

Bipin Chandra Pal and His Concept of Religious Nationalism

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Abstract

Bipin Chandra Pal was an Indian nationalist revolutionary and was one of the triumvirate of LAL BAL Pal. He is known as the father of Indian revolutionary thought and emerged as a prominent leader in India, after his Madras Session speech. He was born in 7 November, 1858 in a small village in Habiganj district of erstwhile Bengal province, presently in Bangladesh. He was born at a time when the British were busy crushing people after revolt of 1857. Bengal witnessed a number of revolutionary activities and such an environment had a spontaneous effect on his delicate personality. There was many facets to the personality of this luminary. He was writer, orator, teacher, librarian, journalist, all woven into one. This was the reason that he was the leader of many revolutionary movements involving boycott, lockouts, strikes etc. His idea and concept about Indian nationalism was purely spiritual in character. He had no interest in violence but had immense trust over the age old tradition of India. He assumed that national movement will be futile if only concentrated in political hemisphere. India is such a nation which underlays in the vision and route of synthesis and testimony of his ideas can be found in various books written down by him. For him Motherland comes first of all concern.

KEYWORDS-Revolutionary, Spiritual, Synthesis, Nationalism.

Introduction

There is complexity in defining both religion and nationalism so to define religious nationalism is not easy. Many scholars argue that religious nationalism is the situation in which political and religious objectives are conflated and interwoven. The term becomes even more complex when it is further added with ethnicity and race. Many scholars have tried to portray nationalism as a replacement of religion so religious nationalism is considered as oxymoron. Nationalism developed in the 17th and 18th centuries in Europe and was mainly based on ethnic and linguistic affinity. It is argued that as nationalism gained strength and religion became waned, in many societies nationalism replaced religion. Nationalism itself became the new religion and the idea became full-fledged developed. Naturally this led to tassel and conflict in many countries and ideological groups. However in many states the opposite also occurred. Nationalism and religion became intertwined and a new concept of religious nationalism emerged.

In a country like India during the late 19th and early 20th century when the ideas of nationalism was gradually infusing a new sets of leaders emerged out of the Indian National congress, popularly known as the Extremist in the pages of history. The concept of religious nationalism started to lay its foot in the political as well as in the societal hemisphere in this period of time. A new vision of completely free India from foreign domination as well as from the dead- weight of social and religious obfuscation dawned upon some of our national leaders. Among such national leader Bipin Chandra Pal was one of the most prominent and chequered idea about the

concept of religious nationalism. It was Pal who procured the idea of religious nationalism in India in a different and immense level. Born in the year 1858 in village Poil, Habiganj (now in Bangladesh), Pal had a celebrated public career as social and political reformer. Pal was also editor of several newspapers and was a great orator as well. Thus his persona was an amalgamation of baffling activism. A born rebel, he firmly stood for principles and ideologies with an uncompromising attitude. Bipin Chandra Pal's concept of religion and nationalism was inter-twined. According to him India being holding one of the ancient civilizations should act as a custodian of the spiritual tradition that held the key to the future progress of the world. But India under foreign yoke could not do this: therefore India had to free herself and to achieve independence the route taken should be the spiritualization of the race. The route of the national movement should outbreak with political, but will end in a spiritual consummation. By achieving the goal India will fulfil the destiny to become the spiritual leader of humanity and the people of India through the route will become self-conscious. Therefore the once under estimated Indian race will be no more considered primitive or backward.

Materials and Methods

The Source material of the paper is based on both primary and secondary sources. The sources are collected from Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Teen Murti Bhavan, New Delhi; Bipin Chandra Pal memorial library, New Delhi; Central Secretariat library, New Delhi; National Archive of India, New Delhi; National Library of India, Kolkata; Delhi University Central Library, New Delhi; Jawaharlal Nehru University Library, New Delhi; Library and Museum of Asiatic Society, Kolkata; The Central Library-Tripura University, Agartala; Bir Chandra State Central library, Agartala.

The method undertaken to write this paper is mainly based on historical method using both the Primary and Secondary sources and following analytic and synthetic operations.

Results

The paper tries to analyse Bipin Chandra Pal and his concept and activities on religious nationalism of India based on rare and unexplored materials. It can be argued that the conventional idea of Pal's image only as an extremist leader can be repudiated and tries provides a complete different image. Pal's idea of social and religious perspective of that contemporary time helps to present him as a humanist with a strong spiritual insight. Thus, his ideas and concept deserves careful attention of all students of Indian politics and history.

