



ANTI-COLONIAL NATIONAL LIBERATION MOVEMENT: ASIA AND AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

Colonialism based on territorial conquest has become a legacy of the past but economic and military disparities between the former colonies and the metropolitan powers are substantial even today. The history of the struggle against colonial rule is important not merely to understand the evolution of countries in Africa and Asia but also the regimes that emerged after independence. A comparative study of anti-colonial movements is easier now on the basis of the published works available. In this paper we will discuss the growth of anti-colonial movements in Asia and Africa.

KEYWORDS: *Nationalist Ideologies, Colonial Power, Anti-Colonial Movements, Constitutional Nationalisms, Capitalist Development etc.*

INTRODUCTION

Although there were a few straightforward armed struggles against colonial rule the primarily non-violent struggle led by the Indian National Congress under Mahatma Gandhi was indeed an exception in the history of anti-colonial struggles. The struggles against the French and subsequently the Americans in Vietnam took the course of a violent liberation movement. The rivalry between the Soviet Union and the United States of America as the defender of the free world introduced a measure of conflict in anti-colonial movements after World War II that was absent in the case of those countries that had gained independence during the late 1940s. India and China managed to choose their paths of development after prolonged struggles against foreign domination before the cold war began in earnest. Even smaller countries managed to avoid the consequences of cold war rivalry like Sri Lanka and Burma during the late 1940s. Vietnam and Korea, however, were divided as a result of superpower rivalry after the USA decided to stop peasant armies from bringing communists to power. The history of liberation struggles has been shaped by two decisive factors. One was the extent of leeway left by the colonial power for the colonized to express their nationalist aspirations through open and legitimate channels. The British set up representative or consultative bodies that allowed for more moderate forms of anti-colonial politics to flourish and compete with the more militant expressions of nationalism. The French in many of their colonies did not evolve such mechanism, and the absence of any space for moderate and constitutional politics led to the emergence of the Vietnamese liberation struggle under Ho Chi Minh. In China the defeat of the communist party in the urban centres led Mao to build his base in the rural areas during the 1930s. A powerful and predominantly peasant armed struggle against Japanese aggression (1937-1945), based on a class coalition dominated by the communists, emerged under Mao-tse-Tung. The opportunities for more liberal and moderate politics in China were absent and so the movement took a more radical turn than in India. The second factor in the anti-colonial struggles was the role of external interventions during the cold war. There were countries that fell clearly under one sphere of influence but there were many that were the arenas of contestation. In Malaya the British stayed on to crush the communist movement and in North Korea and North Vietnam the communists assumed complete control under independent leaders with support from China and the USSR. In many countries there were struggles to dominate the national movement and after the Sino-Soviet split of the mid 1960s there were pro-Soviet and pro-Chinese factions in the liberation struggles of many African countries like Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau. The fate of many small nations was often determined by super power rivalry and negotiation and not the strength of their anti-colonial movements. The role of external factors in attaining national independence cannot be underestimated. Developments in Paris and Lisbon determined the outcome of struggles in French Algeria and Portuguese Angola and Mozambique. If there had not been changes in the political equations in France in 1958 and Portugal in 1974 the liberation of colonies in Africa would have been a more long drawn affair, although their struggles had been long and bloody enough. The decolonisation of Africa was influenced by the colonial powers had divided up many parts of the world without regard to the ethnic, linguistic or religious attributes of their colonised subjects.



