

Indian National Movement: Awakening of Indians Due to Discrimination Policies of Lord Lytton Between 1876 to 1880

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Abstract

The British people arrived in India in 1600 A.D. for trade purposes, but they soon began exploiting Indian culture, religion, and economy through their policies. Between the years 1870 and 1880, the most exploitation took place, which led Indians to get organized, leaving aside their caste, creed, region and religion. The Indian National Movement was started due to many reasons, but one among those causes was discrimination policies of Lord Lytton. Initially, to get organized, Indians began to unite through various small groups Brahmo Samaj, Prarthana Samaj, Theosophical Society, Arya Samaj, Mohammedan Society, etc. Till 1875, many groups came into existence. This article specially, explains that how Lord Lytton misused the Indians and made them socially and economically weak through his discrimination policies such as: Debarring of Indians from Higher Services (Regulation-1878), Implementation of Arms Act (1878), Sitting ideal during, spread of plague in Maharashtra, Ignorance of Poverty and celebration of Durbar Samaroh (1878), Afghanistan Attack or the 'Second Afghan War (1878), Vernacular Press Act (1878), Removal of the Border Tax on Cotton, Discrimination of Indians in employment of higher posts etc. Besides this, the Controversy over the Ilbert Bill (1883) after Lord Lytton was also the other reason of the Indian National Movement, as the Indian National Congress was formed on 28th December 1885.

Keywords

Trade, Exploitation, Culture, Religion, Economy, Discrimination, Policies, Theosophical Society, Mohammedan, Existence, Socially, Debarring, Regulation, Implementation, Plague, Ignorance, Poverty, Durbar Samaroh, Employment.

Introduction

The Indian National Movement was started due to many reasons, but one among those causes was discrimination policies of Lord Lytton. He was the Governor General from 1876 to 1880. No doubt Indians are culturally and religiously sensitive and do not like any external interference in their personal matters, so when the British people attacked the culture and religion, then Indians started gearing up to free themselves from the clutches of British rule. Though, Indians began to unite through various small groups Brahma Samaj, Prarthana Samaj, Theosophical Society, Arya Samaj and Mohammedan Society, etc. Till 1875, many groups came into existence. After the Crown rule in 1858, a gulf had been widened between the reformers and the British Indian administrators. Because the educated Indians were aware about the character of the British Government and they were also aware that whatever policies are framed by the British Government are also against Indians. These educated Indians brought the people together through their writings i.e. literature, press articles and communications and awakened Indians for the National Movement. The Indian press and literature both played an important role to bring national awakening among Indians in different languages in different regions like; Gujarati, Telgu, Punjabi, Tamil, Kannad and Oriya, Assamease. The prominent writers were Bankim Chandra, Bhartendu Harish Chandra, Chaudhary Badri Narayana, Bal Krishna Bhatt, Mohammad Husain Azad, Altaf Husain Hali, Rabindranath Tagore, Rajani Kanta Sen, Mukunda Das, Sayed Abu Mohammed, Mohammad Iqbal and news papers were: The Hindu (English), Voice of India, Bengali, Kesari (Marathi), Mahratta (Marathi), Indian Mirror and Amrita Bazaar Patrika etc.

British people came to India to have trade and business relations, but when they observed that Indians are divided into different small states, religion and languages hence they took undue advantage of the Indians and started promoting their own religion, culture and language. Thus, the cultural renaissance, religious traditions, spread of western education and ideology were the factors that sown the seeds of nationalism. This nationalism brought Political and Administrative Unity among Indians. In the words of Pt. J.L. Nehru: *'The political unity of India brought about by the British was unity of the common subjection but it gave rise to a unity of Common Nationalism'*. From economic point of view British people squeezed the economy of India. On this also, Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru commented in his book Discovery of India that: *'One village industry after another began to collapse and*

India became an economic appendage of another country'. The agriculture sector was also not left untouched, as the economy of peasants was also affected aftermath of 1857. It was due to colonial exploitation that the government started levying heavy taxes and land revenue in Ryotwari areas. The peasants of this Ryotwari area unitedly revolted, which is named as the Indigo Revolt. In Maharashtra, Justice Ranade was very active in those days. He led Poona Sarvajanik Sabha and organized a peasant's campaign at Poona and Bombay against the land revenue in 1873-74. This type of campaign taught the peasants to resist against anti-agrarian acts of the government. It contributed in the rise of peasant protest in 1875. Even capitalists like Jamunalal Bajaj, Vadilal Lallubhai Mehta, and Lala Shankar Lal Birla, Ambalal Sarabhai and Walchand Hirachand, etc., also participated in the national movement.

