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Nationalist Historiography

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Educated Indians read and interacted with British writings on early India and because of this exposure wanted to know more about the past and if possible absolve it of some of the charges made by British scholars. In the process the nationalist' views revolved around those proposed by the colonialist. It is therefore generally agreed that despite their opposition to the British they did not go beyond the colonial framework of analysis and, in fact, were rooted in it. Between the last quarter of the 19th century and the 1940s in general we had a large number of eminent Indian historian actively engaged in deciphering early India. They ranged from R.G. Bhandarkar and R.C. Dutt through K.P. Jayaswal and R.K. Mookherji to H.C. Raychaudhari and R.C Majumdar. As with the imperialist historiography, so also in this case there were different strands within the nationalist writings. The works of Bhandarkar and Dutt, for example, though imbued with the spirit of nationalism were not super patriotic. The nationalists approvingly cited the early British (orientalist) works because they were considered to be sympathetic to India. and accepted the ideas of spiritual Indian villages and village republic owing to their contemporary suitability. It was believed that India achieved a degree of spiritual and moral development matched by the west. Similarly, self-sufficient villages meant local self-governance, and more importantly they were the units of mobilizations in the national movement. The idea of common group of Indo-European languages and their association with the Aryans was approvingly accupted. It established a common ancestry between the colonial masters and the Indian subjects, what was not seen was that it introduced a racial interpretation of Indian history by differentiating between the incoming Aryans and Dravidians or the local inhabitants. As the freedom struggle progressed early Indian history was called upon to prove the existence of democracy, self-government checks and balances and so on. The discovery and translation of the Arthashastra came as a boon for the nationalists. They went on to assert the existence of political theory, a pan-Indian centralized empire and welfare state, among a host of other claims. Private ownership in land, constitutional monarchy, republics, shipping and Maritime activities and local government in early India were being argued for shipping and maritime activities and local government in early India by K.P Jayaswal and R.K. Mookherji. Jayaswal's Hindu Policy

(1924) and Mookherji's. The Fundamental Unity of India were among their most influential works. The introduction of the Golden Ages interspread with Dark Ages marked by political disunity or the absence of large political formations questioned, even if indirectly, the idea of Oriental Despotism or an unchanging society.

The period was also characterized by the emergence of regional histories, most of which came from Bengal and the Tamil South. Small battles were transformed into major wars and local heroes were unduly glorified. The idea of Indian colonies in south-east Asia or their evolution largely owing to Indian influence was a product of these times and had its greatest exponent in R.C. Majumdar. It is suggested that it was extension of the same approach which the colonial historians adopted in the study of early India, the idea that all that was good necessarily came from outside. Such ideas also partly compensated for contemporary Indian's colonial subjection. No matter if they were a colony at present, they themselves had colonies in the glorious past. In short, all that was good in the early part of the 20th century was there in some way in the early cultural past. The nationalist historiography did not make distinction between Aryan, Hindu and early India and all that was good was assigned to it. In the process they reinforced the communal divide in the periodization of Indian history. Writing regional histories, building a history of resistance and creating regional Rajput, Maratha and Sikh heroes in their fight against the Muslims only compounded the problem. However, they also fostered national awakening, generated a sense of pride in the past and provided justification for the freedom struggle.

Like colonial histories, nationalist historians too accepted the sources at face value and many were selectively used. Actually, two conflicting nationalist histories on nationalisms were at play, one representing the British and the other the Indians. Both erred on the side of excess, but also focused on the role of ideology in writing history. However, they provided the foundation for the evolution of sober history. The work of historians such as K.A.N. Sastri. A appdurai on south India and As Altekar on women and state and government emerged in that background. The most important contribution of the nationalists was that they laid bare new sources of information when it is said that the Guptas did not invent nationalism but it was nationalism that invented the Guptas, it is this aspect that is being emphasized. New sources brought Gupta history alive. Macro-generalizations or in many cases generalizations made from the perspective of north India continued to characterize the works of the nationalist historians, a tendency which they shared with colonial writings.

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