NATIONALIST IDEOLOGIES

In a celebrated work, *Imagined Communities* by Benedict Anderson, it has been argued that the idea of the nation and nation-state in its modular form developed in France after the Revolution of 1789. It then spread across the globe with the aid of print capitalism and elites promoting national languages and sometimes creating national languages along the way. Partha Chatterjee has critiqued this derivative discourse of nationalism. According to him, nationalist ideas in India developed in the private and more spiritual domain shielded from the dominant western discourse in the public sphere. The 'construction' of the imagined community has also been questioned. Elements of ethnicity or race cannot be the products of shared imagination alone. The latter view has been advocated by S.A. Smith. Nationalisms can emerge based on one or more elements – language, ethnicity, citizenship and even religion. Scholars differentiate between primordialist and civic nationalisms, cultural and constitutional nationalisms and exclusive and assimilationist nationalisms based on historical evidence. The ideology of Indian nationalism for the most part was concerned with an economic critique of British rule in India as in Naoroji's *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India*. During the late 19th century the element of cultural nationalism too emerged and influenced a small but significant number of people during the anti-colonial struggle. The element of racial antagonism was much less evident in India than in other countries and certainly less so than in Africa. The absence of significant number of white settlers in India, unlike Algeria, Kenya and South Africa, partly accounts for this. Another factor was the historical experience of slavery in Africa: the large scale export of slaves to the New World by Europeans, sometimes in collaboration with local African elites and Arab traders. The white settlers were responsible for creating a strong element of racial antagonism against the white man because they appropriated the best lands for cultivation and the most hospitable areas for habitation. The European powers were responsible for creating racial barriers throughout the colonial world but in Africa these often took more extreme forms. This was particularly true of countries like Algeria, Rhodesia and South Africa. Therefore the economic critique of colonialism was often overshadowed by the critique of white rule and racism as in Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*. In all the countries that came under colonial rule there emerged a clear distinction between the rulers and the colonized. The entire literature that flourished after the publication of Said's *Orientalism* in 1978 has been concerned with the unequal power relations between the colonizing power and the colonized people and the construction of both the Orient and the Occident, perceptions of the Other also fashioning conceptions about the Self. European perceptions of Indian society and culture whether by the more flattering Orientalist admirers of ancient Indian literature and religion like William Jones or the more dismissive Utilitarians like Mill or condescending Anglicists like Macaulay were part of the same discourse that in a way Orientalized India. The great veneration for the wisdom of the Vedic texts and Aryan culture shaped Indian responses to European cultural domination. It gave a great impetus to reform of Hinduism as well as a measure of cultural confidence to the Hindu middle classes in their struggle against European cultural domination. In the case of Indian Muslims the decline of the Ottoman Empire and the eclipse of Muslim powers after the 18th century quickened a spirit of revivalism and of Pan-Islamism. Shah Wali-Ullah, Syed Ahmed Bareilvi, Jalaluddin Afghani, the Ali brothers and even Mohammad Iqbal contributed to these trends. Syed Ahmad Khan and Mohammad Ali Jinnah were concerned with the political and economic rights of the Muslims in the subcontinent and were willing to mobilize their community in whatever way they could, even accepting help offered by the British rulers. Religion in the subcontinent has been a very important factor in shaping political identities and nationalism. Identities based on language and region and caste developed too but the identities based on religion became predominant during the closing years of colonial rule and led eventually to the partition of India in 1947. The role of religion has been underestimated in Anderson's emphasis on the construction of national identities based on language. Print capitalism, communitarian competition and colonial policies of divide-and-rule worked to give religious identities the overdetermining role in late colonial India. In many countries with an overwhelming Muslim population or with a significant Muslim minority religion has played a prominent role in developing responses to European cultural and political domination. In Indonesia the growth of nationalism was linked to a kind of Muslim identity although the Sarekat Islam did not have the influence that similar parties have wielded in South Asia and West Asia. The principles of Panchshila as enunciated in August 1945 dropped all reference to religion to achieve "solid unity" in Indonesia. Sukarno, and subsequently Suharto, endorsed a broadly secular form of nationalism. Also the rise of communist movements in Indonesia and Malaysia before they achieved independence indicates the presence of alternative ideologies. Retreating colonial powers ensured the success of anti-communist nationalists in these countries. Some Arab leaders like Bourguiba of Tunisia thought nationalism was the best antidote against communism because it promoted the interests of the people as a whole. In the West Asian region the colonial powers exercised dominion but did not often set down deep roots. Iraq was under formal colonial rule for a brief period after World War I until 1932 although it was under neo-colonial influence until 1958. Iran too had to endure informal imperialism but not direct colonial rule. Arab nationalism emerged with the development of pan-Arabism, but there was no demand for a single united Arab state. The earliest pan-Arabists conceived of at least three Arab states east of Suez-Syria, Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula. The existence of twenty odd Arab states following colonial wars and the post World War I settlement added the more pervasive influence of local loyalties based on nation-state sponsored nationalism. Arab nationalism was based on tradition as well as new uses of tradition. The achievements of thirteen centuries of Islamic civilisation came to be regarded as those of Arab civilization. Even if Islam and Arabism were not identical they were not perceived as antagonistic to each other. While in North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula Islam played an important role in the development of nationalism this was not true of the central lands of Islam like Egypt and the Crescent which had



