

It may surprise you to learn that the history of this idea is not more than 200 years old. Nationalism, in the sense in which we use it today, did not exist in India before the 19th century. It may also surprise you to learn that the roots (origins) of this idea do not lie in the Indian history but in the history of Modern Europe. In fact it is possible to talk of Indian nationalism as distinctly different from its European counterpart. In order to know this difference it is important to have an idea of the circumstances under which nationalism took roots in Europe.

In Europe the development of nationalism was the result of the fundamental changes that were taking place in society and economy around the 18th century. The beginning of the industrial revolution produced goods and materials and created wealth at an unprecedented (unprecedented means like never before) level. This led to the need for the creation of a unified and large market where these goods could be sold.

### **Rise of Nationalist Feeling**

The creation of a large market led to a political integration of villages, districts and provinces into a larger state. In this large and complex market different people were required to perform different roles for which they needed to be trained in different skills. But above all they needed to communicate with each other. This created the need for uniform educational centres with focus on one language. In the pre-modern times majority of the people learnt language and other skills in their local environments which differed from each other. But now, because of the new changes brought about by modern economy, a uniform system of training and schooling came into being. Thus modern English language in England, French in France and German in Germany became the dominant language in those countries.

Uniformity in communication systems resulted in the creation of a 'national culture' and reinforced national boundaries. People living within those boundaries began to associate themselves with it. Culturally they also began to perceive themselves as one people and as members of one large community, i.e. Englishmen began to identify with each other and with the geographical boundaries of England. Similarly it happened to German and French people. This was the beginning of the idea of nationalism. Let us understand this differently. Nationalism was the result of the emergence of nations and nation states (large culturally homogenous territories with a uniform political system within) in Europe. These nation states did not always exist. The early societies, with simpler forms of human organizations and without an elaborate division of labour, could easily manage their affairs without a state or a central authority to enforce law and order. State, as a central authority, came into being after the beginning of organized agriculture. People generally found it difficult to manage their lives without a central authority to regulate their lives. This need for a state became even greater with the onset of industrialization and a modern world economy. An elaborate system of communication and a uniform system of education with focus on one standardized language created conditions for cultural and political uniformity. Thus came into being modern nation states. These nation states, in order to sustain and perpetuate themselves, needed the allegiance and loyalty of the people residing in their territories. This was the beginning of nationalism. In other words, an identification by a people or community with the boundary of the Nation, state and its high culture gave rise to what we know as nationalism.

## Advent of Nationalism in India

But this was not how the idea of nationalism developed in India. The conditions in India were very different at a time when the idea of nationalism was taking roots in Europe. Industrialization occurred here at a very limited scale. When Europe was getting rapidly industrialized, India was still largely an agrarian economy. Different people spoke different languages. Though the feeling of patriotism, (patriotism: love and a feeling of loyalty for one's territory and culture like the one that existed among the Marathas for Marathwara or among the Rajputs for Rajputana) certainly existed in India in pre-modern times. But nationalism as we understand it (unified system of administration, common language, a shared high culture and political integration) did not exist in India until about the middle of the 19th century.

Nationalism in India developed primarily as a response to the British rule. British rule, as you know, came to the Indian soil in 1757 with battle of Plassey and gradually established here by defeating the native rulers. As you are aware, the arrival of the British as rulers was resented by many of the native rulers and people also. It was clear that they all wanted to oppose and fight against the British presence in India.

But initially they did not do it together or as one people. Different groups had their specific grievances against the British and therefore they fought for the redressal of their specific grievances. For instance the native rulers did not want the British to take over their territories (as it happened to the rulers of Awadh and Jhansi in present day U.P.). Similarly peasants, artisans and tribals suffered at the hands of the British rulers and often stood up in revolt against them. But merely the opposition to the British rule or a fight against them did not bring about a feeling of nationalism in India. Although different sections of the population got united because of common exploitation at the hands of the British, a feeling of identification with the entire country and its people did not come about. Even the great revolt of 1857, in which many sections of the population fought together (like native rulers, soldiers, zamindars and peasants) did not produce a feeling of nationalism or an all-India unity. The idea that the people of India, in spite of many differences among themselves, had many things in common amongst them had not, as yet, taken roots. Similarly the realization that the British rule was foreign and an alien rule which wanted to subjugate the entire people and bring them under its control, had also not occurred. The essence of nationalism in India, or Indian nationalism, was the realization that all the Indian people had a common nationality and that it was in their collective interests to resist the British rule. To put it simply, a combined opposition to British rule and a desire to achieve national unity lay at the heart of Indian nationalism.

The objective conditions for the development of nationalism were indeed fulfilled by the arrival of the colonial rulers and their penetration into Indian society and economy. However, these conditions in themselves, did not create an awareness of nationalism among the people. The consciousness of the idea of nationalism took a long time to mature and made its presence gradually in the fields of culture, economy and politics.

