

Rise of Nationalism in India

The second half of the 19th century witnessed the full flowering of national political consciousness and the growth of an organised national movement in India.

The year 1885 marks the beginning of a new epoch in Indian History. Indian National Congress was founded in December 1885 by seventy-two political workers. It was the first organised expression of Indian Nationalism on an all-India scale.

The rise and growth of Indian nationalism has been traditionally explained in terms of Indian response to the stimulus generated by the British Raj through creation of new institutions, new opportunities, etc.

In other words, Indian Nationalism grew partly as a result of colonial policies and partly as a reaction to colonial policies in fact, it would be more correct to see Indian nationalism as a product of a mix of various factors.

Social and Economic Bases of Nationalism:

1. Understanding of Contradiction in Indian and Colonial Interests:

People came to realise that colonial rule was the major cause of India's economic backwardness and that the interests of the Indians involved the interests of all sections and classes. The very condition of British rule helped the growth of national sentiment among the Indian people.

2. Political, Administrative and Economic Unification of the Country:

Nationalist sentiments grew easily among the people because India was unified and welded into a nation during the 19th and 20th centuries. The introduction of a uniform and modern system of government by the British throughout the country unified it administratively. The destruction of the rural and local self-sufficient economy and the introduction of modern trade and industries on an all-India scale had increasingly made India's economic life a single whole and interlinked the economic fate of people living in different parts of the country. Furthermore, the introduction of the railways, telegraph and unified postal systems had brought the different parts of the country together and promoted mutual contact among the people, especially among the leaders.

3. Western Thought and Education:

As a result of the spread of modern western education and thought during the 19th century, a large number of Indians imbibed a modern rational, secular, democratic and nationalist political outlook. The spread and popularity of the English language helped nationalist leaders of different linguistic regions to communicate with each other.

Modern education also created a certain uniformity and community of outlook and interests among the educated Indians. This English-educated intelligentsia formed the nucleus for the newly-arising political unrest, and it was this section of the society which provided leadership to the Indian political associations.

4. Role of Press and Literature.

With the emergence of the modern press, both English and Vernacular, the latter half of the 19th century saw an unprecedented growth of Indian-owned English and Vernacular newspapers. The Indian Press played a notable role in mobilizing public opinion, organizing political movements, fighting out public opinions and promoting nationalism.

5. Progressive Character of Socio-Religious Reform Movements.

These reform movements sought to remove social evils which divided the Indian society; this had the effect of bringing different sections of the society together. Since many reform movements drew their inspiration from India's rich cultural heritage, these promoted pan-Indian feelings and spirit of nationalism.

6. Reactionary Policies and Racial Arrogance of Rulers.

An important factor in the growth of national sentiments in India was the tone of racial superiority adopted by many Englishmen in their dealings with Indians. The reactionary policies of the British government were also responsible for the growth of political associations.