substantial Arab Christian populations. Advanced conceptions of Arab nationalism developed in Iraq during the 1930s and 1940s, in Syria during the 1950s, and in Egypt during the 1960s. Secularism and socialism too played a role in shaping the ideology of Arab nationalism. Also there has been a prolonged conflict between the Islamic revivalists and the nationalists in Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Lebanon. The Turkish people were ruled by a modernizer like Mustafa Kemal who abolished the position of the Khalifa, the religious head of the Muslim community, even while Indian Muslims protested against the treatment of Turkey and the Khalifa. A scholar has found some similarities in the developments in Kemalist Turkey and those in Soviet Central Asia during the 1920s and 1930s in terms of modernisation and secularisation from above by an elite, spread of literacy, improvement in the position of women and adoption of the Roman script to develop the national language. The subordination of religion to the state in Turkey was carried out by the introduction of a uniform civil code based on that of Switzerland in 1926. As part of the nationalisation of Islam the Quran was translated into Turkish in 1933 for the first time. During the 1990s there was an attempt to reconfigure nationalism in terms of an Ottoman-Islamic tradition by commemorating the victory of the Ottomans against the Christian West at Constantinople in 1453. In any case religious nationalism in a regressive form became more significant in the Islamic world only after the upsurge against the Shah of Iran in 1979. In the earlier period nationalist elites had supported progressive leaders like Bourgiba of Tunisia, Baath Socialist parties in Syria and Iraq and patriotic leaders like Mossadegh in Iran and Nasser in Egypt.

INTELLECTUAL AND SOCIAL ORIGINS AND VISUALISATIONS OF NATIONALISM

The British conquest of Bengal in the mid-eighteenth century created the basis for a new class of people tied to British interests and by the early nineteenth century a stratum inspired by western ideas of liberalism and culture. The Young Bengal movement and intellectuals like Ram Mohan Roy and Bankim Chandra grappled with western domination and articulated indigenous responses to it. It was only in 1885 that the Indian National Congress was formed by westernized Indians. China was never fully colonized and even the Japanese were unable to go beyond the territories of eastern China, substantial though these regions were. Unlike the Soviet Union, China never offered the right of secession to the national minorities. This was partly because Chinese communists did not need the support of the minorities to fight for freedom or socialism. After the Japanese invasion the Kuomintang and the Communist party were able to accept similar views about the Chinese nation or zhonghua minzu the centrality of the Han people and the inclusion of non-Han borderlands within China. There are problems in identifying the nature of nationalities and nationalism in East Asia which are the product of long term historical factors and also recent state practices. The Vietnamese language has a high proportion of Chinese words because of prolonged contact rather than any genetic connection with the Chinese language. In standard Thai considerable vocabulary is derived from Khmer, which in turn draws on Sanskrit and these three languages are genetically unrelated to each other. The Kachin in Burma developed an ethnic identity largely as a result of politics, not any essential characteristics based on language or ethnicity. Biology and spoken language were less important in shaping differences in the pre-colonial period compared to differences based on locality, kinship and Buddhist or Chinese traditions. Only after the border regions of empires were brought within well defined borders of countries by the early twentieth century that the modern states in East Asia became involved in ethnic classifications. The Han Chinese had regarded other nationalities as barbarians and the Qing and Republican Chinese recognized five major 'races' in China. The ethnic classification or minzu shibie in 1962 put all the minzu on an equal footing within the Chinese nation. Although about four hundred groups were identified on the basis of difference only fifty six minzu were recognized. The Chinese also built up the claims of groups designated the Zhuang in Guangxi and Yunnan by encouraging this identity and allowing them to link up with the Tai-speaking groups of Vietnam and Cambodia. The state plays an important role in promoting claims of minorities or in modifying their rights and claims. In West Africa the colonial intelligentsia began to emerge during the 1840s. Saro pioneers (people of Yoruba descent, liberated slaves educated in Sierra Leone) who settled in Nigeria in 1839 were not the ones who brought European education to the region. The notables of the coast had hired teachers to get the necessary education to profit from the trade of the Atlantic economy from the sixteenth century onwards. Freetown and Lagos drew people from diverse backgrounds. Freedmen from Brazil and the Caribbean, American blacks from Liberia, Jamaican maroons, and indigenous Mende and Temne contributed to the educated community. The Fourah Bay College set up in 1827 in Sierra Leone to train Africans to work for the Church Missionary Society played an important role in West Africa. Links to "the culture of the Black Atlantic" dominated intellectual life until late in the 19th century. Although their numbers were not large the West African intelligentsia had emerged earlier than in other regions. Many members of the West African intelligentsia were deeply influenced by Christianity and sought to find their place as Africans within the framework of the European civilizing mission. The development of African cultural identity and nationalism was influenced by the spread of Christianity in many regions. This set it apart from the Arab and Muslim world as also South and South East Asia. The African nationalism or cultural self assertion took the form of creating African controlled churches with diverse ideologies. In 1937 Lord Hailey in a survey of nationalism saw these black churches as the indicators of a kind of national awakening. It has been argued that although Christian missionaries provided a common language for educated members of different tribes in West Africa they wanted to mould the Africans to suit the interests of the colonizers. The Christian Churches were European dominated and did not deal with the Africans as equals although the access to western education and the Bible added to their self-worth and sharpened a sense of justice. This initially led to the proliferation of splinter African churches and then the denial of equality led them to turn towards nationalism. A more generalized



