

Perspectives on Indian National Movement

India is a nation - a contested issue.

The context of the debate

It is still a matter of academic debate whether the political activities in India from 1757 till 1947 can be called as Indian National Movement.

Origin of the debate

It originates in the works of J.S. Mill, who held that India is not a nation but geographical expression. There was no ^(we are one) universalist consciousness among the people living on this land. Indians have been divided on numerous lines of caste, religion, ethnicity & language. This interpretation was supported by British administrators like Lord Curzon, Herbert Risley & V. S. Chitral.

Historians belonging to Cambridge school also support the thesis. For them the political activities during this period were not a national movement. It was a communal movement. Political leaders were leaders of community. Political activities were not inspired by superior ideas but animal instincts. Elites were competing to extract greater gains from British Raj. As competition became fierce communal character became more clear. Communal consciousness

reached to its peak with the formation of Pakistan. Different leaders were petitioning Britishers to stay back because they needed external balancer. The idea of India as a nation was never strong enough to overcome the passions & animal instincts. The present day politics in India continue to reflect similar features. Indians continue to remain divided. And, India^{idea} of India remains a weak India.

Nationalist Interpretation

Nationalist Interpretation is given by nationalist historians like R.C. Mazumdar & Tarachand. For them, it is wrong to call political activities as communal movement. Political activities do qualify to be called as national movement.

Arguments

- There was a definite desire visible during these years among Indians to evolve as a nation.
- The agenda of INC was not exclusive.
- We see existence of Nationalist consciousness, nationalist leaders and Nationalist parties.
- The survival of India as a nation at present is testimony to the fact that there was a desire to emerge as a nation. Despite hostile environment, enormous diversity & challenges, Constitution has

IGNOU Perspective on Ind. Nat. mov.

Rousseau - Father of Nationalism.
fraternity.

proved workable for different communities.

- It is not that Indians do not reflect the spirit of accommodation. State could pursue affirmative action because upper castes have accommodated.

It is true that process of nation building is still continuing. No. of times the colonial legacy confronts the nationalist consciousness. Communalism & casteism are colonial legacies. Despite

Despite these challenges each time the spirit of India survives and emerge more and more stronger.

The idea of India propounded by Tagore & the Discovery of India by Nehru continues to inspire the Indians.

- Liberal perspective
- Socialist perspective
- Marxist perspective
- Radical Humanist perspective
- Dalit perspective

Liberal perspective

- Views of moderates

Surendranath Banerjee: India is a nation in making.
For liberals, the most imp factor giving rise to Indian Nationalism is the colonial rule.

For liberals, nationalism requires some amount of modernisation & rational thinking.

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Hence they purposfully kept masses out of the national movement. They knew masses were not ready to join the modern nationalist politics. Nationalism which was in infant stage has to be safeguarded. During this phase, nationalist leaders and scholars restricted their criticism of colonial rule to the economic aspect of colonialism. We cannot say that liberals were less nationalist and supporters of the British state.

Criticism of Liberal Nationalism

- By extremists or cultural nationalist.
- Cultural nationalists believed that we cannot attain swaraj by praising British. Indian National Mov. should not be confined to the elites.
- Cultural nationalists challenged British historians. They established that India was a nation from the very beginning. There has been a cultural & spiritual unity throughout the subcontinent.
- They even wanted to prove Indian cultural values & civilizational achievements have been much ahead of the West.

However once they started talking about the glory of ancient Vedic culture, cultural nationalists have impacted the project of nationalism in the Country. It resulted into the responses from different communities like Muslims who could not relate to the

Vedic past. It also led to the rise of dalit movement, Dravidian movement challenging the "Pan-Indian" character of national movement.

Dalit Perspective of Indian National Movement

Who are dalits?

Dalits reflect the most depressed sections of Indian society. They include the untouchables, shudras as well as the non-Brahmins or Dravidians.

