

BRITISH PARAMOUNTCY & INDIAN NATIONALISM

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British Paramountcy over India-The conquest and subjugation of a vast country like India by Britain is an important fact in world's history. In this study I shall trace briefly the stages by which Britain gained control over the whole of India. It was in early part of the sixteenth century that the clever Europeans – the Portuguese, the Dutch, the Danes, the French and the British came to India first as merchants. Several Indian commodities chiefly spices were in great demand in European countries throughout the middle ages. The discovery of a sea route to India via the cape of Good Hope in 1498 by Vasco da Gama helped these Europeans as the land route was closed to the Europeans by the rise of the Turks. The European traders who came to India has formed themselves into trading companies. These trading companies were issued a Charter by their respective governments. The charter generally empowered these Companies to wage war, conclude treaties, conquer and occupy territories, build fortresses, etc. So, it is obvious that these were not ordinary trading companies. They negotiated with the kings, Nawabs and chieftains ruling in different parts of India for getting these facilities. In course of time, the chief rivalry for political power and economic advantage came to be between the French and the British Companies. Very soon, the English came to have an upper hand and began conquering India. The English did not conquer the whole of India at once. It was a case of slow penetration spread over nearly a century. By 1856-57 the whole of India excepting Goa, Diu and Daman, which remained as Portuguese possessions and Pondicherry which remained as the French possession, came under the British East India Company's rule. It might appear to be very peculiar that a trading Company like the British Company won and brought India under its rule. But, it is obvious that the real strength of this Company was that of the British Government, which in many ways encouraged and supported this trading Company in its ventures as part of its policy of Imperialist ambitions. The Company had the services of very able men¹ all of whom contributed in their own way to promote the British interest in India.

Initially, the British Company established with the permission of concerned authorities, a few trading centers called "factoris" and these were actually forts.

The merchant members of the Company became warriors too. Starting with a few 'forts' the British Company steadily spread its political domination over the country by a series of wars. Without going into details of these wars, treaties, etc.² I just note the chronology and also a few landmarks relating to the establishment of British power in India.

1. Winning the three Deccan Wars of 1746-48, 1748-54 and 1756-63, the English drove out the French from their hold in South India and became the dominant power there.
2. The battles of Plassey (1757) and Buxar (1764) made the English masters of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa.
3. By the Pitt's India Act of 1784 the British Government assumed powers over the political and administrative activities of the East India Company.
4. Under Instructions from the British Government Lord Cornwallis annexed a considerable portion of Tipu Sultan's territory.
5. During 1798-1805, implementing the policy of 'Subsidiary Alliance', Lord Wellesley brought Hyderabad under British control and Gwalior, Baroda, Indore, Nagpur and Poona under direct influence.
6. Between 1813-1823 Lord Hastings subdued the Marathas, the Central States of Rajputana and Gurkhas of Nepal.
7. Lord Emherst, who succeeded Hastings defeated the Burmese.
8. By the two Sikh Wars of 1845-46 and 1849 the British annexed the Punjab.
9. In 1856 the principality of Oudh was annexed.
10. Under Lord Dalhousie who came to India in 1848 as Governor-General through the "Doctrine of Lapse" several smaller principalities were taken over by the British.
11. After the above conquests by the British, Goa, Daman and Diu, Dadra and Nagar Haveli remained as Portuguese possessions and Pondicherry, Mahe and Karaikal as the French possessions in India.
12. The transfer of the Government of India from the East India Company to the British Crown on 1st November, 1858 is an important political landmark in India's history.

The above brief picture shows how the Indians lost their Independence and came to be ruled by the biggest modern Imperialist, viz. Great Britain. A detailed study of the history of the above stages will show wherein lay the British strength and what were the sources of India's weakness. In the first place, the British possessed far more economic power than India. For, the Industrial Revolution which occurred in

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Britain for the first time in the world, gave her a big lead in producing machine made goods and also all kinds of modern war requisites. Secondly, the Britishers were well organized in working out their plan of conquests. Thirdly, the British took advantage of the existence in India of several Kingdoms, Principalities, etc. They played one against the other among all the kings and chieftains in India in resisting the British power or had there been a single government may not have found it so easy to conquer the country. Even from the time of the battle of Plassey in 1757 from time to time there were rebellions against the British, in various parts of India. S.B. Chaudhari³ has listed 23 rebellions in Northern India, 23 in Bombay and Western India and 19 in South India. But the first big attempt in the direction of driving out the British power from India was in 1857 which can truly be described as the First war of Independence.

Indian Renaissance & Nationalism-The concept of 'Bharatha Khanad' which is in reality a word signifying Indian nationalism is as old as the Puranas of India. We may say that Indian nationalism had evolved on the basis of the cultural and the philosophical values enshrined in the Vedas, Puranas and the Great Epics like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. As the great Historian Percival Griffiths⁴ has observed, it is the advent of the Muslims in India which introduced in the country divergences of race, religion, language and social traditions which marred the growth of Indian nationality. The incursion of the British with their zeal for spreading Christianity in India introduced another newer foreign element in Indian society. Despite these diversities of socio-religious character, India has been able to maintain its cultural heritage as a nation. As stated in the history that, the first war of Independence gave nation-wide publicity to the harshness of the British rule and thereby generated the nationalistic spirit directed towards securing political emancipation. In the second half of the nineteenth century several other factors contributed to strengthening this Indian nationalism.