argument has been that while the Christian missionaries opened up the prospects of a wider world they did not actually bring the Africans closer to achieving what they offered in terms of western capitalist culture. This gap between what they seemed to offer and what actually came to pass produced a range of responses from resistance to more overt forms of rebellion. African nationalism was quickened partly by this process. The inspiration for nationalism has come from turning to the past achievements of the nation or the inner or spiritual life of the people based on religion or culture. In Africa people outside Egypt were proud of the achievements of Pharonic Egypt and the Nile civilisation, but also of traditional tribal culture. Early nationalists discovered and highlighted the strengths of traditional religion or culture. In Thailand, which was not colonized, there was a preoccupation with the idea of civilization and the appropriation from the west of those ideas that were relevant for a civilized life. The west was setting new standards of civilisation as once India and China had. The Sanskrit word for civilisation invented during the 19th century Arayatham did not take off. Siwilai, an adaptation of the word from English or charoen, a fourteenth century Khmer word, became far more popular. In the ethnic interpretation of nationalism the Vietnamese nation had emerged almost a thousand years ago in opposition to Chinese rule, but those who believed in communal solidarity of the village community highlighted its role in linking up with both nationalism and communism in various ways in the 20th century.

NATIONS, NATIONALISMS AND THE PARTITION OF STATES

The incorporation of vast territories in Asia and Africa by the colonial powers was a long drawn process without any method in the mad scramble for colonies. There were economic reasons for acquiring colonies and also strategic considerations which led to annexations. The partition of the non-European world was also carried out to acquire territories that were likely to be of value in the future or simply to prevent a rival from extending his sway in a region. The countries created because of these factors often lacked anything in common except the ruling power. The anti-colonial movements in countries carved out of vast unexplored territories, particularly in Africa, lacked any clear basis for the articulation of a national movement. The boundaries had been drawn arbitrarily by diplomatic negotiations in European capitals and systems of rule introduced with little regard for the tribal, linguistic or ethnic identities of the inhabitants. The national movements were based on the bonds of colour or black racial identity. National movements based on identity of race were, however, undermined by identities based on tribe, religion and language. In West Africa the struggle of the Nigerian nationalists against British rule was partly undermined because of the division between the predominantly Christian south of the country and the Muslim dominated northern region. Ethnic divisions provoked the Igbo to secede soon after independence. After a bloody civil war between 1967 and 1970 Biafra was reincorporated in Nigeria. In East Africa the Mau Mau uprising brought out the ethnic tensions in the country and helped the Kikuyu move from a subordinate position to one of dominance. Those who fought the colonial rulers were often subjected to severe repression and ethnic differences were exploited to perpetuate colonial rule. The Africans have found it easier to create Pan-African ideologies based on shared blackness or Negritude as articulated by Leopold Senghor, Kwame Nkrumah and Jomo Kenyatta than to unite individual countries ignoring tribal identities. The colonial powers too encouraged secessionist demands for economic reasons. Belgian Congo was divided so that the resources of Katanga could be more easily controlled. The division of territories in West Asia was fraught with great difficulties because the discovery of oil in the region had made it a vital matter for major corporations and the colonial powers. Kuwait was carved out as an independent country allegedly to weaken the bargaining power of the oil producing states.. The British recruited disproportionately from the Tiv in Nigeria, Acholi in Uganda and the Kamba in Kenya for the military. In Africa British policy was to rule indirectly through traditional structures of authority which