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Part One: A Survey of the History of Nationalism

Rise of Nationalism as a Creed

While some of the characteristics of nationalism may be witnessed in the tribal system of the Greek city-state many thousand years ago[1] nationalism as a political, social and ideological school of thought took birth in the West following the French Revolution.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau was one of the greatest advocates of this creed. He emphasized the unity, solidarity and the group spirit of the masses and insisted that one should have the highest attachment to one's home and country where one has been brought up. He believed the fatherland to be the core and center of a person's and a group's love and loyalty. He elevated this belief to a sacred religious duty, and severely condemned the idea of mankind's collective attachment or a religious societal order.

The main fabric of the school of nationalism was laid by the French Revolution, where it was first put to practice. It was then that the stimulation of emotions towards the flag and country, the glorification and worship of national heroes, the composition of the national anthem, the emphasis on the sanctity of the French language and race, the creation of great national festivals and ceremonies in the style of religious rites, a pride in the history of France and a belief in the great mission of the French nation, emerged and displayed themselves one after another in the course of the Revolution. But with the rise of the Jacobins to power and the disasters which followed the Revolution, the evils of nationalism evinced themselves from the very beginning. For the Jacobins, nationalism became the means to toy with the masses feelings, general mobilization, aggression upon neighboring countries, expansionism, massacre, corruption, suppression and self-interest, showing that nationalistic sentiments always result in aggression and imperialism. To the Jacobins, French interests were their basis for decisions.

With the progressive influence of the French Revolution in the West, the concept of nationalism rapidly gained popularity[2] leavening behind the notions of freedom and democracy. The rise of Napoleon Bonaparte quickened its pace in the West. Napoleon was a staunch believer in the creed of nationalism and, as we shall see, he was the first to scatter its seed in the Islamic world. His strong sense of

nationalism laid the grounds for its expansionistic and aggressive policies, his wars and massacres had encouraged a spirit of domination in the French nation, and soon, other nations were contaminated with nationalistic sentiments. In Germany and Italy, this spirit rose rapidly, and in the name of nationalism, horrible crimes were committed and a desperate fight for power was started.

The 19th century is called 'the golden age' of nationalism[3]. It was in that century that Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Paine set up the foundations for American nationalism. In England, Jeremy Bentham gave nationalism a new scope. With William Gladstone, British nationalism reached its height. Nationalism spread as an intellectual movement and school in the whole of central and Western Europe. Mazzini, who rose in Italy is regarded as one of the greatest theoreticians of the school of nationalism of the 19th century. Other great propounders and banner-bearers of nationalism in that century were Giuseppe Garibaldi in Italy, Victor Hugo in France and Otto Bismarck in Germany.

Nationalism made history in that century, bringing about some of the greatest events. Belgium secured its independence, while in South and Central America, the colonies of Portugal and Spain declared their independence under the leadership of Simon Bolivar and Jose Martin. But the strongest sentiments of nationalism were roused by Western governments in the European colonies of the Ottoman Empire. Greece, Bulgaria, Hungary, Finland, Czechoslovakia, Croatia were tempted into claiming independence.

Of course, these events were trivial as compared to the unprecedented expansion of imperialism in the Third World, and the political clashes and conflicts of Western governments. History has shown that nationalism has been far more destructive than constructive. British, French colonialist policies and aggressions, and the expansionism of Napoleon III and Bismarck, proved that the deceptive slogans of Western nationalism and liberalism were empty covers and excuses for enslaving oppressed nations.

Creed of Nationalism

Nationalism is a creed, a school and a pseudo-religion which the West created to fill an ideological vacuum.

Man cannot live without a faith, an ideology, to which he can show affection and love. In the Middle Ages in the West, this faith, ideology, were found in Christianity and the religion of the Church. But Christianity was an unrealistic, imperfect and one dimensional religion, and since it had an unscientific and anti-intellectual basis, it could not last as a permanent and universal religion and ideology.

The Renaissance and subsequent changes dealt the church a heavy blow, and Christianity could no longer make its presence felt as a living faith in Europe, and soon became a dead creed. As we said, Christianity, from the beginning, lacked the dynamism which provides the people with zeal, frenzy, fanaticism and solidarity. After the Renaissance, it retired completely from the political, social, intellectual and emotional life of the people and western ideology was left with an intense vacuum.