Lord Lytton's Repressive Policy (1876-1880)

The Lytton's repressive policy pacified the discontent against the British Government. In the words of Surendranath Banerjee: 'The reactionary administration of Lord Lytton had aroused the public from its attitude of indifference and had given a stimulus to public life. In the evolution of political progress, bad rulers are often a blessing in disguise. They help to stir a community into life, a result that years of agitation would perhaps have failed to achieve. Since the arrival of Lord Lytton as Viceroy, whatever policies he implemented all were anti Indians. He organised the Imperial Durbar at Delhi in 1877, in respect of the declaration of Queen Victoria as Empress of India, while on that time Indians were suffering with a terrible famine. On the other hand, according the British Government regulations-1878, the Indian Civil Service Examination age was lowered from 21 years to 19 and the centre of examination was also made in England only to keep Indian students away from this competition. Besides all these other policies of the Lord Lytton like: Attack on Afghanistan and Making of Scientific Frontier and Arms Act 1878-To disarmed the Indian people, the Press Act (Vernacular Act-1878)-To suppress freedom of press and arrest the editors without a warrant, and removal of import duties on British textile imports to please the British Mill owners and ruin the Indian industry. It created anger among all ages and groups of Indians. This angriness gave an excellent chance to the Indian Association to organize a political agitation at the national level. The following are the discrimination policies of Lord Lytton.

1. Debarring of Indians from Higher Services through Regulation-1878:

During the period of Lord Lytton British Government brought the Regulation-1878,

which says that: *'the age of Indian Civil Service Examination is lowered from 21 years to 19'*. While in Charter of 1833, it was declared that employment in services would be only on merit without any distinction of religion, caste, or colour and repeated in declaration of 1858. But, the British officials avoided the instructions to appoint Indians to the higher posts. To stop them, the medium of instructions was made English and the examination centre London, so no Indians should reach there to appear in the examination. In fact, their main objective to lower down the age was to prevent Indians from this competition. It is observed that even for silly mistakes, the Indians were debarred from services. For example, Aurbindo Ghosh was not found suitable for these services as he could not qualify the horse riding test and S.N. Banerjee has to leave his service for a minor mistake. The Indian Association took up the issue and launched an agitation all over the country against these rules. Mr. S. N. Banerjee toured from North to South India and addressed many gatherings against the actions of the British government. He got a very good response. He demanded that the age of the Civil Service examination to be increased and it should be conducted in both India and England both. This demand not only inspired to aspirants of the Civil Service Examination but also united others for all agitations that are not in favour of them.

2. Implementation of Arms Act-1878: Lord Lytton, who took over the Indian administration in 1876, instead of looking after welfare, he applied repressive policies. He implemented the Indian Arms Act in 1878, not to allow any Indian to keep Arms with them. In any case, if it is needed, then they are required to pay the heavy license fee. On the other hand, the Europeans were not levied any fee. It means the law was partial to the Europeans as they were exempted from the fee. Even the rule says that those Indians who possess Arms, are also not allowed to carry them with them. Only landlords were given a special concession to carry the Arms for their security purpose. Because of this Act, the Indians felt demoralised and insulted as they became armless. Thus, the people have come on the road and agitated against this Act. The mass meetings were held in various cities to insist that the government take back the act. In this connection, in most of the cities, thousands of people have shown their power of solidarity against the Act. Later, this type of protest also took place in 1881-82 against the Plantation Labour and the Inland Emigration Act and showed their strength to the government.

3. Ignorance of Poverty and celebration of Durbar Samaroh by Lord Lytton-1878: On one side British Government was utilising men and material of our country, and other side, taking various taxes and revenues from peasants and