Discussion

Bipin Chandra Pal had been in the forefront of the struggle for independence during the extremist era of the Indian National Congress. In the early phase of his political life, along with Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Lala Lajpat Rai, gave about a dynamic jolt to the political scenario. Generally Pal is characterised and recognised well with the customary idiom of Lal Bal Pal but beyond this distinct identity Pal also have his own political, religious, social belief and predictions. It is relatively less explored and against the conventional impression about him. Much light have been procured by Bal and Lal about their religious retrospection but Pal's idea seems to be less discussed in

such dimension. My present paper attempts to bring into purview the concept and thinking of Pal regarding his religious nationalism.

The foundation in which Pal erected the idea of politics was chiefly religious in nature. He considered nationalism a religion or a movement having super mundane significance which is demanding complete dedication and sacrifice.¹ Rishi Bankim Chandra is regarded as the originator of “religion of patriotism”, but it is Pal who propounded and epitomizes religious nationalism and also considered nationalism as a religion that has come directly from God. Thus nationalism is a creed which one shall have to live within. Bipin Chandra Pal’s nationalism was religious in another sense as well: he sometimes used religious term and symbols from the Hindu tradition which he had embraced in his activities and ideas. He tried to embrace it according to the framework of theory of composite culture. A movement like nationalism had to be based on popular culture and not abstract universalism. In a land like India, where divergent culture resides, nation building had to be conducted not along one single line, but among multiple lines, basically among five lines, Hindu, Buddhist, Parsee, Moslem and Christian. Each of the five cultures has their own characteristics of their own which will help in nation building.

According to Pal, the Congress failed to draw the interest of the masses, first because it was conducted mainly in a foreign tongue, next because its ideas and ideals had no reference to the thoughts and traditions of the people. Further there is no expression in the terms of national history and literature and lastly and chiefly it had no religious reference or inspiration in it. The failure of the congress is entirely due to the pronounced secular character. But the new national movement which came into being by the cry of Bande Mataram have totally driven a new ideal. It drove the new ideals deep down into the very heart and soul of the land, and also introduced a new sacrament of nationality and patriotism among the people.

Bande Mataram is not really Hail Motherland but ‘Hail Mother’. This mother as applied to the divine is an old word and an old idea in Hinduism, which recognises not only merely the fatherhood but also the motherhood of God.² The term “father” applied to the divine, signifies his protective providence, the word “mother” specially symbolises his creative energy. It is the common designation of all the goddesses worshiped by the Hindus. Kali, Durga, Lakshmi, Saraswati, all these have always been addressed as mother. So this concept of mother is combined them all in a dearly beloved term, to a new concept, that of the motherland. Through this salutation has come a new cult in the land, the cult of religious patriotism. A new patriotism has also become foliated to universal humanity which is also symbolised in Hindu traditional thought like Maha Vishnu or Naryaana. Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay is the discoverer of this new situation in salutation. His Annandamath and Bande Mataram in which there is pre sensation of mother are solely significant. Here the Permanent form of mother is resting eternally on the lap of Vishnu. This is her real form – the nation eternally resting on humanity. By this entire, means the new patriotism in India has become really a new religion to the vast numbers of its people. For good or for evil, it is a new force in the country which is deeper, stronger, far more reaching than any foreign yoke. According to Pal the new movement that proceeds will go through

¹ Pal, Bipin Chandra (1922) Swaraj what is it and How to attain it, Vadhvani and Co national printers, Bomabay,India.

² Pal, Bipin Chandra (1910) The Spirit of Indian Nationalism, Hind Nationalist Agency, London, England.

the soul of a people and will find expression in their literature, and imparts to their art. Thus it is significant that the political agitation of the past generations in India have left practically no mark upon any of the vernacular literatures of the country. But it is however different from the present situation. The nationalism has created a new and special literature of its own. Indeed what may be surely called the hymnology of the new patriotism which gives a striking proof of the depth and reality of the new national movement. The most significant thing in these hymns is what may be called strong messianic hope and inspiration which they are in haling.