In the absence of an inspiring force that would revive them, the westerners were left in the dark. Christianity was dead. Since man cannot live in a vacuum (of belief) and needs an ideology to follow and love, 'Azar, the idol-maker' of Western ideas hewed the idol of nationalism, and offered it to the West as anew religion and anew god that was welcomed by thirsty devotees. This vacuum was later on filled by Marxism, and both these schools owed their creation to the weakness and failure of Christianity in satisfying the religious longing of Westerners.

But in Islamic East, there never existed such a vacuum. Here, Islam was already present as a living, dynamic and universal ideology. It contained such dynamism that in the first century after its advent, it unified all the lands stretching from North Africa to the farthest parts of Asia, and from Spain to Mongolia, and joined together peoples of different races, languages and cultures as a single Ummah. Even now, Islam still possesses in the Muslim world afar greater power of rousing revolutionary zeal, devotion and solidarity than any other ideology. It can inspire its followers to sacrifice their life and wealth in the way of the school, and for that reason there is no need in the Islamic world to import nationalism as a Western commodity which is produced in accordance with the peculiar conditions of that region.

Nationalists and Western intellectuals of the Islamic world ignore the facts of their own country and its cultures and fancy that any experiment which has been successful in the West, may be repeated in the East. But this is illusory thinking. A blind imitation of such so-called intellectuals has left them no power of discernment to realize that the West possessed special conditions which differed from those of the world of Islam. The West was faced with a decadent Christianity and church, whereas, here is a revolutionary and dynamic Islam. It is unable to understand this reality that Islam and Christianity are two wholly different phenomena.

While Christianity is a collection of dogmas and religious rites of priests, Islam is a living, comprehensive ideology containing intellectual and practical issues, concerning both the individual and society.

Nationalism and Colonization

Colonialism and Capitalism were two other factors which encouraged the spread of nationalism.

In the 19th century, the Westerners embarked on a fearful race for colonization and plundering the Third World countries. They pounded upon Asian and African nations like bloodthirsty wolves. With such actions, they badly needed a strong ideology to justify their pillage and crimes, while, at the same time, to provide a motive for further plunder and colonization. Thus, in the heat of these attempts at colonization, nationalism rose as an ideology and a living creed of the West.

The school of nationalism in connection with colonization played three significant parts:

1- It was firstly the source of colonization. Intense patriotic feelings, a belief in national and racial superiority, a tribal pride and a glorification of one's own history and culture, emerged from nationalism,

providing the ground for political expansionism and economic self-axism. Imperialism is the illegitimate offspring of these same nationalistic inclinations.

2- Nationalism was a means to justify colonization and the savage acts of Western colonizers under the guise of “national exigencies” and «revival of the country's greatness.

3- Thirdly, it was the strong motive force which maintained the spirit of colonization. By kindling intense nationalistic sentiments and a spirit of self-sacrifice for the fatherland, the motive for colonization was set, giving fresh impetus to English, French and Germans in their close and stubborn race for domination over Asia and Africa.

Francis Cooker, the well-known Western thinker writes: “In the 19th century, most nationalists out of their fanatical nationalism were convinced and claimed that advanced nations had a lofty history and culture, and a racial and national superiority; therefore they were not justified in confining their talents to their own borders. Their national and patriotic duty must not be summed up in their defense and preservation of the independence and territorial integrity of their own country. They have a universal mission to expand the radius of their political and national cultural influence to all parts of the world in the interest of mankind, and help to civilize retarded lands even by force and violence if necessary.”

The above view which was the logical conclusion of nationalistic thought was the root of colonization and a means of justifying savage plunder by imperialism.

A survey of the words and writings of the founders of the nationalistic school in the 19th century reveals how stubbornly they propagated this idea that our national duty compels us not only to defend our frontiers, but also to engage in military and political ventures even thousands of kilometers away from those frontiers for the sake of the country’s greatness.

Dr. Bridgehet a national thinker of the 19th century writes: “Being pleased with our territorial Integrity is not enough, since dropping behind in the international, political and military race would mean neglecting our duty of guarding the historical greatness of our country. If we abstain from expansionism, our national pride will be damaged. It is only by being adventurous and warlike that our national pride may be preserved[4].”

Nationalism also extended Darwin's view about the survival of the fittest to the social and political realms. Ernest Haeckel propagated it strongly in Germany, stating: “Only strong and powerful nations have the right to live and to swallow weak and retarded nations”. This may be called “the collective cannibalism of modern civilization.” Karl Pearson, another prominent nationalist too, considers the survival of the fittest as «the natural law of the relationship of nations.”

