



Tracing the philosophical foundations and their role in Indian National Movement

Abhinav

Research Scholar,

Department of African Studies, University of Delhi.

Abstract:

The underpinnings of the national movement of India were reclined and explicitly motivated by the sense of pride in the achievements and practises of Indian philosophies and traditions. There is the largest civilizational history of India, which was evidently and collectively reflective of shared foundations against the colonization of India. It was not only accumulating against the struggle for political freedom but also reflected the immense importance of the masses' educational, cultural, and social aspects. There was not any single idea or philosophy, and India does not have a unique single founding father who led the national movement and fought against British colonization, but collective ideas and philosophies were undeniably guiding the national movement. The philosophies of unity, ahimsa, and swaraj were together and cooperatively participated in a responsible way for the success of the national movement despite communalism. The uprisings and revolts during the phases of national movements were an indication for the raj, that kernels of the national movement are encouraged by the philosophies of the Indian culture and traditions. This article will critically discuss the ideas and philosophies that have encouraged and contributed to the fundamental underpinnings of the Indian national movement.

Key Words: National movement, India, Philosophy, Ahimsa, Swaraj, Unity, Freedom struggle, spiritualism, rationalism, materialism

Introduction:

The philosophical, ideational, and ideological processes that occurred during India's national movement were an amplification of the relationships between Indian philosophies and the consciousness of the masses. During the evolution of distinct phases of the national movement, the devotion of their cultural beliefs to their social practises organically developed into essential elements of their individual and social psychology. Colonial rule was associated with the western idea and philosophy of indirect cultural assimilation. Undoubtedly, no clear assimilation practises were reflected in India, other than in exceptional

cases. These factors and elements of the ideas and philosophies that emerged with the pace of national movement and evolved with different phases during the practices of colonialism in India, became counterproductive to the (1) western ideas and philosophies, (2) western thought processes of religious doctrines, (3) the idea of the colonial expansion and imperialism by the different tools of colonization and (4) the feeding of the British economic capitalist engine following the deterioration of the Indian economy.

This evolution and dominance of the ideas and philosophies against colonisation were reinforced in all aspects of life, including food culture, clothing, social institutions constructed by Indians, domestic norms, and social practices. Historians have generally understood these narratives in terms of demand for "Swaraj." Although "swaraj" itself is considered self-determination in politics, it was initially derived from the ancient Indian societies within the evolved and established "Ganatantra" during the second urbanisation process. The notion of a "swaraj" originated with the initial idea of a republic considerably earlier than the Vedic age's "Sabhas" and "Samitis," at a time when the western world still hadn't experienced organised political participation. The republic was referred to as "Gana" or "Sangh" by ancient Indian philosophers (Raghuramaraju, 2007).

There was a strict, vicious contradiction that emerged between the philosophy of "Swaraj" (self-rule) and "Samrajya" (imperialism) until independence within the intellectual, physical, and spiritual spheres of the masses during the phases of the national movement. Three main ancient characteristics of India—spiritualism, rationalism, and materialism—were replicated during the colonial period (Raghuramaraju, 2007). The Indian national movement was led by many leaders (men and women) consisting of the spirits of unity, nationhood, courage, and independence of mind. These three fundamental philosophies played a significant role in assisting and guiding the Indian national movement in individual and community actions.

The leaders of the national movement were somehow guided and roamed around these philosophies, which further led to the philosophies of "swaraj," "swadeshi," and "ahimsa." They sometimes had sharp disagreements on many critical issues and strategies of the national movement, openly and publicly criticising each other without restraint, eventually resulting in an independent India free of colonial rule. Many of them rose to prominence as dominant leaders and prominent scholars of the national movement, both within and beyond Indian discourses. Different individuals and distinct groups publicly disagreed with some or all of these points, but these personal perspectives were held in check by the philosophies of the national movement, although some distinct groups never agreed, which resulted in the creation of Pakistan.

The elements of spiritualism, rationalism, and materialism:

The first one, "spiritualism," majorly emphasised the very foundations of the Indian intellectual processes, which have been core to the Indian thought process for centuries despite religious diversions and could be reflected in any religion that originated or evolved in India. Spiritualism became a major counterforce against colonialism in the form of active resistance. It has reflected two major profound

principles, first one is the development of the foundational perceptions of spiritualism, which became reluctant to the western passive cultural subjugation and assimilation process, and enthusiastic to the reformation and counter-reformation movements within the Indian societies with the ideas of Vivekananda, Aurobindo Ghosh, K. C. Bhattacharya, Gandhi and much more. The second was the application of spiritualism in socio-political spaces during the phases of the national movement, such as when the British banned political assemblies in 1893CE, Indian nationalist leader Bal Gangadhar Tilak resurrected the Ganesh Chaturthi festival in Maharashtra, which was later added as a beacon of spiritualism with the national movement (Britannica, n.d.).

