

Bipin Chandra Pal in The light of New Hindu Movement of Bengal

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Abstract

British dominion was first established in Bengal. Calcutta was the heartland of British commercial activities and the first capital of British India. Naturally Western education first introduced in Bengal. This rationalism, which was the fruit of English education, yielded revolutionary ideas in social and religious sphere and it gradually affected the political consciousness of the educated Bengalis. During the first half of the nineteenth century educated groups of India particularly in the cities of Bengal started imitating the West. This became a yardstick of 'modernity, progressiveness and greatness' to them. But during the second half of the nineteenth century situation began to change. A section among the educated Bengali Bhadrakol began to be disillusioned with the Liberal politics of the Congress and the British Constitutional system. As a result a critique against these dual systems began to be developed by them. They made their basis the traditional Hinduism and gave it a new shape. Bipin Chandra Pal (1858-1932), an extremist leader of Bengal, lived in the same milieu when these changes were taking place. Now the questions come before us are – How his ideas of nationalism got merged with the social and cultural transition of the period? How his nationalism varied from secular nationalism of the early congress? Was his nationalism anti-Muslim in character? We shall try to find out the answers of these questions in this article.

Key Words: *The New Hindu Movement, The New Patriotism, Dharma, Varnashrama dharma, Social hierarchy, Indian Spirituality, Khilafat Movement, Hindu Raj, Swaraj.*

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Introduction: -

British dominion was first established in Bengal. Calcutta was the heartland of British commercial activities and the first capital of British India. Naturally Western education first introduced in Bengal. This rationalism, which was the fruit of English education, yielded revolutionary ideas in social and religious sphere and it gradually affected the political consciousness of the educated Bengalis. The Brahma Samaj and the ideals of political freedom were both result of ‘the same rationalistic urge which was created by Western culture’.¹ But during the second half of the nineteenth century situation began to change. A section among the educated Bengali Bhadrakol began to be disillusioned with the Liberal politics of the Congress and the British Constitutional system. As a result a critique against these dual systems began to be developed by them. They made their basis the traditional Hinduism and gave it a new shape. Bipin Chandra Pal (1858-1932), an extremist leader of Bengal, lived in the same milieu when these changes were taking place. Now the questions come before us are – How his ideas of nationalism got merged with the social and cultural transition of the period? How his nationalism varied from secular nationalism of the early congress? Was his nationalism anti-Muslim in character? We shall try to find out the answers of these questions in this article.

Background of the emergence of New Hindu Movement in Bengal: -

During the first half of the nineteenth century educated groups of India particularly in the cities of Bengal started imitating the West. This became a yardstick of ‘modernity, progressiveness and greatness’ to them. But during the second half of the nineteenth century situation began to change. After the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 the rule of East India Company was abolished and the direct rule of the British government was established in India. The experience of the mutiny had prevented them from taking any initiatives for the social and educational reform. However their outlook towards Indian remained discriminating as before. They considered the Indian as inferior to the British in the fields of education, politics, and economy everywhere. In the political field Hindu bhadrakol of Bengal was grown increasingly disillusioned with the parliamentary system of government from the last half of the nineteenth century. The “Divide and Rule” policy of the British government, racial discrimination and arrogance of the colonial masters, unfair treatment in matters of pay and promotion, the partition of Bengal and the University bill of Lord Curzon made the Hindu bhadrakol angry.² However Political disappointment and grievances affected directly only a limited section- the urban educated middle class ‘Bhadrakol’. Economic distress added to the fires of political frustration and racial injustice. The

partiality of the British government towards the Muslim community as a part of their imperial policy and the gradual decreasing rate of job opportunities of the Hindu bhadralok also made them despondent. The British government knew that if Hindus could be crippled and divided, India's national strength would be weakened considerably. The next largest community namely the Muslims, who failed to take the fullest advantage of western education, were gradually won away by the government. The policy of 'divide and rule' provoked the dormant national spirit and gave birth to a new phase of national struggle for freedom.³