As a result of such argumentation by the nationalists, at the end of the 19th century, a new wave of aggressive expansionism was witnessed. British colonization led by Gladstone, the English nationalist, made India and many other zones a part of the British Empire. Germany, under Bismarck, another

nationalist leader embarked on expansionism. France seized various parts of Africa and made of them its own colonies. England occupied the Suez zone and embarked on more imperialistic adventures. Germany intended to create a wide Aryan Empire from Berlin to Baghdad. Even the newly-risen America as a power, influenced by nationalism, entered the race for colonization, occupying the Philippines and other areas of the Far East. The thirst for colonization led to disputes between France and Germany on the question of domination over Morocco, and a similar rivalry emerged between Russia and Britain to make Iran their mandate. All these were the amazing results of nationalism.

Joseph Lighten, the social historian[5] writes:
"The whole history of the 19th century is based on an economic-political nationalism resulting in clashes and colonization. Nationalism is the root of the expansionism and friction of various governments." Some of the greatest nationalists of the 19th century have been active agents for the expansion of aggressive colonization and great criminals of history.

Gladstone, the highest banner-bearer of British nationalism was the man who began a series of aggressive attacks upon the Third World forcing weak nations under his yoke. Robert Clive was the principal agent of the expansion of colonization in India, the man who cruelly massacred the Indians in the Battle of Pelassi. Cecil John Rhodes spread British colonization elsewhere. All these people justified their savage and disgraceful aggressions in the name of nationalism.

Thus, in the 19th century, the high pundits of colonization used nationalism as a motive and a justification for their ventures. Nationalism was the creed of the imperialists and not that of the opponents of colonization. Naturally the establishment of capitalistic order was not without its influence on the expansion of both nationalism and colonization, and there has always existed a close bond of cause and effect between these three factors. Capitalism aided by nationalism directed the national policy of the countries towards expansionism to exhibit its power in all parts of the world so that it could secure new markets where demand was high.

The East India Company which enhanced British colonization in India in the name of 'national greatness' and under the cover of nationalistic slogans, is one of the clearest examples of the connection that exists between nationalism, imperialism and capitalism, a subject which will be discussed in the following chapter.

The Bond Between Nationalism and Capitalism

Nationalism as a tool in the hands of the world-devouring capitalism.

Another factor which was influential in the advance of 19th century nationalism was the capitalistic order which took root in the West[6]. Nationalism had become a tool in the hands of big capitalists and factory owners to preserve the home market for their industrial products and rouse national feeling for the sole consumption of local products on the one hand, and also to secure new markets by leading nations and

governments towards colonization in the name of national interests. For this reason the school of nationalism flourished in the 19th century after the growth of capitalism.

World-devouring capitalism ripened following the industrial revolution. A series of discoveries and inventions begun in 1732 by John Key set the wheel turning for the industrial revolution. The discoveries and inventions of Thomas Savery, Thomas Newcomen, James Watt, Richard Arkwright, Samuel Crompton, Abraham Derbys, Henry Cort and Henry Bessemer resulted in the establishment of huge mechanized factories, the rise of millionaire class and middle-class merchants and culminating in the birth of a world-devouring capitalistic order.

This new class of capitalists and merchants used nationalism as a tool for promoting and preserving their wicked and inhuman goals. To the profiteering class whose factories' production was far higher than the demand at home, securing markets was what mattered the most. Employers and capitalists directed all efforts at selling their products in their bid to win the race they were engaged in with the capitalists and industrialists of other nations.

These two groups had two objectives:
A) To secure new markets in other parts of the world.
B) To monopolize the home market and prevent the entry of imported goods.

World-devouring capitalism fulfilled both objectives through the injection of nationalistic sentiments which encouraged the masses to choose home made products, rather than imported goods of better qualities. And also by encouraging nationalistic prejudices, capitalism directed the countries' policy towards imperialism and colonization which were considered necessary for securing new markets.

The capitalists made use of nationalism to counter foreign capitalism, and the conflict extended from the economic to the political field. They made use of limited freedom of travel, restricted import and the language barrier to check the entry of foreign goods in the home markets[7].

With this goal in mind, the capitalists propagated the slogan of “homeland”, calling their own profits “national interests”, and mobilizing their compatriots to defend the “country's interests.” Thus, with the rise of capitalism, nationalism became a weapon in a combat between the capitalists of various countries, and in order to monopolies world markets, it was placed wholly at the service of capitalism. Moreover, plundering capitalists used the creed of nationalism for another evil objective also which was to incite dispersion among oppressed classes.