were only subordinated to colonial interests, not undermined or destroyed. On the other hand the French, who believed in greater centralisation of power and incorporation of colonial subjects within Greater France, destroyed traditional social structures. They also promoted an elite based on acceptance of French language and culture disregarding earlier status rankings. Thus the British produced an unranked system of ethnic stratification unlike the French. This allowed ethnic competition under the British which intensified after the colonies became independent. The traditional structures allowed disaffected ethnic groups to organize effectively against oppressive elites in the post-colonial period in the former British colonies On the basis of data relevant to 48 countries the study has concluded that the former British colonies were marked by more conflict even though grievances were higher in the former French colonies. It is arguable that the exploitation of ethnic differences in British colonies has been underestimated by this study. The British divided Ireland, India, and Palestine before they handed over power to nationalist leaders. Although the British often divided their colonies before they quit them they were more willing to withdraw peacefully from their colonies than the French. The former colonies, both British and French, tried to create federations with or without support from the retreating colonial power. After the Central African Federation created in 1963 failed Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya went their separate ways. Federations often failed because of the anxieties of the more developed national group that it would have to bear the burden of the less developed regions. Gabon had these fears about the Central African Republic that four French colonies tried to set up. Cote d' Ivoire in West Africa and Kenya in East Africa were wary of federation for the same reasons. In South Asia after World War II the strength of the national movement and the breakdown of colonial authority and inter-community relations made a policy of retreat appear eminently sensible.. Notions of nationalism were promoted by the colonial powers and post colonial elites according to various economic and strategic considerations that sometimes brought them together. The idea of Greater Malaysia was promoted by the British after the Malay leader Tunku Abdul Rehman



supported the notion in 1961. Although the Tanku did not particularly want Singapore as part of greater Malaysia he had to go along with the plan to secure the resources of Sarawak and Sabah in Borneo. Thus Malaya that had achieved independence in 1957 accepted Singapore and the Borneo territories as part of Malaysia in 1963. Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore went along with the British strategic plan to protect their interests during the cold war because he too wanted to thwart the rise of communism

CONCLUSION

The historical record does not support any simple theory explaining either the rise of nationalities or national movements or the policy towards them of colonial and post-colonial elites and states. Nationalism is not necessarily connected to capitalist development or industrialisation although they do create the basis for national mobilisation. Language and print capitalism do play a prominent role in the rise of nationalism, but in many cases nationalist elites have promoted the spread of national languages and public education to spread the spirit of nationalism after creating a nation-state. Languages are not always the basis of nationalism since religion has also promoted nationalism. Religious nationalism has been important in many Middle-Eastern countries although other strands of nationalism and other ideologies also co-exist even in this region. Nationalism and the accompanying emphasis on borders, sovereignty and singular identities creates national minorities and sub-national or alternative nationalist ideologies. The rise of nationalism cannot be understood in terms of the opposition between western and indigenous sources of nationalism. The elements that go into making nationalities are subject to long term evolution and the impact of mass mobilisation and state practices. Outside the historical context it is not possible to understand the rise and growth of nationalism in Asia and Africa or anywhere in the world.

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