Any national movement with mere political stand without any spiritual institution will hardly appeal to the masses. Endowed with exceptional spiritual discernment the Indians always recognised the signs of coming changes in the political condition of the country. Gifted with a strong and overwhelming sense of the perpetual presence and providence in God in the affairs of men, Indian masses has always recognised the faithless futility to fight against fate, and has ungrudgingly accepted the inevitable as the good. Always keenly conscious of the impermanence of all things mundane, he never sought to grasp with the mortal tenacity of more materialistic hemisphere. Further there is believe in ordained pass with the inexorable law of karma. Thus, in such a nation, mere political nationalism will be handicapped without the tinge of religion.

The essence of nationalism which rendezvoused in European men would be inclined to dismiss the idea of spirituality. Even the modern man in India would not perhaps take the old traditional cosmogony seriously. As there is high voltage chance to treat it as mythical and feeble. Thus such ideology is responsible of placid acquiescence to the successive changes of political government in the country. But while doing so they knew all the while in their inner consciousness that it is not like all else in the world. Other than the modern class, even the ignorant and illiterate people have commenced to ask in fear and trembling, in a tiny voice of how long the Raj will continue? Anyone who goes about the country and mixes among the population, repeated from a hundreds of voice hears the same pathos. But the upper authorities have hardly any appreciation of the gravity of the situation. The Raj is highly engaged in putting down the outer expression of unrest, but the deep root cause of which lies in the spiritual upheaval and not as a mere economic or political ferment. This unrest is essentially religious and spiritual in force. They are manifest in every department of the present nationalist activities. A fervent religious spirit breathes through every poem and hymn in which the new nationalist sentiment finds true expression. It has been the inspiration of every nationalist orator who has drawn people in their thoughts and has created new symbols – a new form of idolatry in which there is representation of the apotheosis of the spiritual life.

However it will be unjust to conclude that the religious garb provided by Pal to be mischievous and intrigued political agitation. His propaganda was not to rouse any religious breakage between heterogeneous groups but was propaganda to strengthen oneself from the foreign yoke. He tried to do away with the alien way of thinking which solely European in nature, literature and history was. Pal earnestly finds the European way of thinking to be no way which denotes national spirit. But the new religious nationalism flourishing its way is much deeper in faith, spirit and most importantly it is the result of synthesis of a new idea with age old traditions.

Pal further went a step forward and describes about the new synthesis that will occur if the new wave of religious nationalism flourishes up to the zenith. A new social synthesis will be reconciliatory in which the segment will work as a family of individualistic interest protected for the members of the family. The families will further come together to form a clan. The commune, clan or the tribe will have the function to mediate between the families and by mediating between conflicting interest, the tribe or the commune will try to keep the families together to form a unit. Thus, this will be the collective life. This will try ahead to keep the strength of the collective life of the clan. This collective life will make everything very composite. Similarly, the nation is composed of many communities. Even those nations which are not exactly composite, nations, that are united in language, that are united in religion, that have no separate racial or tribal traditions among them, even these have conflicting interest. Hence for running in such order, the real resolving factor will be synthesis. The family synthesis endures so long as the common life and power of the family is not identified with any particular individual belonging to the family.

The common life of the family, the common authority of the family, is exercised by the head of the family. He is thus keeper of the privy purse of the family and so long as the head of the family does not identify himself with any particular individual belonging of the family, the family synthesis exists in the family life endures, the unity of the family is not broken, leading to the un breakage of family institution and it remains unimpaired. From the family it goes to the tribe. The tribal synthesis also endures only so long as the head of the tribe is the king. Similarly it happens to the case of the nation. The nation in the view of sociology is a social synthesis, as such the family is the synthesis of individual personal interest, as the tribe is a synthesis of family interest, and even so the nation is a synthesis of communal interests. It provides a ground for reconciliation and compromise between any conflicting interests.

As regards of national synthesis, it endures best so long as the power, the authority and the instrument which exercises power and authority of the nation is not identified with any unit, any particular sections, any particular class or particular tribalism or racialism composing the nation. Thus the purest form of national synthesis. But when the authority of a nation identifies with any particular class inside inside the nation, the moral hold over the people is weakens and as it happens in the case of the tribe, so it happens in the case of the nation also that when any particular tribe or community inside the nation usurps the authority of the nation and uses it for its own particularistic ends, the national synthesis is broken up, though the national authority may still be exercised through sheer brute force.

