

Media and Nationalism in India: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract:

Nationalism is considered a modern ideology. While the 19th century is known as the age of nationalism in Europe and the western world, the 20th century witnessed the rise and struggle of powerful national movements throughout Asia and Africa. But the concept of nationalism is not new to India. It has deep roots in history and civilizations; and it is as old as the Vedas. However, the modern concept of Indian nationalism developed during the independence movement in the country and media played a crucial role in inculcating the feeling of nationalism among the countrymen. The latter half of the 19th century witnessed an unprecedented growth of Indian-owned English and Vernacular newspapers, which played a notable role in mobilizing public opinion, organizing political movements, propagating national sentiments and promoting nationalism. As a result, Indian National Congress was founded in December 1885, which was the first organized expression of Indian Nationalism on an all-India scale.

In independent India Nationalism has assumed a concrete shape. Various factors have contributed to the strengthening of nationalism. The Constitution of India is considered as a supreme law of the land. Freedom of speech and expression (Article 19) under which Freedom of Press is implicit, is vital to ensure Rule of Law and Liberty of the Citizens.

Our National Anthem and national song, sung on each occasion of national importance, promote nationalism. National emblem and national festivals are other hallmarks of our nationalism.

Independent India enjoys a vibrant press, which with some exceptions, has discharged professionally acclaimed duties in all times of crisis and war, shaping public opinions and sentiments by promulgating accurate and desirable information and knowledge. However, since the emergence of social media the entire media landscape has changed. Today social media has become the most powerful platform for shaping and reshaping public opinion and mobilizing the masses for a particular cause. Nowadays nationalism has become the most debatable issue on social media. Against this backdrop this study seeks to find out answers to a number of searching questions. i.e.

What is nationalism?

How much deep rooted is the concept of Indian nationalism?

What was the role of media in promoting nationalism during the independence movement?

What about Media's role in nation building in independent India?

and

How social media is used to propagate nationalism in India?

INTRODUCTION

Since the very beginning Mass media and nationalism have been intertwined. Media has played a crucial role in nurturing and propagating the concept of nationalism across the globe.

For India nationalism is not a new concept. Rigveda depicts the promulgation and expansion of the loyalty towards nation. The geographical entity and spiritual oneness of India has been clearly expressed and invoked in the Vedic hymns extolling the sacred rivers of the land. The shape of India as a nation also finds mention in the Mahabharata. Moreover, religious scriptures and historical evidence loudly profess that India has been unified under many emperors and governments in ancient times. Ancient texts mention India under [king Bharata](#) and the term [Akhand Bharat](#) was also used in these texts . The [Maurya Empire](#) was the first to unite all of [India](#), and South Asia including parts of [Afghanistan](#). Besides, much of India has also been unified under a central government by empires, such as the [Gupta Empire](#), [Rashtrakuta Empire](#), [Pala Empire](#), [Mughal Empire](#), [Vijayanagara Empire](#) and [Maratha Empire](#).

However, it is noteworthy that Indian nationalism might have its roots in the pre-colonial times, but it was fully developed during the Indian independence movement. Indian nationalism quickly rose to popularity in India through these united anti-colonial coalitions and movements. Independence movement leaders like Madan Mohan Malaviya, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Mahatma Gandhi, Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi, Sardar Ballabh bhai Patel, Subhas Chandra Bose and Jawaharlal Nehru spearheaded the Indian nationalist movement and media played a key role in mobilizing public opinion against the colonial rule.

Post-independence, Indian constitution, parliament and a number of institutions including Supreme Court, Election Commission of India, national media as well as celebrations of republic day and Independence Day played an important role in promoting national sentiments.

The first Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and his successors continued to campaign on Indian nationalism in face of border wars with both China and Pakistan. After the Indo-Pakistan War of 1971 and the Bangladesh Liberation War, Indian nationalism reached its post-independence peak.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: CONTENT ANALYSIS

WHAT IS NATIONALISM?

