

**CHAPTER FIRST :**

**MODERNIZATION AND NATIONALISM IN INDIA.**

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Establishment of British rule in India in the last decades of 18th Century paved the way for introduction of western mode of social and political institutions in India. There was great change all over the country and whole of India was dazzled by the miraculous achievements of British people. Therefore, the first generation of English educated Indians wanted to establish the society in India that would closely follow the British model as men like Ram Mohan and Ranade were influenced by the liberal democratic ideology of ruling British classes:<sup>1)</sup>

Indian renaissance which was imposed from above gave birth to Indian nationalism. When nationalism was gaining adherence in India, it had already consolidated itself in Europe as the European states were getting integrated into nation states. India was not a nation state in 19th and early 20th century but the most of the Indian leaders wanted to establish nation state in India.

Rabindra Nath Tagore a great poet and philosopher did not support the view of the zealot nationalists and

held a view that the idea of nationalism was borrowed from Europe and in Europe itself it was causing great hardships to the people. Hence, India should not blindly follow Europe but should try to chart out her own path because the Indian civilization had many things to offer. He made a brilliant critique of the idea of nationalism and put forth his own views. Tagore made his criticism some six decades ago ( Nationalism was published in 1917), but his ideas were more relevant to day because the development theories of the western political scientists are increasingly criticised by the 3rd world scholars. These scholars are now arguing that political development and modernization of the 3rd world countries need not follow western model and they should avoid the mistakes committed by the western countries is the burden of their argument.<sup>2</sup> Tagore cautioned most of the Indian nationalists in 1937-38 that we should not follow the western concept of politics which was based on power and profit. It is true that Tagore was not alone in this as leaders like B.G. Tilak, Mahatma Gandhi, Vivekanand and Vinoba Bhave also raised their voice against Westernization, but the fact remains that Tagore's was the most important voice.<sup>3</sup> Tagore's ideas gath~~er~~fresh momentum in the light of researches of the modern political like the Rudolphi. They point out that modernization of traditional societies is taking place in

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a peculiar manner in the sense that the meeting of the two traditions was creating something new.<sup>4</sup>

In the present dissertation, an attempt is made to critically examine Tagore's views on nationalism in the light of the problems of synthesis between western and Eastern civilisations as both of them needed each other's support.

It is pertinent to note here that Tagore was a child of Indian renaissance as he was a son of D.N. Tagore a famous Brahma Samaj leader.

Renaissance in India : It may be said that the most important effect of the British rule in India was the intellectual development of the people on an entirely new line which resulted in the consequent changes in their political, social, religious and economic out look.<sup>5</sup> The transition of Indian society from medieval to modern society due to the impact of the western civilization and culture, might be characterised as the period of Indian renaissance. It started in Bengal in the second half of the 19th century. We know that renaissance in Europe brought about social revolution, by destroying the feudal social structure and paved the way for the growth of early capitalism. In politics, the renaissance contributed to the rise of modern nation state. The spirit of European renaissance stirred

from the womb of her own society. But the stimulus of Indian renaissance was presented by the British rulers by implementing some socio-economic policies and by introducing modern education system in India. This modern education was English education.

English education as the stimulus of intellectual renaissance:

The development of a society largely depends on the nature of its education system. The education is the only means to emancipate humanity from the forced subjection and restore to it the rights and liberties which are the common heritage of mankind.<sup>6</sup> It was during the British period that modern western educational institutions were established that created a new class of people in this country. Thus, by introducing modern education in India, the British brought the Indian people in contact with the extensive and profound achievements of the modern west in the sphere of scientific and social scientific knowledge.<sup>7</sup> Indian people imbibed modern political ideas of the west by means of English education.<sup>8</sup> It can be said that English education, not only helped in imparting western knowledge but also it helped for the development of the dialects of ancient Indian languages.