## Culture and Nationalism

It was in the field of culture that the idea of nationalism was expressed first. This happened at two levels:

- Firstly it happened in the form of questioning some of the elements of traditional Indian culture and a desire to bring about reforms in it by removing some socially undesirable feature of Indian culture like caste system, religious superstitions, priesthood, discrimination against women etc.
- Secondly, an attempt was also made by the Indians to oppose the British encroachment in the Indian culture.

It is important to remember that the colonial conquest did not just mean the replacement of one kind of rulers by another. Its effect penetrated deep down to the lives of the ordinary people. In a variety of ways, through the efforts of British rulers and their agents, the culture of then colonial rulers began to spread among the

Indian people. This spread of colonial culture and language produced two responses among the Indian elites (elite: socially privileged people belonging to high culture and the upper strata of the society). Some of them began to compare the traditional Indian society and culture with the one that existed in Modern England. They thus questioned some of the elements of the Indian culture. For instance social reformers like Raja Rammohan Roy and Ishwarachandra Vidyasagar worked hard for the eradication of some of the social evils that were a part of the Indian society. In particular Rammohan Roy attacked the practice of Sati (burning of the widow along with the husband on his death) and Vidyasagar advocated remarriage of widows. Leaders like Jotiba Phule initiated anti-caste movements in Maharashtra. They also made an appeal to the colonial rulers to intervene in the Indian society and bring about reforms, although they did not believe that the European culture was superior to Indian culture. They did, however, believe that the British rule represented a modernizing force which could help in the development of the Indian society along modern and rational lines.

At another level, however, the Indian leaders tried to 'defend' and protect Indian culture against what they thought was an encroachment of the colonial culture into the lives of the Indian people. When attempts were made in the 1850s to impose a European dress and other practices on the Indian people, it was resisted by them. Interestingly this was also true of those social reformers who admired the British rule and hoped that the colonial rule would, through legislation and other means, introduce modernity in India. Thus Keshub Chandra Sen, a prominent 19th century reformer and a leader of the Brahma Samaj (formed by Rammohan Roy in 1828) did not like to wear English dress or eat English food. Similarly Ishwarachandra Vidyasagar refused to go to a function hosted by the Lt. Governor because he was required to wear European dress. In this approach cultural rights and practices of the people were seen as very important and the colonial rule was defied on the ground that it was trying to impinge upon them.

The two approaches mentioned above may seem to you different and also in conflict with each other. The former approach (of questioning the evils of the traditional Indian culture) may look different from the later approach (of resisting any attempt on the part of the colonial rulers to either appropriate or try to change the local Indian cultures). It may appear to you that the first approach invited British intervention in the Indian society whereas the second approach opposed it. But it is very important to remember that, as components of Indian nationalism, both the approaches complemented each other. The idea of cultural nationalism, as it developed in the 19th century was based on a firm rejection of some of the negative features of the traditional Indian culture by, or its integration into, the culture of the colonial rulers. In other words the 19th century social reformers wanted the Indian culture to become truly modern; but they did not want it to become totally western. In this sense they were opposed to both the traditional culture but also to the modern colonial culture. This was the essence of cultural nationalism as practised in 19th century India.

### **Economic Nationalism**

You have now understood what is meant by cultural nationalism and what was the relationship between culture and nationalism in India. Let us now try to understand economic nationalism. The origins of economic nationalism can be traced back to the second half of the 19th century when Indian leaders like Dadabhai Naoroji, Mahadev Govind Ranade and Romesh Chandra Dutt among others began realizing that the British rule was economically exploiting India and that it was largely responsible for keeping India under extreme poverty. From this a whole generation of Indian leaders like Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, G.V. Joshi and many others developed a systematic and comprehensive economic critique of the British rule. Following are some of the features of economic nationalism they propounded and preached through their writings:

They emphasized that the colonial rule was economically exploiting India in a variety of ways. Initially this exploitation was confined to heavy taxation of the peasantry and the unequal trade with India. It was an unequal trade because the British East India Company (which was granted a monopoly of trade with India by the British Parliament) bought Indian goods very cheap and sold British manufactured goods to India at a very

expensive rate. This resulted in India's wealth going to England. It also destroyed the traditional handicraft industries of India. However, in the 19th century, whereas this form of economic exploitation continued, new and more complex forms of exploitation came into being. Now the colonial rulers exploited India as a supplier of raw material for their industries and a market where the goods produced in the British industries could be sold. India was made to cultivate those raw materials (like cotton or jute) which were required by British industries. The impact of this was that India's wealth, which could have been utilized for India's industrialization and economic development, was utilized instead for Britain's economic development. The Indian nationalist leaders learnt these vital facts and propagated them at the same time.

- As a part of their understanding about a steady economic exploitation of India, the nationalist leaders, Dadabhai Naoroji in particular, propounded the 'drain theory. Naoroji, in his famous book *Poverty and the Un-British Rule in India* written in (1901 pub. 1988) argued that India's economic resources were being systematically siphoned off to England through trade, industrialization and high salaries to British officials which were being paid by Indian money. According to their calculations this 'drain' amounted to one half of government revenues and more than one third of India's total savings. It was thus that Britain's enrichment and India's impoverishment were taking place simultaneously.