Nationalism is an ideology based on the premise that the individual's loyalty and devotion to the nation-state surpass other individual or group interests. Nationalism is built around a shared language, religion, culture, or set of social values. By the end of the 18th century nationalism began to be a generally recognized sentiment molding public and private life and one of the great determining factors of modern history. The American War of Independence and the French revolution are considered as the first

powerful manifestations of modern-day nationalism. After penetrating the new countries of Latin America, it spread in the early 19th century to central Europe and from there, toward the middle of the century, to eastern and southeastern Europe. At the beginning of the 20th century, nationalism flowered in Asia and Africa. Thus, the 19th century has been called the age of nationalism in Europe, while the 20th century witnessed the rise and struggle of powerful national movements throughout Asia and Africa. In the 21st century nationalism played a crucial role in the Arab uprisings in the middle-east.

Nationalism inspired intense loyalties among the people. It has united people and helped to liberate them from oppressive rule. But, it has also been the cause of conflict and bitterness and wars. It has been a factor in the breakup of empires and states. The struggles related to nationalism have resulted in redrawing the boundaries of several empires and states. As a result of this, today we can see that the world is divided into different nations and states.

A number of examples of nationalism in the 21st century can be traced across the globe. In 2014, India voted a nationalist political party BJP led by Narendra Modi to power and in 2019 this nationalist party again got mandate to rule with a thumping majority. In 2015, Vladimir Putin rallied Russians to invade Ukraine to "save" ethnic Russians. The Russia Ukraine war is the outcome of that Russian national sentiment. In 2016, the United Kingdom voted in favor of Brexit, the British exit from the EU.

In the United States, populist Donald Trump won presidential election in 2016. And he declared himself a nationalist at a Texas rally in 2018.

Media virtually shaped all these events and electoral victories. Leaders used media strategically to promote national sentiments and the results were astounding.

DEEP ROOTS OF INDIAN NATIONALISM

Nationalism is rooted in the popular principle of nationality. In India, the roots of national identity can be drawn from the ancient civilizations. When we study the history of India, from the ancient Vedic period to modern times, we find the whole of the Indian peninsula, from Bengal to Gujarat, and from Kanyakumari to Kashmir, mentioned always as one motherland. The early Vedic literature contains hymns addressed to the Motherland of India. The epic poems speak of the whole of BHARAT as the home-land of Aryans.

The literature of India is full of thoughts about Indian nationality. There is no mention of separate Bengal, Gujarat, or Punjab nations, based upon geographic divisions. Powerful emperors in ancient as well as modern times have ruled over the entire peninsula in peace and security. In fact, the belief in the unity of India was so strong in ancient times that no ruler considered his territories complete until he had acquired control over the entire peninsula. Asoka ruled over the whole of India in perfect harmony. Akhbar's power spread to the farthest ends of the land.

However, in modern sense, the concept of national identity emerged among the people of India during the 19th Century.

Elaborating on the concept of Indian Nationalism, the Encyclopedia on Social Science says, “India is a nation in which the Hindu religion served as a cohesive traditional element in uniting people of various races, religions and languages. India achieved national unity through the influence of Western ideas, notably those of British origin, and in the struggle against British rule”.

Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore expressed his views on Indian nationalism on various occasions. A collection of his speeches on nationalism was published in 1917 with the same title and one of the speeches in it denotes Tagore’s unconventional, integrated views on Indian nationalism.

ROLE OF MEDIA IN PROMOTING NATIONALISM DURING FREEDOM STRUGGLE

During the British colonial rule in India the economic condition of common people was getting bad to worse. Exploitation and humiliation were commonplace things. Indian society was badly trapped in the shackles of blind faiths and social evils. Social practices like female infanticide, child marriage, sati, polygamy and a rigid caste system were order of the day. Women were discriminated against at all stages of life and were the disadvantaged section of the society.