businessmen. In seventh decade of the 19th century number of famines occurred, which made the lives of the people miserable. Because of these famines, the people were starving, but the government pressured them to pay taxes. The first of its kind famine affected the Western U.P. in 1860-61, in which approximately 2 lakh people lost their lives. After a few years in 1865-66, another famine affected the whole eastern sector to downwards southward in which nearly 20 lakh people died. Still Government did not took proper care and turned to deaf ears. Even after this incident, in 1868-70, again a major famine took place in which more than 14 lakhs people lost their lives in UP, Bombay, and Punjab etc. It has broken the backbone of the Indians. The anger of the people reached on peak as the government was unable to handle the situation properly. In this also lakhs of people died without food. But the Government, instead of taking the initiative to give medical aid it asked the people to pay overdue taxes. When Lord Lytton came to India in 1876 as Viceroy, his repressive policies ignited the situation, because the worst famine occurred during his regime i.e., in 1876-78. It occurred in all parts of India and took the lives of more than 80 million people. Hence, whole India was suffering from various natural calamities but Lytton organised Durbar Samaroh to celebrate the declaration of Queen Victoria as Empress of India. Commenting on his Durbar Samaroh, some newspapers wrote that: '*When Rome was burning, Nero was fluting*'. This 'Durbar Samaroh' showed the new path to Indians and they realised that British officials are not our well-wishers. S.N. Banerjee was also invited in the Durbar Samaroh and there itself, he thought that if people can be gathered for this function from all over the places, then why they cannot come on one platform against these celebrations. Like this, the Durbar Samaroh sown the seeds of nationalism against the inhuman approach towards the victims of the famine of 1876-77. To give shape to his idea, he united the people and planned a big gathering of landlords against the policies of Lytton.

4. Afghanistan Attack or the 'Second Afghan War-1878': Till the 7th decade of the nineteenth century, it was seen that British imperialism spread like a mushroom in every part of the world and the British Government also started to interfere in the economic matters of Indians. The interference of the British in the economic matters of Central Asia annoyed Russia. This developed Anglo-Russian rivalry. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR), with the largest area, was a powerful country of that time so it does not want anybody's entry in West Asia. While the British chased Afghanistan to expand their power in Central Asia and formed a base in this area. The main fear of British people was that Russia should

not enter India through Afghanistan. The Sher Ali then the ruler of Afghanistan, felt danger from Russia hence became ready to take military support from the British Government. But British officials were interested in exercising their control over the foreign relations of Afghanistan, for which Sher Ali was not ready. So, instead of complying with the terms and conditions of the British, Sher Ali signed a treaty of peace with Russia. This act of Sher Ali irritated Lord Lytton (1876-80). So, to safeguard himself from Russian attack, he made a Scientific Frontier (Boundary) on which he spent Indian money lavishly. Later in 1878, he attacked on Afghanistan. In this attack, a huge amount of money was wasted and lots of Indians lost their lives. By this useless and unwarranted act of Lord Lytton, the Indians got irritated and they became against the British Government.

5. The Vernacular Press Act-1878: As said, when Lord Lytton came, he started implementing the policies that were against the Indians. These policies were criticised in various Indian newspapers and continued to make headlines daily. To have control over the press and stop their freedom, Lord Lytton took permission from the Indian British Secretary and passed the Vernacular Press Act in 1878. This act was so repressive that for any criticism of the government, the Magistrate authorised to cessation of newspaper or journals that wrote against the government policies. He also asked the editors to sign a bond not to publish any seditious material or news that defames the government. Surprisingly, this act was only against Indian language newspapers and was passed in a single sitting of Imperial Legislative Council. The Indian nationalist papers which were feeling the consequence of this act, opposed it all over India. This was the first time that in Calcutta, a huge gathering organised by Surendranath Banerjee which demonstrated against the Act. By Indra Vidyavachaspati, this act was pronounced as: *'Rape of the Indian newspaper in British Rule'*. It was also called as 'Gagging Act'. Gradually, in all areas, people have protested on an open stage. Surendranath Banerjee toured in various part of the country against this Act and got all-India fame. A memorandum was sent to England through a barrister, Lal Mohan Ghosh, to repeal the Press Act. The Amrita Bazaar Patrika, a Bengali paper immediately changed into an English medium paper to escape the restrictions imposed by this Act. The storm against this act was so strong that, finally, it was repealed in 1882 by Lord Ripon. After getting an opportunity, S. N. Banerjee wrote an editorial against Justice Norris in 1883 for hurting the sentiment of the Bengalis, for which he was sent to jail. He was the first person who go to jail for his editorial.

