

Issues in The Development of National Consciousness in Kerala: A Historical Analysis

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Abstract

The rise of national consciousness in India was essentially the result of the British rule. The economic, political and social changes introduced by the British rule resulted in the oppression of all classes of Indian people giving rise to a wide spread dissatisfaction among the masses. But uniform system of administration, development of post and telegraph, railways, printing press and educational institutions introduced by the British primarily as measures for running an effective administration also became instrumental in providing favourable conditions for the rise of national consciousness. In Kerala the growth and spread of nationalism in Kerala owed much to Indian nationalism and was part and parcel of the anti-colonial movement in India. But in Kerala there are many issues in the development of the national consciousness in Kerala. This paper is an attempt to examine the issues in the development of the National Consciousness in Kerala.

Keywords: nationalism, consciousness, administration, genesis, identity, movement, enlightenment

Introduction

The concept of national consciousness is an amorphous one. Defining the term national consciousness in a comprehensive manner is a much vexed task. The genesis and development of national consciousness primarily depends on history and culture of the state. The national consciousness is also ascribed to national heroes associated with national symbols. The national consciousness is a shared sense of national identity based on common ethnic linguistic and cultural background. Historically it provides the first step towards the formation of a nation. Till 1919 nationalism in India was confined to certain sections and places. Indian nationalism assumed the stature of mass movements only after the Jallianwalla massacre of 1919.

Genesis of national consciousness in Kerala

The genesis of national consciousness in Kerala was a product of western education and the spirit of Christian enlightenment. Further knowingly or unknowingly some elements of linguistic and ethnic practices were crept in the process of the development of our national consciousness. The main cause attributed to it was the pattern of social organization in Kerala that was entangled with community and caste identities. Caste and community feelings were not

the factor of anguish but fear and the desire for domination. Malayalam Memorial and Ezhava Memorial were the manifestations of such patterns of social organization. Penetration of linguistic and ethnic elements distorted the concept of national consciousness in Kerala. Due to the pressure exerted by these elements thinking and ways of acting of keralites made the path of development of national consciousness in Kerala gathered momentum in a regional level. It targeted the establishment of responsible administrative machineries in then existed princely states such as Travancore, Cochin and Malabar province of the Malabar presidency. Even though a few exceptions were there it represented merely a regional consciousness. The people of the princely states of Travancore and Cochin had been demanding the establishment of responsible government in their respective states even from the beginning of twentieth century. Therefore they could devote time for the activities of the Indian national movement while comparing with other princely states. The role of Kerala in nationwide freedom movement is debatable because most of the princely states kept along from the mainstream Indian nationalism and struggled against their sum native rulers.

Issues in the development of national Consciousness in Kerala

The development of national consciousness in Kerala was lopsided because a section of the population in the state was engaged in the fight for achievement of their civil rights and liberties from the native ruler. Inequalities, insecurity, and exploitation were rampant in social order of Kerala as it was highly stratified on caste and ethnic lines. Caste determined one's social mobility and also the criteria to measure individual's social status. The lower castes denied access to basic human rights. The social organization was highly stratified and polarization of society.

The social religious reformed movements played the most decisive role in the development of national Consciousness in Kerala. The social religious reformers paved the way for the rise of national consciousness in Kerala like elsewhere in India. The social religious reformers and their organizations kindled the spirit of nationalism. The vernacular newspapers played a tremendous role in inculcating the spirit of nationalism. The very names of news papers like mathrushoomi desabhimami, desamitran, injected the sense of patriotism

There arose a situation that people would support any regime that could offer a solution to their problems. Taking the advantages of the situations the socio religious movements took its birth in Kerala. But the leaderships of these movements had been taken over by caste and religious elites. There was an absence of indigenouslyness in the mode of operation of socio religious movements in Kerala. The spirit of such movements was ignited by Europeans enlightenment which came largely through the medium of missionary activities. These were some glaring defect of socio religious enlightenment which came largely through the medium of missionary activities. These were some glaring defect of socio religious movements in Kerala.

Missionaries civilized Kerala society under the guise of the propagation of Christianity. Therefore a distorted version of national consciousness developed in Kerala due to peculiar social context. Missionaries offered setting up an egalitarian society. Therefore people turned against native rulers and such situations perpetuated chains of colonial regime in Kerala.

Political geography had a decisive role in the development of national consciousness. Absence of a centralized administration made the growth of nationalism in Kerala dispersed and disunited. Kerala was divided into mainly three princely states and again divided into many administrative units therefore there was no uniformity in the growth of national consciousness. The numerical and social composition of community groups in Kerala had variation from region to region and therefore some areas of the state were politically vibrant and some areas remained silent.

The fragmentation of Kerala into petty chiefdoms and principalities with feudal pattern stood against the development of national consciousness in broader sense. The involvement of communities in the daily affairs of administration and harmonizing the communities was a major challenge of the administration. All the political movements used to make very strong alliance with communities. Communities clashed each other for lofty political gains. The strategy of the government was to divide the communities and never adopted favorable stance for any communities. The communities and religious groups had shown no interests in freedom struggle and they were not completely devoted for democratic aspirations. Thus political geography was a major hurdle in making a unified national consciousness in Kerala.

Governments in the princely states had great loyalty to Hinduism. Discriminatory administrative evoked great criticism. Altogether the government stand remained opportunistic. Society continues to be divided according to cast lines. The eruption of violence to control caste purity in society was frequent and was manifested in many forms. Conversion of lower caste to Christianity therefore was wide spread. The governments in the princely states had no interest in educating subjects who hailed from the lower strata of the society.

Linguistically and culturally the situation in Kerala had been definitely a different one. The factors responsible for the peculiarities of the Kerala culture took shape under the feudal set up in Kerala. But the structure of feudalism existed in Kerala was different from that of north India as well as of south in the fields of land relations, the political set up, the caste system, man-woman relationships, modes of succession, the forms of worship and rituals, the language, the art and literature and the dress.

Kerala society was highly calamitous as missionary education and social reformist's performance by missionaries and lower caste evoked greater pressure among the upper caste. Social scene became more violent over the issue of caste privileges. The predominance of two separate ideologies and its various manifestations were deep rooted. One such ideology was reflected in and around the palace, temple and structures of monarchy and power and second was reflected in popular movements and political and social life of the ordinary Keralite.

CONCLUSION

It is clear from the analysis that the communities and religious groups had shown little interest in freedom struggles and they were not completely devoted for democratic aspirations. Instead they tried to make maximum gains at certain points of time with the support of antinational forces that the matter of faith used for narrow purpose. Both Hindu and Christian had become a tool for state craft

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