During the national movement, "rationalism" particularly emerged as a socio-religious philosophy. It became evident with the enlightenment process of the individuals and philosophies itself by the evolution in thought processes and reformative ideas. Rationalism was evident in Indian philosophies since the emergence of Jainism and Buddhism in India; however, during the phase of the national movement, rationalism was determined as enlightenment, reformation movements, and economic rationalism, first identified and constructed by economic nationalists. Counter-reformation movements were also there, and some of those were moving away from the sterile rigidities of enlightenment rationalism, hence providing another factor that moving away from enlightenment rationalism, somehow related to the rise of fascist ideology (Raghuramaraju, 2007). Many historians, including Sarkar, have characterised the national movement in India's philosophical context as the initial phases of rising "Hindutva" ideology and its philosophies in the extension of ideas that originated from India's ancient past and indigenous roots (Sarkar, 1993).

It has also got some attachments with Said's "orientalism" because the varied possibilities of the ideologies and philosophies of the "Hindutva" were also grounded in the forms of indigenisation and not very distinguishable from the idea of "orientalism" with an active critique of colonial discourse. Moving away from the enlightenment rationalism could be evident in Savarkar's philosophy of "Hindutva" with a rational explanation of India's ancient philosophies, even without empirically evaluated, intuition and innate knowledge-based ideas, defining and glorifying the superiority of the Indian culture, clothes, and education, which later gave birth to the matured idea of "swadeshi." The British consolidation of power in India during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is a historical fact and has also been depicted as an "epistemic rupture on the vastest possible scale—one of the greatest known in history" (Pollock, 2008).

Mainstream historians usually and traditionally consider social reform movements in nineteenth-century India as being centred on the reflection of great Indian intellectuals as a consequence of colonial rule (Quack, 2012). Looking at "rationalism" in the context of the National Movement, it is clear that rationalism became well-established and attributed all progress and shifts in nineteenth-century India to the agency of colonialism, without recognising the complex amalgamations and interactions between native and Western traditions, as well as the "epistemic ruptures" caused by colonial rule, initially in the realm of intellectuals but soon also on general everyday life (Kaviraj, 2005). The genesis of organised and unorganised rationalism can be evenly traced back to the Buddhism, Jainism, Bhakti, and Sufi movements in India, but the actual

organisational history of "rationalism" can be commonly limited to the early twentieth century only. There were Chārvāka, Buddha, Marx, Engels, Phule, Ambedkar, and even Nehru could be depicted as rationalists.

The rising dimensions of rationalism due to the scientific, empirical, and ethical temper of the masses gave birth to the educated middle class and eventually affected Indigenous education, culture, and social apparatus. Despite many criticisms of communalism and casteism, these ideas and philosophies related to rationalism shifted towards increasing freedom of thought processes, wider acceptance of reasons, and an open outlook towards orthodox religion, culture, and society, thus enhancing the spirit of freedom against colonial rule with the spirit of unity, harmony, equality, and universalism. It asserted Indian minds in such a way that it held, inherited, and eventually diverted the reality of religious sensibility and articulated a structure with such classes of truth that the Indian intelligentsia grasped very quickly and directly, whether with Vivekananda, Naoroji, Savarkar, Gandhi, and Ambedkar.

However, there was an eminent question that emerged during colonial rule and became a sincere concern for the leaders of the national movement of India: "Could rationalism pave the path to nationalism?" Although the driving forces behind the national movement were social, cultural, and political interactions, among the individuals and groups consequently, with "spiritualism" and "materialism." Historically, individually rational, and enlightened choices created and provided incentives for the ethnic groups of imperfectly imagined and defined identities, somehow even resulting in India as a dilemma and phenomenon of the failure of the national movements with the emergence of separatist politics. The colonial rule also helped in this with its "divide and rule" policy. But leaders such as Nehru, Gandhi, Ambedkar, and Patel have envisioned the idea of a rational nation despite the costly stalemate-like situation of public choice as a nation.

