Role of Modern Education and Socio-Cultural Movements in India's Independence

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Abstract: At the outset it may be stated explicitly that this paper has tried to argue that the spread of modern education and consequent socio-cultural reforms, among other factors, indirectly played a key role in the struggle for India's independence. The role of other such factors, however, are not underplayed in the freedom movement. The British were highly zealous of spreading their education and culture outside. Statesmen like Lord Macaulay and Sir Cecil Rhodes were of the view that the English culture was the best and the most liberal in the world and if India, South Africa and later on, the entire world were "Anglicized" culturally through British pattern of education, it would pave the way for the social and political unification of the world. The idea of "Anglicizing" the world and thereby building up the empire and forging political and social unity of peoples at the global level under the leadership of the British, is apparent in the will of Sir Cecil Rhodes. He had desired "the extension of British rule throughout the world, the occupation by British settlers of the entire Continent of Africa, the Valley of the Euphrates … the whole of South Africa … the ultimate recovery of the United States of America as an integral part of the British Empire, the inauguration of a system of Colonial representation in the Imperial Parliament, which may tend to weld together the disjointed members of the Empire, and finally, the foundation of so great a Power as to hereafter render wars impossible and promote the best interests of humanity [1]." Thus the belief in Britain's role as the Messiah to civilize and unify the world by disseminating the British culture was one of the important reasons for the introduction of modern education in India.

Keywords: Anglicized, British, Education, Socio-Cultural

I. INTRODUCTION

The introduction of modern education was also necessitated by the fact that the Government required a large number of English-speaking people to run the vast administrative apparatus. Besides, educated people were needed in industrial and commercial sectors. It was neither possible to get a sufficient number of people from Britain nor was the recruitment of the Superior Britain race profitable either to the rulers or to their countrymen at home [2]. The British held only key posts in the state machinery and business management, and the subordinate posts were given to Indians. The British, therefore, established schools and colleges to serve their own end.

Another important reason behind the introduction of modern education was to add strength to the colonial empire with an eye to perpetuating it in India. Lord Macaulay and Lord William Bentinck anticipated, to quote B. N. Pandey, " The introduction of English education would not only turn its recipients into loyal subjects of the British Raj but might eventually induce them to embrace Christianity and thereby unshakably strengthen the foundation of the Empire in India [3]."

In the long run the modern education, however, turned out to be a serious miscalculation in the interest of the Raj. People became aware of the evil effects of foreign rule and education also divulged the secrets of modern Western rationalism. It was the English education through which liberal and democratic ideas of Jeremy Bentham, J. S. Rousseau, Herbert Spencer, and the several other social and political thinkers of the West filtered into India. Thus, leaders were inspired by the dream of a modern, strong, prosperous, united India. It was not a mere accident that the leaders who championed the cause of India's freedom struggle hailed from English educated classes. The Congress leaders like S. N. Banerjee and Sankaran Nair too had admitted the important role of English education in arousing political consciousness in their presidential address.

Lord Salisbury had rightly forewarned the high-ups of his ruling race that the newly educated persons would not be anything else than an opposition in quiet times and rebels in the times of trouble [4]. Salisbury's fear was quite genuine. Sir Henry J. S. Cotton had pointed out that a feeling was fast developing in India chiefly owing to the spread of English education, and the emancipation of India, therefore, had become inevitable ever since a system of English education was introduced [5]. One of the important reasons for discontent among the intelligentsia, besides several others as noted earlier, was that the British Government was reluctant to associate Indians with the administration at the highest level. They were deemed unfit for superior administrative posts. Even in the lesser services the experience of the Indians was mostly unhappy. They suffered from a sense of humiliation and frustration which soon transformed them into one of opposition to the foreign rule. The case of Surendranath Banerjee, among innumerable others, is a notable one.

A part of threat to the British regime came from the half-educated Indian elites. Every educational system has a certain amount of educational wastage. The half-educated products (drop-outs or failures) of the educational institutions of higher learning, who could not get a suitable job in government service or in the professions, could only hope to find odd jobs for which a smattering of English and a nodding acquaintance with the liberal arts were deemed sufficient. Journalists, translators, unemployed educated young and political agitators mostly represented the group of half-educated elites. They enriched

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their vernacular languages by translating English books or by writing articles, which were indigenous in language and context. The half-educated persons kept themselves more in touch with the common people than those who passed their examinations with good results and obtained lucrative jobs and tried to conform to the standard set by the colonial rulers. In the words of Michael Edwardes: "The institution of higher learning contributed to increased political activity not so much through those who graduated, many of whom could be absorbed by the demands of a growing bureaucracy, as through the high proportion of failures – the wastage often being as high as 60 percent of candidates– who tended to drift into extremist political spheres [6]."