Social effect of English education :

First : English education was instrumental in creating a sense of nationality in the minds of educated Indians that

posed a great challenge to prevalent orthodox canons of Hindu society.

Secondly : The British Govt. through its new and uniform system of education in the sub-continent helped to create a class which had ambition as well as the capacity to launch nationalist movements and ultimately challenge the legitimacy of the British rule.<sup>9</sup> The progressive intelligentsia which was the product of western education tried to assimilate modern western national culture with that of the traditional culture of India. They were the organizers and leaders of all social and political movements of the country. They were the makers of modern India. Due to English education the newly educated Indians critically reviewed their own culture and religion. They found that they should be cured of their dead wood. Hence religious renaissance began soon after with the establishment of different societies and publication of translations of religious books' in regional languages.

These actions introduced some sort of dynamism in religious and social affairs of Indian society. Following were the major social reform movements that sought to give new shape and meanings to Indian religion and culture.

1. Brohmo Samaj Movement.
2. Arya Samaj Movement.
3. Ram Krishna Mission Movement.
4. Theosophical Society.
5. Prarthana Samaj Movement.
6. Religious Reforms by Eminent Political Leaders.
7. Religious Reform Movements Among The Muslims.

1. BROHMO SAMAJ MOVEMENT : The Brohmo Samaj Movement, the first of its kind, was started by Raja Ram Mohan Roy in the year of 1828. Being influenced by the liberal ideas of the west, the Raja tried to inculcate some sort of protestant ethics in Indian society. He challenged the validity of many social customs and traditions like idol worship, ~~sati~~ <sup>sati</sup> system, polygamy and caste system. After a long struggle, he succeeded in abolishing the cruel practice of Sati in the Hindu society. Raja set in motion the dormant Hindu society by shaking off the fetters of the ages. He was rightly called as the pioneer of India renaissance, and the founding father of Indian nationalism. Tagore once commented that Roy freed Indian society from crusting load of unreason. The social effect of the Brohmo Samaj Movement was <sup>to</sup> absorb, to assimilate and, to an extent sustain the western impact at all levels of society while at the same

time maintaining the continuity of tradition<sup>10</sup>. The Brohmo ideology played an important role in the intellectual development of Tagore as Tagore's father Debendra Nath Tagore was a famous Brohmo.

2. THE ARYA SAMAJ MOVEMENT : The Arya Samaj was established by Swami Dayanand Saraswati in 1875 at Bombay. This movement propagated the idea of the revival of vedic social institutions as a defence of Hinduism against the encroachment of christianity and westernization. Although the Arya Samaj Movement was purely a Hindu revivalist movement, it consolidated and developed the feeling of national consciousness in the minds of Indian people.

The Arya Samaj preached gospel of ' Go back to vedas ' <sup>11</sup> and tried to give new self-confidence to Indians. Though Arya Samaj was revivalist in character, it advocated social reforms and encouraged the spirit of nationalism. Along with Bankimchandra and Tilak, Dayanand was considered as the presiding diety of Indian nationalism by Sri Aurobindo.

3. RAMA KRISHNA MISSION MOVEMENT : ( Estd. 1897 ) :

Rama krishna mission movement was mainly a mystical Bhakti movement initiated by Swami Vivekananda under the spiritual guidance of his guru Sri Rama Krishna Parama- hansa.

This movement helped in promoting the spirit of national self-respect and a sense of identity in the minds of Indian people. It aimed at protecting India from the



materialistic influences of the western civilization. The Rama Krishna Mission Movement wanted the spiritual conquest of the world for revived Hinduism ( Neo-vedantism ).<sup>12</sup>

4. THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY (Estd. 1979 ) : The Theosophical society under the able leadership of Mrs. Annie Besant in India contributed significantly in the development of nationalism in India. As, it was the basic belief of the Theosophists that India and the East had to give some special message to the world hence the Eastern countries need not follow western civilization.