Moreover, there was a tendency among the British to underestimate the Hindu bhadralok character as effete and weak. This was particularly visible after the Mutiny of 1857. A new theory was advocated by Lord Roberts, the Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army between 1885 to 1893, for the recruitment in the Indian army. This theory classified the Indians among manly Marathas, Rajputs and Sikh, and the effete unmanly and cowardly Bengalis and excluded the Bengalis from the Indian Army.⁴ Even this characterization was limited to only Bengali Hindus. Muslims were to some extent remained outside the limit of this characterization.⁵ In the context of limited employment opportunities, the need to transform the effeminate self-image became an absolute necessity.

As a consequence of these social, political and economic changes a new tendency was developing among the Hindu community of Bengal. The educated Hindu Bengalis did not give up their Western education and rationalism. But they realized that this rationalism did not make any appeal to ordinary masses. So they felt the need to explain Hindu religion with rationality and to make it suitable for the new age through reform. They also conceived that in this way the new Hindu religion could compete with the western rational consciousness. As a result humanism and social reform merged with the traditional Hinduism. These different social and cultural ideas made the basis for opening of a new chapter in the history of the social and political transformation in Bengal in the second half of the nineteenth century. But Tapan Raychaudhuri and Amiya P. Sen refused to term this trend as 'Hindu Revivalism.' Because, as, Tapan Raychaudhuri argued that the Hindu leaders of that period did not want to re-establish the forgotten tradition. Rather they wanted to preserve the tradition. Secondly, Hinduism was not altogether abolished. So it was impossible to revive it.⁶ Therefore instead of Hindu revivalist movement, it is better to use the term 'the New Hindu Movement' to describe this new Hindu nationalism. In the light of this we shall try to examine how Bipin Chandra Pal's interpretation of nationalism conformed to this New Hindu Movement.

Fomenting Influence on Bipin Chandra Pal: - A member of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, Bipin Chandra Pal went closer to varied sects of Hindu religious faith driven by a broad and humanitarian vision. Unlike many orthodox Brahmos, he appreciated the genuine humanism of Ramkrishna Paramhansa and the enlightened preaching of his disciple Swami Vivekananda. Along with this he became a disciple of Bijaykrishna Goswami, a Vaishnava in the fold of Brahmos, who imbibed Pal with Vaishnavas Philosophy and its essence 'Bhakti' or piety and humanistic appeal. Like Pal, many of the English educated Indians got back their faith in their tradition by coming in contact with Goswami.⁷ Side by side the Theosophical Society also helped the Indians to restore their faith in their pristine glory. They carried forward the message that the Rishis of ancient India were the highest propagator of supreme truth. Ancient Indian literatures were the repository of sublime knowledge. As a result like many Bengalis of the second half of the nineteenth century, Pal felt the importance of protecting traditions and culture of Indian and felt proud on it.⁸

Ideas of Bipin Chandra Pal: -

a) **Sri Krishna**—the Soul of India = He rooted his ideas in the golden age of India and tried to create a comprehensive and constructive ideology which would be the basis for what he described as 'the new patriotism.' For Pal, the soul of India was Sri Krishna-not as a sectarian ideal, but the means through which the past of India manifested itself in the present, and would enlivened in future. Like Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, Pal by using the Krishna cult, however in figurative way, gave a new impetus to the newly awakened nationalism. He wanted Indian society should have distinctiveness from other society and a historic evolution of its own on the bass of some eternal ideas. In accordance with this eternal idea he called Shree Krishna the soul of India.⁹ Krishna symbolized all human relations such as 'Lord', 'Friend', 'Father and Son,' and 'Lover and Love', etc. For this reason Hindu Vaishnavism had 'more thorough, more concrete at once more real and a more ideal presentation of the Universe' than other culture. 'In Vaisnavism', Pal continued, 'we have the innate sense of the Spiritual and the Universal of the Indo-Aryan Race-Consciousness seems to have found its loftiest and deepest expression.'¹⁰ Even the ideal of dharma or 'specific personal law of being, which constitutes the inner individuality and personality of different humans', preached by Krishna in Gita gave Hinduism a Universal connotation. In view of this universality of Hinduism no worship or culture can be condemned.¹¹ Pal was able to intermingle religious passion with political idealism because he considered dharma as a basis of synthesis of different elements of things and was the soul of order and spoke of many cults and cultures. The Hindu Society, Pal explained, for this reason was not a homogeneous unit, but