Historians have rightly argued that Indian nationalism is the foster-child of English education. The rationale of argument is that the nationalist movement had been pioneered and successfully led by the English educated people. Through the knowledge of English they were able to know the Western history, politics, and thought which helped them greatly in organizing the Congress on democratic principles and ideals, making the movement puissant and effective. Questioning the prominent role of Western education in the movement, R. Palme Dutt has stated that "the Indian national movement arose from social conditions, from the conditions of imperialism and its system of exploitation and from the social and economic forces generated within Indian society under the conditions of that exploitation… [7]."

Despite its many disadvantages the alien rule proved to be a blessing in disguise for Indian literature. Abolition of medieval feudalism by the British marked a turning point in the cultural sphere. Poets and writers were no longer bound to display hypocritical reverence and high-sounding praises to the princes and aristocrats. They were set free to move out of the courts to the courtyards. The new formative forces like the press, the emergence of middle class intelligentsia, infusion of modern scientific ideas, and the like gave birth to certain broad features which are easily recognizable in most of the Indian language. The new wave in Indian literature at first became prominent in Bengali and later in Hindi during the second half of the nineteenth century.

The pioneers of the new tradition in Bengali were men like Dinbandhu Mitra, Hem Chandra Banerjee, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Rajendra Lal Mitra, Raj Narain Bose, Bhudev Mukhopadhya, Madhusudan Dutta, Dwijendra Nath Tagore, Rangalal, Nabin Chandra, etc. Their writings appealed to the dumb millions of India to be ready to liberate the motherland from the immeasurable pathos. The national lyrics of Hem Chandra whom Aurobindo Ghose called "one of the mightiest prophets of Indian nationalism [8]," championed the legitimate rights of the Indians and inspired all the nationalist leaders. Of all these writers Bankim Chandra Chatterjee exercised the greatest influence and his works hailed the loss of independence in a heart-rending manner and stirred up the imagination of the people and made them devotees to the cause of the nation. He was a hydra-headed genius of his times and his services to the national cause need no emphasis. Rabindra Nath Tagore was another great Bengali genius, Asia's first Noble Prize Winner, who profusely contributed to the growth of national literature. He stressed the importance of "*Atma Shakti*" (self

confidence) and criticized those who were begging concessions and reforms from the alien ruler.

The press was yet another instrument through which the leaders and intelligentsia were able to familiarize the masses with the anti-imperialist doctrines and ideologies such as representative from the government, individual liberty, democratic framework of the political and social institutions, misdeeds of the colonial rule, and self-government or Swaraj. In the press they also discovered a powerful weapon to propagate and popularize their programmes, policies, and the means of struggle enunciated by them and the official policies of the government. The extensive exchange of views on programmes and problem relating to different regions of the country led to the creation of a spirit of national collaboration in political and social spheres. The press also assisted in the development of a rich literature and culture provincial in form and national in character. In this way, the Indian press had played a distinct role in accelerating the process of formation of public opinion in India.

Newspapers like the Hindoo Patriot, the Amrita Bazar Patrika, the Bengalee, the Som Prakash, and the Sanjivani in Bengal; the Rast Goftar, the Native Opinion, the Indu Prakash, the Mahratta, and the Kesari in Bombay; the Hindu, the Swadeshmitran, the Andhra Prakashika, and the Kerala Patrika in Madras; the Advocate, the Hindustani, and the Azad in U.P.; the Tribune, the Akhbar-i-Am, and the Koh-i-noor in the Punjab; the Bihar Herald in Bihar, and several others played a very significant part in creating public opinion favourable to the freedom struggle. The role of the press those days was no less than that of a constitutional opposition.

Political awakening in India was not an isolated and solitary event; rather, it was a part of world awakening. The unification movement in Germany and Italy and parliamentary reforms in England during the 19th century exercised considerable influence upon the Indian people. Under the influence of parliamentary reforms in England, Indian leaders asked for similar things in India. Some scholars consider that the nationalist movement of India or other Asian countries was impelled more by the 1905-1907 revolution in Russia and then by the Great October Socialist Revolution than by the national movements in Eastern and Southern Europe. The Russo-Japanese war was another big international event that positively affected the movement. In India it was taken as a war between East and West, and the defeat of the great Russian Power by little Japan was considered the victory of the East over West. This certainly changed the scene of despair into a sign of hope in India. The impact on India's emancipation movement of the Young Turk Movement, introduction of representative institutions in colonies like New South Wales, New Zealand, New Foundland, Barbados and Philippines and the rise of Sinn Fein in Ireland was quite significant.