5. THE PRARTHANA SAMAJ MOVEMENT (Estd. 1867 ) : The Prarthana Samaj undertook a comprehensive programme of religious and social reforms for the regeneration of Indian society under the leadership of Justice M.G. Ranade.

6. RELIGIOUS REFORMS BY EMINENT POLITICAL LEADERS.:

The individuals of outstanding capacity and political Pre-eminence, such as Bepin Chandrapal, Aurobindo Ghose, Tilak and Gandhi, without organizing any distinct movements, have made a great contribution in the sphere of social and religious reforms.

7. RELIGIOUS REFORM MOVEMENTS AMONG THE MUSLIMS :

The Muslim leaders like Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, Mirza Ghulam Ahmed, Sir Muhammad Iqbal initiated a number of religious reforms for the modernization of Indian traditional Muslim community.

These social and political reform movements tried to shake off the Indian society from its deep slumber and critically examined the past practices and beliefs of the people.

The Nature of Western impact & the Genesis  
of Indian Renaissance.

The most important result of the impact of western culture on India was the replacement of blind faith in current traditions, beliefs and conventions - characteristics of the medieval age by a spirit of nationalism which seeks to inquire and argue before accepting anything.

The revolt of the mind against the tyranny of dogma and traditional authorities, beliefs and customs, is the first requisite for freedom of thought and conscience which lies at the roots of progress in social, religious and political spheres of life.<sup>13</sup> The nature of change that occurred in Indian society due to western impact was best explained by an eminent philosopher in the following lines, "with the growth of the British power the old order weakened and the confidence of the Indians in their own culture diminished." (. . . . .) Some people were so overwhelmed with the impact of western culture that they embraced christianity. Proclaiming the futility and worthlessness of Indian social

and religious institutions, they wished to rebuild the structure of national life on new foundations.<sup>14</sup>

There occurred a lot of changes in Indian society with the influence of western culture. A number of religious seats emerged to bring about a revolutionary change in traditional Hindu religion. The education system of the country underwent a revolutionary change. Equally revolutionary changes occurred in the domain of Indian literature and languages. The establishment of Printing press brought about an epoch making change in the spread of mass education among the people. The economic and industrial renaissance occurred with the establishment of new industrial centres in Bombay, Calcutta, Madras and in other metropolitan cities in India. The new economic activities started during the British period helped in large way to lay the foundation of capitalistic economy in India.

Thus, the renaissance of Indian society was essentially a product of western civilization. There occurred an epoch making change in religious, social, literary, economic and political life of Indian people. All these factors combined to generate among the Indian people a strong sense of national feeling which did not exist earlier.

The following may be considered as the a salient features of Indian renaissance :-

First :- Revival of the past spiritual values was the most important aspect of Indian renaissance. Some leaders of the Indian renaissance advocated a deliberate modelling and moulding of the present life on the basis of gospels of the vedas, the upanisads, the Gita and the Puranas.<sup>15</sup>

Secondly: The emergence of spiritual revivalism was the inevitable consequence of the impact of politically dominant nationalistic foreign culture on that of traditional culture of India.<sup>16</sup> The elites of Indian society wanted to revitalise Indian traditional social institutions to control the pace of westernization. Hence, as a defence against the impact of foreign culture, a new humanist and cosmopolitan interpretation began to be put upon the old writings.<sup>17</sup>

Thirdly : The enlightened leaders of Indian renaissance wanted to adopt the philosophy of liberalism in the sphere of religion with the inauguration of religio-reform movements.<sup>18</sup>

Fourthly : The socio-religious reform movements of the 19th century launched a crusade against medieval social customs and traditions as they were proving to be the obstacles in the way of national development .

Finally : There were two main features of these movements.

a) Some of these movements wanted to revise the traditional religion in the spirit of western liberalism. (b) others wanted to retain its pure form that existed in ancient times.

Casting off its evil social practices,<sup>19</sup> These movements played a progressive role in the history of Indian national evolution. They were the first expression of the national awakening of Indian people.

