious and social reforms long before it issued in a movement for political emancipation."The Brahmo Samaj, the Arya Samaj, the Ramakrishna Mission and the Theosophical Society in their own respective ways, revived the glory of ancient India, generated faith in Indian culture and religion and tried to strengthen them by removing the evils.

Era of Lal-Bal-Pal (1905-1918)

The nationalist movement entered into a new phase during this period. In this period for the first time the Indian Nationalist Movement turned into an extremist mode. In this phase the Indians became aware of the concept of nationalism and approached toward some forceful political action. This period was dominated by the leaders like Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Lala Lajpat Rai, Bepin Chandra Pal, Aurobindo Ghose (1872-1950) and many others. The early stage of the nationalism had been characterized by nationalists that believed that the British could be reformed from within. However, at this period people realized that there was little scope for progress under the imperialistic rule of the British. They knew that economically India had been adversely affected as a result of becoming a British colony, and the only way it could flourish again was if a government controlled and run by the Indian people was put in place. The desire to co-operate with the British grew less, for the Indians nationalists were treated with contempt and their demands rarely met. The British attitude disappointed many, for instead of reforming their policies they were instead in some cases making them even more oppressive. Even the initial good will that the British enjoyed because of the spread of education and new technology was now diminishing for these fields had stagnated over the years.

Nationalists also were angry at the policy of the British to divide Indians on communal lines and realized the disastrous implications of continued British rule. These fears were not unfounded, for in the forty two years more it would take for India to achieve independence, the divide and rule policies of the British increased communal forces, which eventually led to the country failing to remain a single country at the time of independence, splitting into India and Pakistan This phase of nationalists saw a more confident set of leaders who had faith in their ideas and of Indians being able to run their own country. These set of leaders would extend the idea of nationalism to more sections of the Indian society realizing that the only way India could obtain independence was if it launched a massive movement supported by the masses of India. The myth of European superiority was meanwhile being shattered. Japan a backward Asian country had managed to transform itself in a few decades into a powerful economic and military power.

The nationalist movement now gathered more support and soon massive protests were held against this decision. The leaders realized that they would have to take some stronger

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measures in order to have an effect. They attacked the very backbone of the British power in India, its economic interests. In some cases extreme measures like the burning of foreigngoods also took place. Instead of crushing the national movement, the partition of Bengal gave it even more strength. While the nationalists failed to revoke the partition, and to some extent the aim of the British, of increasing communalism was achieved, the nationalists were able to give the freedom struggle a new outlook. No longer was it perceived as a half hearted effort by a group of intellectuals but truly a struggle of the Indians. This set the environment for the final stage of nationalism, one that under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi would, through the efforts of millions of Indians, finally free the country from foreign rule.

Entrance of Ghandi into National Movement (1918- 1927)

In this phase of the nationalist movement turned into a more meaningful struggle which is only for the freedom rather than reforms or development. During this period a new era has been initiated in history of nationalist movement with the emergence of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948) in the Indian politics. He became the cardinal personality in the life of the Indian. Under his guidance the nationalist struggle turned into a mass struggles for freedom of all times. This finally forced the British to leave India.

In 1915, Mahatma Gandhi returned to India after twenty years in South Africa. In South Africa, he developed a philosophy called “Satyagraha” which he often translated loosely as “Soul-force “or Non-violence. Arriving in India for some months he traveled throughout the country and observed the conditions of the country and countrymen. After that he took an active part in the independence movement people and at first of visited Represented The stage for such developments had been set in the previous phase, as extremists dominated the movement. Moderates began to slowly change their views, for they
too noticed that the British had no intention of cooperating with them. For instance, during World War I,

Britain had taken the aid of a number of its colonies, including India and had promised some form of self-government in return. After the war however, these promises were quickly forgotten and the Indian people thus felt betrayed as a half-hearted measure the British introduced the Montagu-Chelmford Reforms, which led to the Government of India act of 1919. These reforms gave the Indians some power, but this sort of concessions no longer satisfied the nationalists. The poet Rabindranath Tagore lettered to Lord Chelmsford, the Viceroy, repudiating his Knighthood honor in protesting for Jalianwalahbag mass killing. (The letter was published in The Statesman, June 3, 1919)

Post Impacts of Indian Nationalist Movement

The Indian Nationalist Movement not only brings the independence to the Indian. Besides this it has many impacts on various issues and grounds. Let us discuss some of them:

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1. The first and foremost impact of the Indian Nationalist Movement was the genesis of India and Pakistan as independent nation-state.
2. It was also responsible for some communal riots which took place after the partition of India.
3. In addition, a war broke out in 1965 between India and Pakistan because of extreme feeling of nationalism in both counties.
4. Moreover, it influenced the Bengali people to become conscious about their rights, and raise their voice against the oppression of Pakistan government. Finally, to struggle for their rights and free themselves from the clutches of Pakistan in 1971.
5. Indian Nationalist movement also assisted the Indian to become united which works for their state-building and nation-building.
6. It has also enriched the Indian literature and culture. Most of the novelists, writers, poets and painters of that period were significantly influenced by the Indian nationalist movement which reflection we found in their creations.

In summing up, we can say that Indian Nationalist Movement has some drawbacks, but same way it is also true that it brought independence to India. To make this movement fruitful and successful the sacrifices of the Indian leaders are inevitable. Number of leaders laid down their lives and number of leaders passed their lives in exile and jails for India to become independent.

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