Prominent leaders, scholars

1. Jyotiba Phule
2. Ramaswamy Naikar
3. Narayan Guru
4. Ambedkar
5. T.N. Nair
6. Kumaran Asan

Jyotiba Phule

- Jyotiba Phule was critical of Congress Nationalism.

According to him, there cannot be a nation until and unless there is an emotional integrity & the feeling of fraternity. Jyotiba Phule

- praised Britishers for establishing the rule of law and equality before law in the country.

- Jyotiba Phule ^{should} ~~was~~ not be considered as anti-national & supporter of colonialism.

He even highlighted the flaws of British state as it was also not working for the welfare of the people.

- Jyotiba Phule was against Brahminism. For him British Raj is better than Peshwa Raj. Jyotiba Phule was spokesman of the large section of Indian society. Without taking into consideration the interest of (Bahujan/majority), India cannot emerge as a strong nation.

Ramaswamy Naikar

- He was more vocal critic of Brahminism & INC. Naikar started 'self respect movement' challenging the hegemony of Brahmins.

Ambedkar

- Ambedkar also believed that nationalism is built on the values of liberty, equality & fraternity. For him, India was not a nation, but a segmented community. He favoured the introduction of separate communal electorate. He asked dalits not to support INC - INC is not working for the interest of the nation, rather to secure the hegemony of Brahmins. He didn't want that once British rule comes to an end, dalits come again under the domination of Brahmins. Hence he actively worked to ensure the civil & political rights of dalits. He is also criticised as the leader of community, not giving primacy to nation. However it is not a correct understanding of Ambedkar's perspective.

Marxist Perspective of Indian National Movement

- The 1st work from Marxist perspective on Indian National movement has been of Karl Marx himself. He has given the interpretation of Revolt of 1857 as a rebellion by feudal class. Marx even considered British Rule blessing for Indians. It has brought modernisation in India.

- The next interpretation of Ind. Nat. Mov. from Marxist perspective is of M.N. Roy. In his book titled "India in transition", M.N. Roy criticised INC. He held that masses in India are ready to take power in their hands, but Congress is denying them the opportunity.

- Gandhi was not a mass leader but class leader. INC was working in the interest of the colonial state & the privileged section of the society. He was sure that in the end INC will betray masses & join hands with colonial state.

- Sudipto Kaviraj charges M.N. Roy with guilt of heteronomy (wrong interpretation). M.N. Roy applied the experience of German bourgeoisie class in Indian context. Whereas there were lot of differences betⁿ the German bourgeoisie class and INC.

- A.R. Desai

- Rajani Palme Dutt (Book: India Today).

They have also supported the view that INC was bourgeoisie party.

- Sumit Sarkar

- Traditional Marxist analysis requires more careful approach. It is true that programme of INC did not help masses as it should have helped. However we cannot say that INC had any well planned strategy to work in the interest of Bourgeoisie class. He also mentions that Indians were not so sharply divided that they could not come together

and reform
Zamindar

- Bipan Chandra

- He clearly states the nationalist orientation of INC. He called the movement as truly inclusive & the largest mass movement ever.

Socialist perspective of Indian National Movement

- India was introduced to modern socialist ideas after the success of Russian Revolution in 1917. There were different brands of socialism & communism, e.g. Revolutionary socialists like Bhagat Singh, the communists & Congress socialists.
- Socialists brought new energy & goals to national mov. Nehru & S.C. Bose were the Socialist faces of Congress.
- In 1934 Congress Socialist Party was formed. These leaders were known as Young Turks. One of the reason for Congress Socialist Party was disillusion with Gandhian strategies & programmes.
- Nehru gave the ideal of 'Poorna Swaraj'.

Acharya Narendra Dev.

- Socialist like J.P. Narayan, Ram Manohar Lohiya, Ashok Mehta went towards Gandhian socialism. They were more concerned with the future Indian society.

Radical Humanist perspective

- Criticism of Gandhi & INC
- Support for peasants & workers.
- Indian nationalism also has cosmopolitan appeal for Radical humanists, individual is more important than class/nation.
- They have vision for Radical democracy for future India.