#### Political Renaissance - The Emergence of

#### Indian Nationalism :

National sentiment was absent during the pre-British India. There were Bengalis, Hindusthanis, Marathas, Sikhs, etc but there were no Indians.<sup>20</sup> India before the British conquest was merely a geographical expression,<sup>21</sup> not a national state. According to Dr. A.R. Desai, Indian nationalism emerged during the British period as a result of the action and interaction of numerous subjective and objective forces and factors which developed with in Indian society under the conditions of the British rule and the impact of world forces.<sup>22</sup>

Following are the causes for the emergence of

#### Indian Nationalism :

First : The attainment of freedom from Colonial domination and the establishment of nation-state was the basic objective of Indian nationalist movement.

Secondly :, The new economic innovations made by the British rulers provided major impetus for the growth of Indian nationalism. Dr. A.R. Desai is of the opinion that the social consequence of the British rule in India was the destruction of feudal social structure and the growth of modern capitalist society. According to him the idea of nationalism is the offspring of capitalistic society and it is non-existent in a feudal society.

Thirdly : Indian economy remained under developed due to severe colonial exploitation of the British regime. Hence, Indian nationalism emerged to stop the drain of Indian capital to the Great Britain.

Fourthly : Political and administrative unification of India , under the British rule also helped for the development of national sentiment in the country.

Fifthly : The improvement in the means of transport and communication also hastened the pace of the growth of nationalist movement in the country.

Finally : Indian intelligentsia, educated in the western mode of education<sup>23</sup> played a very important role in the development of nationalist movements in the country. The initial response of Indian intelligentsia to the British rule was positive and conciliatory. But it was during the third quarter of the 19th century that " a gap began to open

up between the British Raj and some of its educated subjects, and the collaborators of the past became critics and were moving rapidly towards organizing all India movements." <sup>24</sup> In all the phases of Indian Nationalism the intelligentsia of the country, consolidated and mobilized anti-colonial sentiments of Indian people, demanded the eventual liquidation of the British imperialism and strove for the establishment of Indian Nation-State.

The Indian nationalists forged a new political weapon in the late 19th century in order to gain political freedom and that weapon was the Indian National Congress that took birth in 1885.

#### The Emergence Of Indian National Congress :

The idea of nationalism that emerged during the 19th century found organized expression with the establishment of Indian National Congress in the year of 1885. Indian National Congress was the brain child <sup>25</sup> of Allan Octavian Hume, a retired member of Indian civil service. The leadership of early congress was controlled by the English educated intelligentsia and with the impact of western political ideas and institutions, they followed the path of western model of nation building in Indian sub continent. For the attainment of political objectives, the early congressmen adopted the western method of political action.

Though the Congress lacked concrete programme of action, however, it played a significant role in the national evolution. Regarding the social background and the progressive role of the early congress. Dr. A. R. Desai writes, " the progressive intelligentsia and the commercial bourgeoisie formed the social basis of early congress. They played a progressive role in Indian political development. They aroused national consciousness in the minds of Indian people and popularized the idea of democratic representative institutions." 26

There were three phases of Indian Nationalism.

- 1) Moderate Nationalism ( Reformative stage 1885 A.D. - 1905 A.D. )
- 2) Extremist or Militant Nationalism ( 1905 A.D. - 1918 A. D. )
- 3) Gandhain Era ( 1919 A.D. - 1947 A. D. )

1) The Period of Moderate Nationalism :

At the initial phase, the Congress was not a revolutionary body and its leaders were loyal to the British Govt. They were against the idea of agitation and preferred the method of constitutional channels of political action through debates, propaganda, Petitions and deputations. They mostly adopted the policy of appeals. The moderate leaders of the Congress wanted to bring about some changes in the existing structure of colonial government by exerting pressure upon the British Raj.<sup>27</sup> They were deeply influenced with the idea of western liberalism and propagated the



idea of secular nationalism.

