

## **AWAKENING OF NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS**

The early nationalists felt that India could not exist as a nation or a united country until there was a revolution in the fields of transport and communication. In the words of the Bengali nationalist Bipin Chandra Pal in 1916. Our language has no word corresponding to the English word nation. And the reason is that our social synthesis practically stopped with the race-idea. We never had, therefore, this nationalist aspiration before.

Before this period Indians mostly lived in remote and scattered villages. Their viewpoints hardly stretched beyond 30 km. Even intellectuals living in the urban areas, did not have any sense of identity with even other urban people in India. The only link that had anything common with that the British administration which controlled and ruled as semi-hegemonic and semi-authoritarian colonial state. The nature and working of the colonial state forced the Indian masses to participate in the Indian National Movement and it made them have a sense of identity with other Indians. They did not completely reject the constitutional validity of the British system. Rather, they used it effectively in combination with the, non-constitutional struggle to make changes in the existing structure.

The negative factors of the British rule which inspired the struggle for freedom were:

1. **Humanitarian:** Not much was done for the Indians. Everything that was done was to facilitate the British who were coming to or had settled in India.
2. **Civilizational:** Efficiency on the part of the government was required to help the civilization make progress. There is no doubt that railways were built and ambitious irrigation projects were

undertaken. However, it was not adequate. Moreover, everything was done to facilitate the smooth functioning of the British government. It did not involve any concern for the Indian people.

3. **Political:** The British repeatedly breached their promise of giving the Indians fair and equal treatment. They were denied reasonable representation in higher administration as had been promised. All this shook the confidence of the Indians towards the British. Indians were being denied their birth right of adequate political aspirations and the legitimate claim to have a reasonable voice in legislation. This was after disregard of the feelings and views of the Indians.
4. **Financial:** The British were evolving new methods of imposing taxes on the Indians, without making any effort to increase their income. Inequitable financial relations between England and India, that is the political debt of \$100,000,000 forced on the shoulders of India.
5. **Material:** It is estimated that the material drain from India to England was more than £500,000,000. The calculations were made at the lowest computation. It had been included the principal alone, and it would run into thousands of millions if interest had also been included. Moreover, this drain continued at the rate of more than \$12,000,000 annually, with a tendency to increase. The impoverishment and exhaustion of the country grew steadily. The exports from India increased without adequate compensation. It led to a loss in the manufacturing industry and

its skill, did much damage to Indians materially.

6. **Others:** During the years after the rebellion of 1857, there was an increase in political awareness, expression of Indian public opinion, and emergence of Indian leadership. The economic uncertainties that the British rule had created for the ever-expanding number of Western-educated youth began to dominate the speeches of the leaders. They had started thinking of themselves as a 'nation', despite gaps created by region, religion, language and caste.

The educated class of India highlighted the facts how wealth from India was being drained out of India and how it was leading to poverty among Indians. The criticism of the British colonial rule hastened the rise of nationalism. The educated thinking class voiced for liberal and democratic principles emphasised by Western education. It further promoted nationalism. There is no denying of the fact that Western-style education was beginning to form a new class of Indians having an understanding of the English political outlook. The number of Indians studying English increased from 298,000 in 1887 to 505,000 in 1907. In the same period, the circulation of English-language newspapers grew from 90,000 to 276,000.



### **Indian National Movement vs. European Revolutions**

Indian nationalistic movements were similar to those in Europe. The goals of autonomy and self-rule were the same. Circumstances that led to the unification or the division of a place were alike. The catalysts for nationalism were, however, slightly different. Both were based on the corruption or ineffectiveness of a government on its subjects, but the sources were different. European abuse of power came

from within (e.g. French kings over French people or disunity in Germany). Indian nationalistic movements for independence were a direct reaction to imperialism. European nations were in a period of imperialism, or the taking over of another country for political, social and/ or economic gain. In this case, India had experienced long periods of imperialism at the hands of European authorities. As imperialism progressed, nationalistic movements rose up in an attempt to throw out foreign influence and gain independence.

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