"Materialism" is the only living component in the Indian philosophies alongside "spiritualism" and "rationalism" (Chattopadhyay, 1959). Gandhi, Vivekananda, and Aurobindo have characterised materialism with the "west" as a colonial tool, while Savarkar, Nehru, and Bose have distinguished "materialism" as the way of modernisation, thereby somehow agreeing on the empirical evidence of the dialectical materialism of Marx. However, economic nationalists were the first to demand economic independence in terms of the philosophy of "materialism." The rising demands for the Indianisation of civil services were the forerunners of the nationalist movement (Mathur, 1968). The philosophy of materialism in the indigenisation of the civil service could be seen as a matter of great significance, a tool for the assertion of political movements, the utility of the native agency, and most importantly, the prevention of the drain of wealth through consistently increasing home charges by increasing the salary, pension, and other emoluments.

Establishing agency in the economic sphere and speeding up the industrialisation of India during colonial rule were also major factors. The socialist concept of industrialisation is considered as the straitening of materialism and hence further providing shelter to 'capitalism' (Jones, 1987). At the same pace, Nehru, Bose, and Ambedkar were advocating for the industrialisation of India. The industrial philosophy of Nehru and Bose is well-known and established in public discourse, and many social scientists have already critically worked on it. The philosophy of increasing industrialisation was also prevailing in Indian demands, so the

industrial houses of India could become economically empowered, and they could economically help in the national movement of India. We could trace the evidence of the cotton, paper, and chemical industries in India, which took place after the "Swadeshi" movement. However rural India still refrained from the "arch of industrialisation," hence organically making distance from the industrial prospects of the industrial part of economic nationalism. Ambedkar and Gandhi became the interlocutor of this paradigm, and the Gandhian philosophy of "charkha" was inspired by the "swadeshi" (Binod, 2015) and Ambedkar's philosophy of "rural development" with the help of industrialisation as a natural and powerful remedy to agricultural problems (Ambedkar, 1918) created by the colonial rule, completed the "materialism" debate between the consciousness of the people belonging to rural and urban areas.

These attempts at the reconstruction and rejuvenation of the ancient Indian past, seeking to re-enact the philosophies of "spiritualism," "rationalism," and "materialism," did not seem as inorganic during colonial rule. Vivekanand hence criticised the western philosophy of spiritualism in form of Christianity, he focused on the religious reformation movements for the collectively unifying spirit of nationalism among Indians. Vivekananda's philosophy of nationalism was undeniably different from the western idea of nationalism and deeply associated with "spiritualism." The western idea of nationalism was not compositely derived from the factors of spiritualism, rationalism, and materialism. The definitions and ideas that were trending during the national movement of India were quite different at that time and might be influenced by the French and American revolutions, even social scientists have not critically examined the evolved idea of nationalism. It was merely the pathology of modern developmental history, as inescapable as "neurosis" in the individual (Nairn, 1977).

Nationalism was merely and generally understood and propagated by the left historians as the replica of the German and Italian model of unification, considering the elements of Fascism and Nazism. However, the new idea was nationalism as a spirit of the imagined political community, a recent and modern creation despite nations being thought of by most people as old and timeless, universal in that every individual belongs to a nation yet each nation is supposedly completely distinct from every other nation, having such ideas and philosophies which is so influential that people will die for their nations yet at the same time itself an idea difficult to define (Anderson, 1983). Anderson's definition is partially fulfilling the idea of nationalism in Indian discourse; however, he has also indicated that nationalism of all varieties cannot be understood without reflecting on the older political forms and kingdoms, out of which they emerged, especially empires of the pre-modern and early modern times. Hence reflecting on merely a politically imagined community, which he would consider and define as a "nation."

In the context of India, Marxist historians have also understood the ideas of nation and nationalism as driving forces behind the imagined political entity. The earlier kind of nationalism that originally took birth on Indian soil was also related to "materialism," hence considered "economic nationalism," propagated by Naoroji and Romesh Chandra Dutta. Economic nationalism hence applied to only the economy and undoubtedly it generated a stimulus of initial nationalism among the consciousness of Indians. The dialectic

materialism idea of Marxism was also working with the consciousness of the Indians against colonialism. However, Marx himself, in "*The British Rule in India*," said that "England, it is true, in causing a social revolution in Hindostan, was actuated only by the vilest interests and was stupid in her manner of enforcing them." But that is not the question. The question is, "Can mankind fulfil its destiny without a fundamental revolution in the social state of Asia?" If not, whatever may have been the crimes of England she was the unconscious tool of history in bringing about that revolution."