Against this backdrop media ignited the flame of nationalism in the society. Media played a major role in shaping the Indian society of 19th century. There were intense debates around religious issues. Different groups in colonial society offered a new interpretation of the beliefs of different religions. Newspaper spread the new ideas and also shaped the nature of debate. New contradictory ideas emerged and a wider public could participate in these discussions and expressed their views. An intense controversy between social and religious reformers and the Hindu orthodox sections emerged. Reformers opposed Brahmanical priesthood, idol worship, widow immolation and advocated monotheism. Raja Rammohun Roy published ‘Sambad Kaumudi’ and strongly opposed the social evils at that time. In North India, the Ulama used cheap lithographic presses to print religious newspapers and published Persian and Urdu translations of holy scriptures. They feared that colonial rule would change their personal laws. Urdu print helped them to battle against this.

Thus, on the one hand, media connected communities and people in different parts of India and helped them to develop their own views, on the other newspapers played a vital role in creating social awareness and insisted on the need for achieving independence from the clutches of the British. Many nationalist journals were published which aroused the sentiments of the Indian public against the British rule. Prominent newspapers and journals fostered the ideas of nationalism, patriotism, justice, liberty and equality in the country. Newspapers such as The Times of India, The Bengali, The Hindu and several newspapers in regional languages also played their role in igniting people’s mind to have freedom. The press criticized the unjust and oppressive policies of the British government which created awareness among the commoners. People also became aware of what was happening around the world, particularly the political and social development outside India and this led them demanding the policies and programs that would benefit the people of India.

Several Nationalist newspapers were published in the 1900s. It included Bande Mataram which was an English language newspaper founded by Bipin Chandra Pal in 1905, Bombay chronicle in 1910 by Firoz Shah Mehta, Young India, a nationalist weekly journal by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, who used this

journal to inspire people and spread his ideology and thoughts of non-violence in organizing movements and urged readers to plan for the freedom of India from Britain.

However, the press Act of 1910 was passed by the British government to impose strict censorship on all kinds of publications and to bring down the influence of Indian vernacular and English language newspapers in promoting Indian nationalism.

The Indian Press Act of 1910 prohibited the publication of a large amount of nationalist press and political literature. But it couldn't suppress the spirit of freedom. Media had a difficult path to tread, but its journey continued and in the long run it proved to be the most prominent tool for freedom struggle.

ROLE OF MEDIA IN NATION BUILDING IN INDEPENDENT INDIA

If you imagine a powerful and thriving nation, where persons in power care for the common man and where common man is empowered, it's not possible without robust media. Thomas Jefferson who was also the third US president (1801-1809) said, "were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate for a moment to prefer the latter". Our first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru also declared "I would rather have a completely free press with all the danger involved in the wrong use of that freedom, than a suppressed or regulated press". The key role of media in nation building could be understood by these two remarks of great political leaders of their times. If the press is to function effectively as the watchdog of public interest, it must have a secure freedom of expression, unfettered and unhindered by any authority, organized bodies, or individuals.

In fact, in India the media touches almost every aspect of our public life. It plays a very important and crucial role in enlightening and educating the people. The media is a bridge between the government and the common man. It ensures public involvement through advocating issue and transferring knowledge, skills and technologies to the people.

It has proved to be a powerful tool for creating awareness about various public welfare measures taken by government like Jawaharlal Nehru Urban Renewal Mission,

Jawaharlal Nehru Rojgar Yojna, Indira Gandhi National Disability Pension Scheme, Indira Gandhi National Widow Pension Scheme, Annapurna scheme, Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana, Atal Pension Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana, Stand up India scheme and others. It has also played an important role in propagating various rural development and agriculture welfare programmes like Per Drop More Crop, family planning and schemes to save girls and their education like 'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao'. Besides Media has played very emphatic role in awakening people against many evils prevailed in the society like child marriage, killing of female unborn child, the evil practice of child labour etc. It has an important role in education sector as well. Through educational programmes, it covers large number of students in a single platform. The University Grants Commission telecasts educational programmes benefiting the school and college students all over India. Through various programmes based on science, media ignites scientific temper among the students. Media has exposed a number of corrupt practices and hidden deals, thus putting a check on deep rooted corruption in the society.