II. SOCIO-CULTURAL REFORMS

The nineteenth century socio-cultural reforms, which constituted the core of the Indian Renaissance, had given a great impetus to the rising national consciousness in India [9]. The reformists had

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created a new outlook, facilitating the process of unification of various religious communities at all-India level through historically progressive techniques. As nationalism generally thrives on past memories and achievements, the renaissance leaders made every effort to discover and popularize the glories of the ancient and medieval Hindus in different spheres of life. The memories of the Vedic past; the reigns of great emperors like Chandra Gupta, Ashoka, and Harsha; the heroic deeds of Prithvi Raj, Rana Pratap, Shivaji and Guru Govind singh; the epic patriotism of Rani Laxmibai and Kunwar Singh were resuscitated with an intent to infusing a new life and vigour in the masses [10]. At first it was, in fact, the Europeans who studied the language and culture of ancient India and rediscovered past wisdom not only for themselves but also for Indians. Through the labours and appreciation of these scholars the British and the Indians both came to know and value India's culture anew. The basic difference between the purpose of rediscovering the pristine glories of India by the European and Indian scholars was that the former acted out of their academic curiosity, while the latter acted with a view to awakening their countrymen. The revival of India's past glories stirred up the hearts of the Hindus so deeply that they were imbued with a spirit of nationalism and ardent patriotism. The reformists of the twentieth century attempted to combine Hindu revivalism with politics – with an object to give "Indian nationalism a mass appeal and to convert Congress from the narrow expression of minority self-interest into the apparent spokesman of the Indian people [11]." On the basis of the knowledge of their great past the reformists as well as politicians were not only able to project the real image of India outside but also were in a position to falsify the belief that Britain represented a higher civilization and the English had a civilizing mission in India. "The awakening of India," in the words of Jawaharlal Nehru, "was of two folds: She looked to the West and at the same time, she looked at herself and her own past for inspiration [12]."

Raja Rammohun Roy, who is generally called pioneer of the Modern Age in India [13], had contributed tremendously to the renaissance movement. He, during the later part of his life, worked mainly for the reorientation and revitalization by the corrupt priestly class interested in keeping the general masses ignorant by feeding them on superstitions and fears relating to something mystical beyond their life. Rammohun Roy openly decried the age-old faith and practices of the Hindu society from the standpoint of contemporary Western values, e.g., rationalism, humanism and humanitarianism. Strictly speaking, a direct challenge to the philosophy of renunciation and the fatal incubus of ancient abstraction came from Ramkrishna Parmahans and still more from his great disciple– Swami Vivekananda. Vivekananda tried to awaken national consciousness through his preaching, deriving inspiration from the philosophy of Karma-yoga. His usual theme of speech was "above all, be strong, be manly" and exhorted, "anything that makes you weak physically, intellectually and spiritually, reject as poison, there is no life in it, it cannot be true [14]." He believed in a spirit that would inculcate national self-respect. He opposed Europeanization of the Indians and taught self-respect and inspired his countrymen to cherish their own traditional culture and values. By his speeches and activities he stimulated the pride of the Indians in their own cultural heritage and strengthened the spirit of political nationalism. Although Vivekananda was not in favour of political agitation, the building up of a strong, brave, dynamic nation was dear to his heart.

The Hindu society underwent considerable changes in social and religious spheres under the influence of various reformatory socio-cultural organizations like the Ram Krishna Mission and the Brahmo Samaj in Bengal; the Pramahans Mandli and the Prathana Samaj in Maharashtra; and the Arya Samaj in North India. They were led by great reformists namely, other than those mentioned above, Devendranath Tagore, Keshub Chandra Sen, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Gopal Hari Deshmukh, Mahadev Govind Ranade, Gopal Ganesh Agarkar, K. T. Telang, R. G. Bhandarkar, N. G. Chandvarkar, Swami Dayananda Saraswati, etc. These reformers collectively gave a new lease of life to the decaying Hindu society and heightened the sense of greatness among the masses through reformatory movements and demagogic preaching. They not only helped revitalize the Hindu society but also helped foster a strong sense of national spirit [15].