## 2) Extremist or Militant Nationalism :

During the last decade of 19th century, a more radical group emerged within the congress, that challenged the established leadership on the grounds of the methods and strategies of political action. The newly emerged faction of the congress was known as extremists, who refuted the old methods and sought to adopt more radical and militant strategies in the national freedom movement.

The extremist leaders like Sri Aurobindo Ghose, Bipin Chandra Pal, B. G. Tilak showed a great reverence to Indian tradition and propagated the idea of cultural nationalism. Thus, the marriage of religion with politics, occurred during the militant phase of Indian Nationalism. Swaraj, Swadeshi, Boycott and National education<sup>28</sup> were the main slogans of the Indian nationalist movement during the militant phase. Nationalism during this period assumed some peculiar characters as Sri Aurobindo sought to glorify nation and the nationalists started seeing all the virtues in the concept of Nationalism. Tagore did not approve of this type of deification.

## 3) Gandhian Era :

The leadership of the Congress came in to the hands of Mahatma Gandhi in 1920. Indian National Movement undertook mass character during the Gandhian era. Indian nationalism

during Gandhian phase was less extreme in its content. But Gandhi did advocate the cause of militant nationalism and because of his satyagraha and militant nationalism Tagore and Gandhi differed on many important issues.

Brief Biographical Sketch Of Rabindra Nath Tagore :

Rabindra Nath Tagore was born on 27th May 1861 A.D. ( 25th Baisakh, 1268 B.S. ) in the famous Tagore family of Calcutta.

It was the most crucial period in the history of India, particularly in the history of Bengal. There occurred a lot of political and social changes during this period. Sepoy Mutiny was over. The British parliament abolished East India Company and India came under the direct administration of the British crown in accordance with the Govt. of India Act of 1858. After the suppression of great revolt of 1857, The Britishers again consolidated their position in India. The tide of Indian renaissance was in full swing.

In Bengal Presidency we can see the first occurrence of change and Raja Ram Mohan Roy started his reformist activities in 1828-29. Bengali culture and literature greatly developed and Brohmo-Samaj of Roy played an important role in over all development of the province. Tagore was greatly influenced by Brohmo Samaj ideology. He was also influenced

by nationalistic writings of a great Bengali novelist Bankim chandra. In the realm of politics, a sense of patriotism and national consciousness was gradually developing with the impact of the English education and western liberalism. Tagore's father Debendra Nath was an important leader of the province. Before the emergence of Indian National Congress, the political institutions like the Hindu Mela, Sanjibani Sabha were established in Bengal, with the direct initiative and financial patronage of the Tagore family. The main objective of these early political institutions was to launch a movement of self-respect and self-reliance and to eschew slavish imitation of the west.<sup>29</sup>

Tagore family took a leading part in all these movements and the young Tagore was born and brought up in an atmosphere of the confluence of these movements all of which were revolutionary. In brief, Tagore family was the central point of Bengali renaissance, that refuted traditional out look of religion and society and ushered in the new era of the modern India. The idea of self-respect and self-reliance propagated by the Hindu Mela left a permanent impression on Rabindra Nath Tagore's mind and it was the dominant theme of his political writings.

#### Reformist Background of Tagore Family :

Tagore was deeply influenced by liberal ideas of Brohmo Samaj, expounded by Raja Ram Mohan Roy. After the

death of Raja Ram Mohan Roy in 1833, Maharshi Debendra Nath Tagore, father of Rabindra Nath Tagore, assumed the leadership of the Brohmo Samaj Movement. The Maharshi gave the Brohmo Samaj, a definite Hindu character by codifying the first ever Brohmo Scripture, Brohmo Dharma<sup>30</sup>, a selection with slight modifications from the non-idolatrous scriptures of the Hindus. By abolishing idolatry and rejecting the infallibility of the scriptures, the Maharshi emancipated the Hindu mind from the bondage of the scriptures without repudiating the national tradition. Rabindra Nath was deeply influenced with the spiritual ideas of his father and it is relevant in many of his writings.