Hundreds of Newspapers and 24/7 news channels in the country always keep the vigilant citizens updated. They organize debates and group discussions about the current political issues in order to enlighten the people about the democratic processes.

Moreover, media serves as a bridge between the government and the people. The government's policies and actions are conveyed to the people, and the latter's views are forcefully expressed to make the authorities aware of the public feelings. It makes the policy makers aware of the wrongs and gives opportunity to rectify them.

During elections media publishes the biodata of the candidates, which makes the general public aware about the candidates, to whom they are planning to vote. An impartial and fearless media is the basic requirement for the success of democracy. Now-a-days media has become so powerful that it is in a position to make or break governments. The media also has a distinctive role to play in bringing communal harmony which in turn preserves the secular fabric of a democratic country.

Media and nationalism are perhaps most obviously entangled in times of war and conflict, when the language becomes charged with national sentiment subsequently evoking patriotism among citizens. In India also at the times of war and conflict with China and Pakistan, media has played a crucial role in igniting the flames of patriotism among the country men.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND NATIONALISM

The communication technology has undergone revolutionary changes. Particularly the advent of social networking sites and the messaging apps have brought a sea change in the world of communication. The all-powerful influence of social media has given a new dimension to the concept of nationalism.

Earlier, People from the underprivileged class didn't have a voice. But social media, which has democratized the world of communication, provided this class a platform to raise their voice for rights and against injustice and inequality. So, the marginalized class got empowered by social media and ultimately this section of society came to the mainstream. Now the policy makers and the government are forced to listen to the grievances of this class. Moreover, today the government is making policies and programmes for various sections of society keeping in mind the wide reach of social media. So, this media is playing an important role in nation building in independent India.

This media is also playing a pivotal role in national politics. In the Lok Sabha elections 2014 Bhartiya Janata Party led by Narendra Modi used social media at a large scale to propagate its policies and convince the voters and the result was astounding. BJP came to power with a thumping majority. In the general election of 2019 also, BJP aggressively used social media and it came to power with a bigger mandate. Now using social media has become a new normal for all the political parties and election strategists.

Social media influencers have a great impact on users in general and youngsters in particular. Research says that emotionally charged messages related to nationalism and patriotism are among the top trending messages on social media.

CONCLUSION

At a time when many parts of the globe were grouping in the darkness of barbarism, India was flourishing in the lap of great civilizations. When small fiefdoms and kingdoms were fighting for power and position in different parts of the world, India envisioned the concept of a nation and actualized it.

However, in modern sense the concept of nationalism in India came on ground during the British colonial rule. Media played a key role in igniting the flames of patriotism in the minds of people. Most of the freedom fighters who led the independence movement had either their own newspapers/magazines or they used to write regular columns in various publications to raise patriotic sentiments and mobilize the public opinion. Thanks to their efforts people of different parts of the country started thinking as a nation. They collectively felt the urge of freedom from Britishers and finally on 15th August 1947 India became independent and a new nation was born. Post-independence, various institutions like Parliament, Supreme court, Election Commission of India and Indian army played a crucial role in promoting nationalism in India. Indian constitution was the guiding force behind the spirit of nationalism. Republic day and Independence Day celebrations further enhanced this spirit. At the times of war with China and Pakistan the spirit of nationalism became very dominant. Media was the force to reckon with behind all these institutions.

This is the era of social media. Wide reach, immediacy and cost effectiveness are the characteristic features of this media. And through these features social platforms are spreading the spirit of nationalism and patriotism at the lightning speed.

Keywords: Media, Nationalism, social media, Freedom, Patriotism, Key role, Newspapers, British rule, ancient civilization

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