rather 'a highly developed organic whole which seeks to realise its essential unity not by denying but openly accepting and harmonising in the totality of its life, the endless diversities of its components organisms.'¹²

b) Comparative Approach towards Indian and European Civilization = Not only he gave Hindu religion a new meaning but at the same time he refuted the western attacks on Indian civilization. He totally rejected the British's stereotype notions that India had glorious past but it had no present and it was the duty of the British to make Indians civilized. On the contrary Pal expressed the opinion that Indians and Europeans belonged to the same Indo-Aryan race. As members of the same race, there were many fundamental affinities between them and thus both unity and difference were traced by Pal. His 'comparative approach' brought out the difference of approach between Indian and European minds.¹³ An example given by Pal in his book entitled *The Soul of India*, Which is a collection of four letters written by pal to his European friend, in the following words:-

'The Word of Indian Evolution is Dharma; the word of European is Right. And these two words seem to my mind to completely sum up the fundamental difference between India and Europe. Dharma is the law of renunciation, Right is the law of resistance, Dharma demands self-abnegation, Right self-assertion. Dharma develops collectivism: Right individualism. Dharma works for synthesis, Right lives and grows in antithesis. Dharma is the soul of order: Right the parent of revolution. To understand India we must seize the conception of Dharma. To understand Europe we must seize the principle of Right'.¹⁴

So Pal raised the question – 'How then, can the generations of European experience, gathered under the Law of Right, help one to interpret the character and culture of India trained in the ideal of Dharma?'¹⁵ In his earlier life he disregarded ritualism as purely 'anti-democratic' elements, but during later part of his life it gave him a new meaning and concept. Now he believed that – "There can be no religion strictly so called, though there may be any amount of philosophy and theology, without symbolism and rituals. The symbols must be natural, rational and adequate; but there must be some in every true religion."¹⁶ As for image worship of the Hindus he stated that – in order to made our mind free from the grip of material world and sensuousness, our senses should rise gradually to the consciousness of the spiritual only. The senses should by some means or other, be 'supernaturalised' for them and through it people could gradually rise to the faith in the 'supersensuous'. This was the secret of the

so-called idolatry of the Hindus.¹⁷ So he commented that – ‘The Hindu’s so called worship of stocks and stones has been admittedly ordained for this purpose, namely to lead him through the senses to the contemplation of the supersensuous. And what the so-called stocks and stones do for the ordinary Hindu, occultism and spiritism are seeking to do for the modern European and American.....’¹⁸ He also stated that Indian culture, like all great cultures of the World, was of a complex and composite character. Many races and many cultures had contributed to their growth and evolution. But as the main current of European cultures had flowed from Greece, the central stream of Indian culture had flowed through the Hindu people.¹⁹ His writings were in tune with the new interpretation of Hinduism during the late nineteenth century when the intellectuals of Bengal were trying to establish the superiority of Hinduism and Indian civilization in comparison with other religions and culture. Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay’s *Krishnacharit*, Nabin Chandra Sen’s trilogy on the life story of Krishna, great epic hero of Mahabharata, also represented this changing social consciousness. Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay, a prominent intellectual of nineteenth century Bengal, in his *Oitihāsik Upanyas* (Historical Novel, 1857) and *Sapnalabdha Bharatbarsher Itihas* (Dreamt Indian History, 1895) also expressed the ideal of glorious tradition of Indian past. Pal by explaining the dynamic role of Hinduism in nation building made himself identified with the new cultural tradition of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