The 19th century witnessed the exploitation of the oppressed classes of society in the most ruthless manner by capitalism. The industrial revolution and the appearance machines turned commercial capitalism Into Industrial capitalism and resulted in the concentration of capital and labor. With these conditions, the exploitation of the labor force was multiplied a hundredfold, resulting in a fearful social system where the worker's blood was cruelly sucked.

The inhuman system of capitalism, in order to terrify the oppressed masses and check their rebellion, compelling them to work day and night in pitiful conditions like thoughtless mechanized beings, needed an effectively strong motive, and this was found in nationalism. Thus through the slogan and cry of 'homeland', capitalism attained its objective.

With nationalistic sentiments, national zeal and frenzy reaching a crescendo, the oppressed class of society forgot all about social injustice and instead turned to national issues. Due to the national unity banner, they failed to realize the lack of harmony between their interests and those of the arrogant in their society.

Moreover, a natural development of savage exploitation was that the workers' spirit of rebellion and dissatisfaction gained in intensity day by day in other European countries while raising the question of nationalism and kindling the flame of nationalistic sentiments, making it impossible for the world oppressed to make common cause against the arrogant. The oppressed of each nation, out of nationalistic sentiments, allied themselves with the arrogant of that nation, against the oppressed of another nation, thereby preventing an effective alliance of world oppressed against the whole arrogant world. This was the old policy of divide and rule' which had long been adopted by oppressors as far as history goes.

Nationalism in the 20th Century

The history of nationalism in the 20th century can be divided into two periods:

A– Nationalism in the first half of the 20th century.

B– Nationalism in its second half.

In the first half of the 20th century, up to the Second World War, the clearest manifestation of nationalism was seen in Europe and Japan resulting in a universal war. It revived in them the dream of colonizing the whole world, and led them to start two calamitous wars. Most scholars admit that the main cause for the First and Second World Wars was nationalistic sentiments. In this period, the true off–springs of nationalism who elevated this school to its highest position and gave it its severest form were Mussolini in Italy, Hitler in Germany, Peron in Argentina, Franco in Spain and Salazar in Portugal. This was the wicked product that nationalism gave to mankind and this way is still continued. Nationalism is still looked upon as a formal religion by international aggressors such as the U.S.

In the second half of the century, nationalism made its appearance in the Third World. At first it looked like a movement aimed at uprooting colonization, but a close analysis points to the contrary. As the western culture and domination were not compatible with eastern religion, culture, mentality and local traditions, rebellion against colonization was inevitable in these eastern regions, whether nationalism appeared as a motivating force or not. For the people, the motive of revolt was religion and religious

fanaticism, not nationalism and nationalistic sentiments. But when the small enlightened group depending on the West realized that the direct domination of colonization was no longer possible they directed the movements in the name of nationalism, so that after the exit of colonization, they would indirectly be able to preserve its values and methods of domination.

In the contemporary world, colonization having become a thing of the past, and the colonies having secured their independence, nationalism has come to be used by colonization and imperialism in another form, and its role is somewhat changed.

Neo-colonization uses nationalism to prevent the union of former colonies, so as to keep them weak and dependent on stronger powers.

The imperialists on realizing that they could no longer keep eastern nations under their direct yoke, and that their union would be a serious threat to their interests, started exporting nationalism to the East in a bid to weaken them and encourage conflicts among the newly independent nations of Asia and Africa. This way, they aimed at sowing the seed of hostility and dispersion among them to check their unity and solidarity. This is why we see that wherever colonization has made an exit, the rein of affairs is held by a westernized educated minority, and nationalistic forces are encouraged to stand against Islamic forces. The bond between nationalism and colonization is preserved as before, and wherever nationalism raises its head, its root is imperialism.

1. Some researchers consider Reformation as the beginning of nationalism and others suggest the Westphalia incident in 1648, but the majority of the researchers regard the French Revolution to be a turning point in the emergence of nationalism.
2. Salow Baron: Modern Nationalism, New York, 1927, p. 43.
3. Hans Kohn: The Idea of Nationalism: A study of it's origin and background, New York, 1944, p. 116.
4. Francis W. Cooker: Recent Political Thought, New York, 1934, p. 443-48.
5. Joseph Lighten: Social Philosophers in Conflict, New York, 1937, p. 439.
6. Hans Kohn: The idea of Nationalism: A study in its origin and Background. p 79.
7. Carlton Hays: The Historical Evaluation of Modern Nationalism, p. 129.

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