The liberal atmosphere of the Tagore family helped Rabindra Nath to develop a broad outlook about life. The influence of the family is best explained in his 'Reminiscences', where he wrote, "one great advantage which I enjoyed in my younger days was the literary and artistic atmosphere which pervaded our house. They were very much enthusiastic in the pursuit of art and literature, as if they were striving to bring about from every side the renaissance which we see to-day. A pronounced nationalism in dress, literature, music, art and the drama had awakened in and around them. They may be said to have given us the lead in writing patriotic poems and songs. This was in the day when the Hindu Mela, was

an annual institution and there, ' Ashamed am I to sing of Indian glories ' composed by my cousin brother Ganendra, used to be sung.<sup>31</sup>

Tagore lived between the period of 1861<sup>A.D.</sup> to 1941<sup>A.D.</sup> and during this period he witnessed a lot of social, economic and political changes in national as well as international spheres . He was a poet of versatile genius and brought an epoch-making change in the realm of Bengali literature. Many of his writings were translated into other languages ( including English ), that enriched the treasure of other literatures as well. He was rightly called as the pioneer of Indian literary renaissance. Above all, he successfully engrafted the literary style and art of English literature in his own writings. Tagore was not only a poet of international renown, but also he was a distinguished political philosopher. He made notable contributions to religious and educational thoughts, economic reconstruction, political and social reforms. Moreover, he was the supporter of the idea of universal humanism. Man occupies the central place in his political philosophy. He preached the idea of international collaboration for the maintenance of international peace and security, war according to him was the great menace to human civilization and it must be avoided for the survival of mankind.

In brief, realism and international humanism were the fundamental characteristics of Tagorian literature.

" Tagore's realism is free from crude materialism, his mystecism is free from the false spirituality of escapism and his humanism is free from the narrow bonds of nationalism."<sup>32</sup>

So far as the political matters are concerned Tagore did not remain indifferent to the political affairs of the country. He played a prominent part in the Swadeshi movement that swept through Bengal in the first decade of the 20th century, and again when he gave up his knighthood at the time of the Amritsar massacre.<sup>33</sup> Though he always advocated the idea of internationalism at the cost of arrogant nationalism. Tagore and Gandhi were the two dominating personalities of India during the first half of the 20th century. It was stated that ' Tagore was a man of thought and Gandhi was the man of action.'<sup>34</sup>

Both Tagore and Gandhi agreed on fundamental humanistic outlook. But there were remarkable differences in their approaches to a philosophy of life and culture. Tagore accepted the life giving elements of western literature and culture and progressive civilization. But Gandhi fulminated against the emptiness, externality and formalism of western civilization. In this context, the poet was more sympathetic to the values of western civilization than Gandhi. Like Gandhi,

Tagore had a moral approach to politics and refused to equate political action with expediency and opportunism. All through his writings he laid stress on moral ideals, not on national selfishness. Like Gandhi he too stood against the cult of violence because violence begets violence. Both of them adhered to truth. But Tagore could not accept the principle of non-cooperation and cult of charkha. He considered these to be negative in their approach. Tagore always sought for cooperation and creative ideals and as such he wanted people to march forward with creative and constructive work than to boycott what was foreign and rotate the charkha mechanically.

Swaraj, he believed was an internal attribute of man which could not be attained by any external means. He upheld the idea of moral and spiritual freedom of individual. Tagore too pleaded for self-government. But the way to obtain one's right is the long and difficult path of constructive suffering and patient self-sacrifice.<sup>35</sup>

Tagore's differences with Gandhi were important and in his writings on Indian history, Eastern and Western civilization and Nationalism, we see that he has developed his own ideas and advocated the cause of humanistic internationalism.

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