Another movement which also contributed to the nationalist sentiment came into being in the early eighties of the nineteenth century, and that was the Theosophist Movement under the dynamic leadership of Mrs Annie Besant, an Irish Home Ruler, which was born out of the Christian mysticism and Hindu spiritualism. The theosophists proclaimed in a confident language the greatness and superiority of the ancient Indian wisdom and offered an open apology in defence of Hindus faith and practice. The message coming from the representatives of so-called advanced people of the world raised Indians in their own estimation and reposed self-confidence among the Indians. Significance which its services rendered to the cause of nationalist movement in India hardly needs any emphasis.

From the foregoing discussion it is not to be inferred that the leaders of the Indian renaissance were directly concerned with the movement. They were, in fact, primarily interested in doing away with contemporary evil practices and unfounded dogmas as well as in the revival of moribund Indian social and cultural order. They were, in a true sense, reformists rather politicians. But the twentieth century reformists certainly showed a deep sense of interest in the freedom struggle. It was Gandhi who first blended religion with mass politics and tactfully handled it as one of the powerful tools, awakening the dormant masses against the colonial misrule. In his view religion and politics were not two different entities. It was he who successfully transformed "the legacy of renaissance movements and regionalisms into a truly mass supported and all-embracing Hindu nationalism [16]." By that he successfully confronted the despotic colonial master, and this made him a great charismatic leader of the twentieth century world.

The side-effect of the socio-cultural reform movements and rising militancy in Hindu society proved disastrous to the force of freedom struggle in the sense that it created mutual distrust between Hindus and Muslims and helped promote sectarianism in the country. Since Hindu religious and political leaders championed some ancient and medieval Hindu

emperors and warriors as national heroes and derived inspiration from their life, the Muslim elites began to doubt the increasing dominance of Hindus in politics. And, thus, the state of uneasiness among Muslims intensified. Their growing fear of lagging far behind Hindus in the political game found expression in the Muslim League. Although some distinguished Muslims identified themselves with the Congress, the League was able to project itself with increasing success as a party dedicated "to protect and advance the political and other rights of the Mussalmans of India [17]." The British, taking advantage of this reality enforced the Morley-Minto Reforms of 1909 which embedded the principle of communal representation in the legislature and thus the cleavage was further widened between the two communities. "To begin with its (League's) programme was largely negative: what the Congress was for, the League was against [18]." The hostility between two communities became so implacable with the leading Congress leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Maulana Abul Kalam and several others, too numerous to be mentioned here, became futile. This ultimately culminated in the historic division of the country into India and Pakistan.

Several Indian historians, more often than not, had accused the British rules and continue to do so for pursuing the Roman policy of "*divide et impera*" in India. But it, if viewed from the perspective of rule's interest, was certainly not an unfair and improper policy on their part. They did not create India as a colony to generate lasting love between Hindus and Muslims and promote all-round development activities. Politics is the art of possible. What they did was quite expected and fair. After all, they had been governing India in the interest of their own country and kept her in their imperial yoke so long as it was possible for them.

III. CONCLUSION

Nationalist movement of India, like that of several other ex-colonial countries, came in the wake of religious and cultural reform movements and had been imbued with traditionalism and ethnocentrism. The sentiment of unity of culture, religion and race encouraged the sentiment of patriotism and nationalism among the people, giving rise to a desire for political and economic liberation. And the sense of unity was infused and spirited up by the presence of a foreign sovereign of an entirely different race and culture.

In the beginning, the movement was largely an urban-based middle class movement which was later supported by the people of other classes all-over the country such as peasantry, feudal princes, semi-feudal landlords and workers for the common cause of decolonization of India, except for a negligible minority of people having vested interests in the perpetuation of colonial rule [19]. V. Kiernan's view that the working class was not drawn into the struggle has been rightly refuted by the several authors [20]. The leadership of the movement had been mainly in the hands of middle class people [21]. They, with some exceptions, were drawn from the groups which traditionally enjoyed a high social and ritual position in the society, and had been most exposed to the Western culture in British commercial companies, administrative services, and educational institutions [22]. A higher level of political participation of a particular section of our society is not to be taken as surprising fact [23]. Right from the ancient times the so-called upper castes namely, Brahmin, Kshatriya (later Rajput), and Kayastha had been either rulers themselves or associated with rules in one way or the other. They had been so grossly involved with the political processes of this country for a great length of time that they were bound to have a higher level of political participation in the struggle for freedom. In the post-Independent era they have become successful enough to occupy state power and transform themselves into new dominant classes. In order to perpetuate their traditional supremacy and continue to be in a dominant power position they have taken recourse to nepotism, casteism, and the hollow sounding slogan of democracy. They have been hindering and flouting in every possible way the revolutionary initiative of mass action and the seizure of power by the people from below.

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