English Education and Nationalism-The most important of these factors was perhaps the spread of English education. Even from the time that the East India Company established itself in India their Directors found the need to have some Indians with knowledge of English.⁵ Lord Macaulay was responsible for introducing English education in India. His purpose was two fold. The first was to secure a cheap supply of Indians knowing English to serve the British Government in India. Secondly, he also thought that western education would foster among the educated Indians as sense of loyalty towards English rule in India and also result in the spread of English culture in In-

dia. Though these objectives were served to some extent, it also helped the growth of India nationalism as explained below. English education spread in India fairly well. For, it gave opportunities to youth to enter government service and also the new professions of law, teaching and medicine. At the same time, knowledge of English also helped Indians to read about the works of political thinkers of Europe.⁶ These thinkers strongly wrote about liberty, equality, fraternity, democracy, self-determination and national freedom. Indians also read about how people of England itself fought for democratic rights and won them. The history of the French Revolution inspired them too. The history of modern Europe they read was the history of the formation of national and democratic states.

Reading through English all the above works, brought about a profound intellectual transformation in India. Many educated Indians began to say that India also must have independence. 'Swaraj is our birthright' became the slogan, English education thus brought about a great Indian Renaissance. The early pioneers of Indian nationalism were such great men like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Dadabhai Naoriji, W.C. Banerjee, Surendranath Banerjee, Phirozeshah Mehta, Gopalkrishna Gokhale, D.E. Wacha, who had all drawn their own lessons from the Western Education they had.⁷ Further, English language also promoted communication as between people of different regions of India. It helped to cut across the linguistic barriers and served as a lingua franca—a common all-India language for people speaking different language in the country. A second factor which helped nationalism was sociocultural renaissance. This task was undertaken by a few stalwarts of India. The Brahmo Samaj started by Raja Ram Mohan Roy in Bengal, Prarthana Samaj Under M.G. Ranade's leadership in Maharashtra, Arya Samaj started by Dayananda Saraswati in U.P. and the Punjab, the Theosophical Society under the leadership of Mrs. Annie Besant in the south, the Ramakrishna Mission Founded by Ramakrishna Paramhansa's disciple Swami Vivekananda created a new wave of Hindu thought uniting all Hindus as it never had been done before. The teachings of all these socio-cultural organization created a sense of confidence in their own religion and culture and halted the trend towards westernization. Vivekananda exhorted his countrymen to 'Arise, Awake, Stop not till the goal is reached.' Several other great men like Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Mahadeo Govinda Ranade, Arabindo, Bipin Chandra Pal carried the teachings of the nineteenth century revivalists into politics. The spirit of nationalism became all pervasive in the country. Hindus all over India came closer and began to discuss problems of political and economic changes.⁸

Side by side with Hindu revivalism there was also revivalism among the Muslims of India. The great leader of Islamic Renaissance was sir Syed Ahmed Khan. He worked to promote the cause of Indian nationalism first by founding the Scientific society to which Hindus and Muslims became members. He tried to promise English education among the Muslims with a view to bring about a regeneration of Indian Muslims on modern lines. All the above socio-religious-cultural trends helped to foster Indian nationalism.

Indian Press and Nationalism-The third factor which helped to mould Indian nationalism was the Indian Press. The policy of the East India Company at first was to disallow the starting of newspapers. In the due course, the press began to enjoy some freedom. Some English newspapers owned by the English and some owned by the Indian appeared. Newspapers both in English and Indian languages increased in number after the third quarter of the nineteenth century. All these became a powerful instrument to educate the people and stimulate Indian nationalism.⁹

Fourthly, the British asserted and demonstrated their racial superiority and political domination over the Indian in many ways. They tried to influence Indians to adopt western culture and to spread Christianity holding that these are superior to Indian ways and religions. Being the masters they treated the Indians as inferior. Instances of discriminations were several. A few may be mentioned here. A competitive examination was held in London for selecting officers for the Indian Civil Service. Indian youths who aspired for these posts had to go to London and only a few could manage to go. Even those who successfully took this examination were entitled to lower salary and fewer privileges than their European counterparts. This discrimination was obviously unjust, again, the

top few posts in the government departments were reserved for Englishmen only. Highly senior and merited Indian officers had of these Indian officers had to serve British officers who were promoted over the head of these Indian officers.¹⁰ This wounded the self-respect of the Indian officers and naturally they resented such discriminations. For instance, when the British entered into a war with Afghanistan it was the Indian soldiers who were sacrificed there. Again Indian troops were sent to Cyprus during the Near Eastern Crisis of 1878. All these were never in the least of any benefit to India. They only brought all-around losses to India.¹¹ The British sense of racial superiority, their superiority complex,¹² their exploitation of Indians to serve their own selfish interest were all greatly resented by the educated Indians.

Conclusion-The various factors described in this study the spread of English language, the socio-cultural renaissance, Indian Press and the British sense of racial superiority and political domination contributed to the growth of India nationalism both in its intensity and wider population coverage in the second half of the nineteenth century. As a result of this, the freedom movement also began to gather momentum and take some shape. Indian leaders realized the sources of their weaknesses in fighting against the British and began to take remedial measures. They noted that the extraordinary force possessed by the minority of Englishmen in India depended inter alia on their good organizational strength. They felt that if they should effectively ventilate the grievances of the people against the British rule and also fight for the freedom of the country they should have proper organizational forum. This feeling led to the establishment of organizations like the national Congress, the Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasagha, etc.

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