6. Removal of the Border Tax on Cotton: Initially, the roles of the East India Company were as a trading corporation that brought goods or precious metals into India and exchanged them for Indian goods like textiles, spices, etc., for further sale to abroad for more profit. This gave a good boost to Indian goods in Britain as well as in other countries. Thereby, it increased the export of Indian manufacturers and encouraged their products. This was also a reason that Indians tolerated the Company's factories. But, the popularity of the Indian goods made the British manufacturers jealous of the Indian textiles as they felt that Indian manufacturers are enjoying in Britain on our cost. In this connection, the Dafoe, the writer of the famous novel, *Robinson Crusoe*, complained that: *'Indian cloth had crept into our houses, our closets and bed chambers; curtains, cushions, chairs and at last beds themselves were nothing but calicos or India stuffs'*. The reason was that all of a sudden, the dress fashion changed and light cotton textiles began to replace the coarse woollens of the English. To make happy the mill owner of Britain, especially Lancashire the Lord Lytton abolished the border Tax on cotton. By this, the Indian peasants started going in loss, which had directly affected the Indian cotton industries. Realising this loss, Mr. S.N. Banerjee said: *'Because of the removal of the Border tax, Indians became dissatisfied and lost trust in the Britishers'*. This economic loss of peasants and industrialists was another cause to get unite and agitate against the government.

7. Favour of the British People by the British Government: The discrimination through acts, policies and racism developed the heinous feelings in Indians about the Britishers. Lord Ripon, who succeeded Lord Lytton in 1880 as a Viceroy, tried to fill up some gap created by Lord Lytton, but he was unsuccessful. It was just meagre effort to end racial discrimination under existing laws. To remove the gap, Lord Ripon wanted to bring some reform in Judicial System. Because the Britishers do not want to uplift the educated Indians and they openly said that: *'even the most highly educated Indian is unfit to trial Europeans'*. Every now and then, they use to abuse Indians for their culture and character. So, to remove this discrimination, a member of the law department of the Governor General's Council, P.C. Ilbert, introduced a bill which aimed to authorise the Indian judges to try European criminals. From administrative point of view the bill was alright but the Europeans opposed and agitated against the Ilbert Bill. This was another example of racial discrimination. To counter it, Europeans organised a conspiracy and instructed guards to tie the Viceroy by rope and deport him to England. At last, Bill was amended under pressure of the Europeans. Later, the Indians faced horrific

racial discrimination due to criticism of the Bill. This degradation not only awoke Indians but brought consciousness among them. Now, it was their turn to organise an all-India campaign in favour of the Bill. The motto of Lytton was that the interest of the Indians may be sacrificed to favour England. While Ripon wanted to utilise the talent of the educated classes to strengthen British Rule. He took some positive steps, but his policy could not proceed beyond certain limits. In the same way, when Poona (Maharashtra) came under the severe grip of an epidemic attack of Plague, the British Government did not take any corrective measure to control it. This behaviour irritated the people of that area to agitate against the government. Tilak, who initially supported some of the government action, was also dissatisfied, the way the government handled the situation. Hence, he criticized the responsible officers deployed for this duty. Mr. Tilak, who was associated with the freedom of Press, wrote against the plague Commissioner Mr. Rand with other editors in different newspapers. His articles motivated the youths which was visible in their actions. Being hurt by the inaction of the Commissioner, an emotional youth, Damodar Chapekar, assassinated Mr. Rand and his colleague, Lt. Ayerst. It was the start of aggressiveness among the people against the alien rule and also the beginning of the extremist movement. Because of his articles, Tilak was arrested. Hence, many people have gone on a rampage. It was also visible in the behaviour of youths and the comments of the Press in various newspapers.

Evaluation

It was really a matter of great concern that: *'How the flourishing India of the 18th century become socially, politically, and economically weak?'* It was none other than the discrimination policies of the British Government. They want to demolish the Ancient Indian Culture and spread the western education and culture, hence Indians do not allow them to do so and came against it. The Government not only tried to religiously weaken and divide the country, but also drain the Indian economy and brain, so they adopted the repressive policies towards the Indians. The policy of Lord Lytton (1876-1880), including lowering of the Indian Civil Service Examination Age by regulation in 1878, the Arms Act, ignorance of poverty and celebrating the Durbar Samaroh while Indians were suffering from plague, proved a landmark to have a big platform at the national level to come against the policies. Besides this, the unnecessary Afghanistan Attack and border taxes, etc., were the reasons that Indians enforced to revolted against the government. In this regard,

initially, besides the peace march, agitations, strikes, they also used literature and Communications as tools of freedom in the development of the National Movement. The controversy over the Ilbert Bill and the Foreign National Movement also played a prominent role to influence the Indian National movement.

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