Majorly beyond economic nationalism, the idea of social and religious revolution was also pointed out by Marx itself, which has not been much considered. Economic nationalism indeed emerged during a time when ideological contestation between the initial Indian nationalists and Britishers emerged, but it was not solely the philosophy behind the idea of "materialism." The idea of "swadeshi," initiated by economic nationalism, became a beacon of political, social, cultural, and economic policy against the western philosophy of "materialism." The philosophy of "swadeshi" later drove the pace towards "swaraj" through all available means, including newspapers, journals, books, and meetings for political, social, and cultural agitations. Nationalism with the social and cultural consciousness amongst the masses was developed initially, but eventually got evolved after the development of economic nationalism.

Historians often consider economic nationalism a predecessor of the full-fledged national movement. It somehow even seems true but is often not empirical because the reformation movements in Indian society have already developed a consciousness of imagined social and cultural unity in the masses. Vivekanand seems to be the sole propagator of this philosophy, while his speech in Chicago clearly reflected the philosophy of "spiritualism" as the cultural unity of India, hence adding to the cultural unification of the masses into the national movement. Vivekananda referred to India as the "Mother of Religions, Classes, and Sects" and considered all Indians to be Hindus, the guides of universal toleration and acceptance. He contrasted the Hindus with other nations by saying that the national goals of the French were liberty from the monarchy, the British had mercantile genius, and the Hindus had spirituality (Chatterjee, 1995). Vivekanand's philosophy mainly focused on depicting Hindus as a nation unto themselves and not just a religious community, and this cardinal truth formed the basis of the first popular national movement of the twentieth century, the "Swadeshi" movement. Bankim Chandra, Aurobindo, Dayananda Saraswathi, and Savarkar all argued in their philosophies that Hindus are more than just a religious community but a nation. However, Vivekananda made his most powerful pronouncement on this idea, and hence, his philosophies were reflected in the national movements.

There were many points of difference within Indian society already presented. India had Vaidika, Tantrika, the Buddhist, Jain, Shaiva, Vaishnava, Shakta, Sikh, Islam, Arya samaj, Kabir Panth, worshipers of Ayappa in Kerla, Sarana in Chota Nagpur region, and Doni-pollo in the north-eastern part of India. There were several castes, even classes were well emerged and developed, languages and regional, religious traditions and customs, but the fundamental sense of unity, a sense of imagined community, a self and community identity, a spirit of harmony, a sense of integral unity rather than western synthetic unity gave

birth to well-developed nationalism, which collectively resulted in the first all India political campaign non-cooperation movement of 1919 CE. Gandhi seems to be the de facto leader of the non-cooperation movement, and he has also taken the help of the philosophical underpinnings of India, which were derived from the complete sense of spiritualism, rationalism, and materialism and were called "swadeshi" and "ahimsa."

These philosophies of spiritualism, rationalism, and materialism cut through all the differences and diversions and prevailed over the community on account of the common spiritual current of the national movement. Foreign domination of colonialism led to the misfortune of our losing control over some parts of the traditional philosophy with the introduction of Christianity and western philosophies, and some segments of our nation (the demand for Pakistan) also got fractured away from the rest of us. But this colonial subjugation could not be sustained by itself, destroying nationhood and nationalism. Also, this subjugation of the people as well as the minds of the Indians could not imply the destruction of or change in the character of Indianness. The reinvigoration of the integral unity and regeneration of India was the central spiritual, rational, and material theme of the thoughts of the leaders of the national movement. Hence, spiritual India was reflecting the idea of Indianness, despite several differences; rational India was indicating the movements that automatically and artificially emerged during the national movement, and material India was indicating the development of the indigenous economy as well as freedom from the drain of wealth towards Britain.

The philosophy of ahimsa, universal religion, and humanism was also propounded and reflected by Gandhi and other leaders of the national movement, but later got politically synthesised with a historically conditional phenomenon, eventually leading to spiritualism, rationalism, and materialism. The processes and practices of the development of contradictions during the national movement over spiritualism, rationalism, and materialism finally led to political synthesis and compromises, hence creating practical political solutions against colonial rule with the doctrine of the independence of India from alien rule. This practical political synthesis of philosophies referred to combining and embodying the sub-elements of ancient Indian culture in their best practices and features.

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