



SOCIAL BACKGROUND OF INDIAN NATIONALISM

Shriram S. Nikam

*The author has been working as Professor and Head in the Department of Political Science,
Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University, Aurangabad.*

Abstract

The degraded and dehumanized Hindu Society was mobilized towards modernity as the alien rule obliged it to do so. The modern values of democracy provided the avenues to Indian elites to make rational enquiry into their own social system for rebuilding their nation. The concept of nationalism includes three aspects of human life-social, political and economical. The initial stage dominated by social nationalism. The extremists enlarged the scope of political nationalism at the cost of social nationalism. The 20th century debate over the problem was multidimensional-secular nationalism of Gandhiji, Hindu nationalism and the nationalism based on social political and economic justice of Ambedkar. The debate over the issue of nationalism has been covered in this research article.



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The Hindu social system is known all over the world as its being unique features of hierarchically graded caste system, patriarchy, untouchability and other theological and social traditions. These cardinal features of Hindu society rigidly occupied feudal structure of self sufficient village economy remained unchanged over the centuries until the advent of British rule in India. The long cherished colonial policies of alien rule generated modernity by devising the new values, institutions and other tools in a tradition bound society. However, it was so difficult task to build up social nationalism in a politically organized India by the colonial rulers as there was existed tremendous diversity. The parameters of social change from the old to new one social structure in Europe could not be applied in Indian society as the former had gone through the lengthy process of a rational introspection of religion ultimately stabilized it into the values of democracy.

Despite having their commitment to the alien rule in its colonial administration and economic setup, the newly borne anglicized middle class elites were discontent over their own inhuman social system; thus they started making rational enquiry into their social system and religion ultimately arrived to the conclusion that unless the social system brought to the

level of humanity, the nation building and political development would not be possible.¹ The social reform movements of 19th century may be classified into three heads- liberals, revivals and radicals. they as being depended on the source of inspiration and quality.² With the western philosophy and concepts as being constituted a source of inspiration, the liberal reformists through their scientific enquiry urged them to generate change in their social system eventually but certainly without radically colliding the Hindu fabric. They realized such as difficult task that to convert caste ridden society suddenly into the modern one casteless on secular plane. It was, therefore, while pursuing political interest; the liberal social reformists were intended to consolidate the Indian society on modern tools and values.³ The initial efforts in this regard were launched by the Brahmo Samaj of Roy. However, the Samaj stressed on theorization rather than practically the eradication of untouchability.⁴ M. G. Ranade had followed the same path. The revival social reformists looked back to the ancient Vedic age as highly value loaded social order as a means for social change and urged the need of restoration of Varna system as an ideal social form based on the quality, certainly not on the birth, which would resolve the problems and consolidate nationalism. Dayanand Saraswati initiated in this regard.⁵ This trend initially stood for social reforms so as to pacify the critics on Hindu religion an society launched by the Christian Missionaries, subsequently the trend turned into Hindu nationalism of Hindu Mahasabha and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh in 20th century.

Mahatma Phule as a radical reformist offered his materialistic-rational enquiry into the Hindu religion and society and stood for its wholesome annihilation, as he had lost the faith in its reforms.⁶ He visualized the new society based on liberty and equality which would be attained through the organized mobilization of lower exploited castes against the existing social setup.⁷ Phule's strategy to the end was initially to impart education among the untouchables, women and other backward castes. This would destroy the mental slavery of such social sections as it was imposed by the Brahminical literature.

An object behind the foundation of Indian National Congress in 1885 was to combat and pacify the discontent among the natives which was brought out through the repressive policies of alien rule. The anglicized middle class elites of the congress would achieve the end as mediator between the mass and government. The early moderate leaders, strictly secular in attitude, were clearly distinguished between political and social problems and avoided intermixing the both together on the congress' agenda; however, paid their sympathy remotely to the social reforms which would be resolved within the respective setup of different social groups.⁸ Hence they granted the permission to hold session of Indian Social

Conference in the same pandal where the political session of the congress was once over. Ranade, the staunch social reformist, urged the necessity of social and political reforms simultaneously.⁹ This would be a right path, to Ranade, towards the nation building.

However, B. G. Tilak and his young associates known as extremists dominated major plank of congress against the colonial rule. They opposed all the efforts launched for social reforms as the lurking fear in their mind assumed them that such efforts for social reforms would destroy the unity of masses against the foreign yoke.¹⁰ The Extremists held responsible to the British rule for the decay and down fall of the country. They openly started to criticize the British rule and moderates and social reformists simultaneously. The westernized pattern of reforms would destroy the age old beauty of Indian culture, as they feared.¹¹ Hence they preceded political reforms over the social reforms and directed the social reformists to go slow without the radically hurting the social fabric. Initially Tilak was in favor of social reforms, subsequently turned to politics with the view that the social reform movement would destroy the political front against the colonial rule as basically the Indian masses were tradition bound. Since the Indian masses skipped passionately to their old tradition and culture, Tilak attempted to build his concept of nationalism on the old cultural foundation which he believed to make a decisive assault on foreign rule.¹² His reluctance over the urgent radical social reform and staunch opposition to it turned into social V/s political reforms which continued until 1920.

Gandhiji neither followed the line of extremist Tilak nor moderates. He offered his own strategy which could digest the earlier dichotomy-social V/s political reforms and religion V/s secularism. Gandhiji followed the techniques of mass based politics of extremists with the values of secularism and ethics as were followed by moderates.¹³ His nationalist debate has been generated from the simultaneous necessity of social and political reformation inter-connectivity. However, he sought to find social reforms through the liberal interpretation of Hindu Shastras and admired the birth based occupational Varnashram Dhrama as an ideal form of society in which he presumed equal status of each Varna located it as horizontal.¹⁴ Such his concept nationalism within the Hindu fold provided fraternity and nationhood. The equal status of all religions existing in India as they carry ethical principles which he called secularism occupied his concept of nationalism.¹⁵ However, Gandhiji's thoughts with regard to caste and untouchability were undergone to change as he visualized India to be as casteless and classless nation.¹⁶

Dr. Ambedkar's concept of nationalism goes through the critique on the two classical sects of values- Brahminism and capitalism- both denied the fearless healthy survival of an

individual. He discarded the very concept of Hindu scriptures as they claimed god ordain Dr. Ambedkar, therefore, stood for the total annihilation of Varna, Caste and untouchability.¹⁷ His source of inspiration of social nationalism lies in the value-‘all men/women born equal and remain equal until the death’ and entitle to enjoy civil rights on equal footing. Ambedkar has also recorded his serious critique on the liberal democracy as it provided capitalist model of economy that accelerates massive inequality.¹⁸ Hence he lost his faith in bringing about socio-economic justice after the transfer of power from alien ruler to natives.¹⁹ It is, therefore, Dr. Ambedkar advocated for democratic state socialism that would capable enough to bring about casteless and classless society providing liberty, equality and fraternity as the foundation of Indian nationalism.²⁰ .

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