The early nationalist leaders thus argued that the British colonial rule, in a variety of ways, completely subordinated Indian economy to the economy of Great Britain. In their view the direction of the Indian economy was being geared to suit the needs of British economy. They demanded an end to the flow of Indian wealth to England and the industrialization of India with the help of Indian capital only, so that it would benefit India and Indian people. In order to achieve this, the nationalist leaders demanded self-rule, or self-government or Swaraj for their country. The relevance of economic nationalism, as formulated by the nationalist leaders, was two-fold:

- Firstly, it demolished the notion, generally held by the educated people in the first half of the 19th century, that the British colonial government was a benevolent government and would ultimately lead to India's economic development. Many people had believed that, if the colonial rule would continue for a long time, India would, in the end, become prosperous like Great Britain. The Indian nationalist leaders were able to demonstrate that this was wrong thinking and that the British colonial rule was actually harmful to the interests of the Indian people.
- Secondly, economic nationalism laid the foundation for a powerful nationalist agitation against the British colonial rule which started in the 20th century under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi and other leaders. These leaders took the ideas of the 'economic nationalism' to the Indian people and thus mobilized them into the national movement. Once the masses of Indian people joined the national movement, it became impossible for the British colonial rule to remain in India.

### Religion and Nationalism

Apart from cultural nationalism and economic nationalism, there were other ways also in which the idea of Indian nationalism was being expressed. There came into being, in the second half of the 19th century, a thinking on Indian nationalism which was based on religion. It was leaders like Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, Dayanand Saraswati (who founded Arya Samaj in 1875). Vivekananda and Arbindo Ghosh who made Hindu religion and its ideas the motivating force behind Indian nationalism. They looked upon the British presence in India as an attempt by the Western civilization to dominate the Indian civilization. They were completely opposed to this domination.

These leaders were convinced that although the British had succeeded in conquering India, the Eastern civilization was superior to the Western one. Bankim Chandra argued that although the British had conquered India with the help of military and technological superiority, Indians should not start blindly following it. He argued about the uniqueness of the Indian society where the ideas of Western civilization could not be applied. These

leaders understood the Western civilization to be based on the ideas of individualism (rather than spirituality) and found them to be completely unsuitable for India. Vivekanand believed that the Western ideas had to be re-modelled according to the Indian situation. He said: “In Europe, political ideas form the national unity. In Asia religious ideas form the national unit.”

These leaders derived their inspiration not from the Western texts and other sources but from the traditional Indian texts like Vedas, Upanishads and Gita. They criticized the British colonial rule mainly on the ground that it was trying to impose an inferior material system on India which was a land rich with spiritual resources.

This understanding of nationalism based on religion had a political aspect also. Leaders like Bal Gangadhar Tilak wanted to take the idea of nationalism to the people. They knew that religion was a very important moral force in the Indian society. Hence they decided to use religion in the propagation of nationalist ideas. In order to be able to speak to people in their language, i.e. religious language, Tilak introduced the Ganapati festival in Maharashtra in 1893 to create a religious platform from where nationalist idea could be preached and spread.

This understanding of nationalism based on religion led to two different kinds of political mobilizations in the 20th century. On the one hand, leaders like Mahatma Gandhi welcomed the use of religion for nationalist mobilization. But they did not confine this approach only to Hindu religion. They used the symbols and language of Hinduism, Islam and other religions too. Thus they tried to bring members of different religious communities into the national movement and also promote unity among them.

The second approach was more exclusivist in nature and was reflected in the activities of organizations like Hindu Mahasabha and Muslim League. Whereas the leaders of Hindu Mahasabha confined their activities only to Hindu, those of the Muslim League appealed only to Muslims. They also did not develop any understanding of Indian nationalism either by contributing to the unity of the Indian people or by engaging in persistent opposition to British colonial rule.

In the end it is important for you to understand some aspects of the relationship between various kinds of nationalisms that you have read in this Module. Although they may seem different from each other, they actually had many things in common. They were different from one another only to the extent that they followed different paths so come to the same destination. They were also not opposed to each other in any fundamental sense. They were all opposed to the British colonial rule but their opposition was based on different grounds. The advocates of cultural nationalism believed that the colonial rule had started encroaching into Indian culture which should be resisted. The founders of economic nationalism argued that the colonial rule was economically exploiting India and was the main factor in keeping India backward.

Similarly, leaders like Bankim and Vivekananda opposed the British rule on the ground that it was tempering with the spiritual resources of India. All the three were opposed to the colonial rule because of its impact on the Indian people. Their ideas helped in the building of a powerful anti-colonial Indian national movement in the 20th century which finally defeated and overthrew the colonial rule from India.