C) Pal’s Idea about Hindu Society and nation = Pal defined Hindu society just like Hindu religion was also not a single unit, but a federation of many units. The freedom and integrity of the parts inside the unity of the whole, is the very soul and essence of the federal idea.²⁰ Pal always strove for this unity in diversity and used it as the ideology behind India’s struggle for independence. It is also important to state here that – his association of religious sentiment with a political movement does not suggest that he was a reactionary. It was part of his political strategy as he believed that – ‘a mere political revolt might be easily crushed by superior physical force of diplomatic cunning. But an essentially spiritual movement.....cannot be killed without killing the entire people among whom it takes its birth.’²¹ This idea was reflected in his outlook towards the Indian National Congress. In 1887 he joined the Indian National Congress with the hope of redressing Indians’ grievances. There was also no sign of extremism in pal before 1897. Gradually he also disillusioned with the liberal politics of the Congress. He was not in favour of imitating British or American model in Indian state system or society which the English educated moderate leaders were trying to implying in Indian condition. He and many of his contemporaries were in favour of abdicating the policy of pray and please policy of the moderate and

wanted instead to be self-dependent and to form the Indian nation based upon its own tradition. He believed state system and social reform which was based on British model would only lead to total degeneration of Indian religion, state and society because Indian condition, which was based on spirituality and social hierarchy and varnashrama dharma was totally different from the British system where state system, people's rights and freedom, ideals of equality were all based on sham illusions. There the national independence of the peoples' was not genuine. So the Indians should not blindly imitate the Euro-American's state system or social structure. Instead they should depend on their own inherited traditions.²² He laid stress on the development of spiritual character of the national workers in the first decade of the nineteenth century. According to him – “The fundamental point of difference between the old political agitations and the new Nationalist Movement is thus 1) its intensely spiritual and religious character as compared to the absolutely secular spirit of the former and 2) its strong grip on the actualities of Indian life and thought as against the imitative character of the older and earlier social and political activities.”²³

The two factors mentioned above were largely due to the preaching of Swami Vivekananda. Vivekananda and Bankimchandra's writings had a deep impact on the new Hindu movement. Bankim's writings even in some cases produced anti-Muslim feelings. Pal and his contemporaries became anti-Muslim due to the influence of Bankim's writings. But for this Bankim was not consciously responsible. However, this outlook of Pal began to change in the post-Swadeshi Movement period. Particularly the impact of First World War and Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 changed his outlook and made him an internationalist and secular in outlook. During this time, he on the one hand warned about the dangers of the fanatical religiosity of the Khilafat movement,²⁴ on the other hand condemned the idea of establishing 'Hindu Raj' in the name of Swaraj.²⁵ Not only so, he dreamt of an independent India where there would be a Federal system of government and a secular state.²⁶ These things give idea of his changed outlook.

Conclusion: -

In conclusion we can say that for Bipin Chandra Pal politics was linked with religion, Philosophy, science and other discipline. His political philosophy was not a static one. It went through three broad phases. Firstly, moderate phase in the pre-Swadeshi period, Secondly Radical nationalist phase in the Swadeshi phase and lastly a new outlook of nationalism based on constitutional opposition and internationalism in the post Swadeshi period of 1911-1932. In the first and second phase his political philosophy got merged with the socio-cultural tradition of late

nineteenth century. During this time the root of his ideas went back to the golden age of past, and their branches reached out to touch the various problems of the time to which he belonged. However, during the first phase his religiosity remained in a dormant phase. In the second phase it took a radical shape. However in the third phase under the influence of the First World War and Bolshevik Revolution he turned into a secular nationalist with a broad international outlook.

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