In the case of Indian national theme, the problem lays underneath is strictly psychological and social, rather than political. The miracle of the Raj in India further strongholds the statement. A few hundreds rule ruthlessly over more than a 300,000,000 of people, spreading all over the sub-continent. The Raj is still possible not due to political, military or moral superiority but of the pure hypnotism. The people are hypnotised to believe in the altruism of the foreign rulers.³ Untrained in the crooked way of diplomacy, it had made believe that the Raj is the supreme and the gospel of truth. It has been told that the people of India lacks in managing their own affairs, and sadly enough some of the leaders even believe the lie. It has been further

³ Pal, Bipin Chandra (1917) Responsible Government, Bannerjee, Das and company, Calcutta, India.

humiliated by daunting that India stood in the lower rung of humanity, and England's mission was only to civilise the semi barbarous native, and people believed that they were in reality in low of the scale of civilization. That is how the hypnotism works. But gradually with the renaissance of spirituality, the hollowness of the idea is withering away. Thus, the counter passes of hypnotism has already begun with religious amalgamation and once awakened, the people to a sense of their own strength, an appreciation towards their own culture, a new stronghold conviction will arise which will possess a distinct mission and destiny.

The national movement had been preceded by a general religious and social revival in India. The revival came as a reaction against the earlier movements of religious and social revolts, raised admittedly under the influence of European thoughts and ideals. These revolts were the direct result of the application of the canons of dominant rationalistic thought of Europe of the eighteenth and the early nineteenth century to the social and religious life of India. It represented what may be called the outer movement of the modern Indian consciousness. It was soon followed by the necessary returned movement. The movement of social and religious revival which preceded the nationalist movement, represented really the return of the national consciousness to itself. It was not really at such conflict between the progressive and conservative elements of Indian society, as superficial observers have tried to make it out, but conflicting between aggressive and European and progressive Indian culture. It was India's mental and moral protest against the intellectual and ethical domination of Europe. It was kind of a reflex action against the growing appreciation of Europe. Foreign Christian missionaries have very materially helped to develop the self-consciousness of the Christian nations, as civilisers of the world and benefactors of humanity, even so the Hindu and Buddhist missionary activities in Europe and America have revealed India's place in the evolution of modern world culture.

The term Swaraj, which is another vital organ of Indian national movement fully represents the spirit of Indian nationalism. The identification of the individual with the universal, the recognition of the freedom of the individual, not in himself as standing apart from the whole, of which the individual is a part, but in and through that whole only, the soul and essence of the concept of Swaraj lays. This freedom is possible of realisation by those only who recognise unity in diversity. Thus here stands the real spirit of Indian nationalism. It is an essentially religious spirit. It ends in the realisation of God – life in and through the activities of the social and the political life.

To achieve the goal of Indian freedom, the role of nationalist leaders is highly important according to Bipin Chandra Pal. He put stress on the realisation of responsibility of national leader in standing tall and together against the force and before the bar of history and humanity. They should be fully aware that there should be no short sighted impatience and recklessness on the one hand and lack of courage and candour to another. A second route is also open. A peaceful solution of the problem that faces the people as well as the government. The condition of peaceful progress towards political freedom is present in India to an extent in which these have never been present perhaps in any other country struggling for national freedom. But the national leaders are denied to the access to the mind and body of the masses as they were thrown and shut up in prison even without the frequently futile formalities of public trials. The whole platforms have been practically denounced.

The earlier sets of political movement using the methods of political agitation, miscalled constitutional, were propaganda which were nothing but imitation of the European without any reference to the life and culture of the people, and having no inspirational message for them. But through this propaganda it may yet easily brutalise the animal passion of the disorderly elements of society simultaneously upon the rulers and the ruled. This is a danger which threatens India if immediately a solution has not been provided and the only solution is through religious spiritual nationalism. An orderly, peaceful, lawful evolution is required which will claim the right of the universal scheme of the thing.

Bipin Chandra Pal though famous has an extremist or present day denoted as assertive leader vividly wrote down that, Indian national movement is totally against violent methods, because it will defeat the high ends that have in view, namely the revelation of God in man, through due regulation of the social and civic relations and activities. The national leaders have always freely recognised the legitimate authority of the Raj, however despotic it may be, to discharge the primary functions of the state in India as rulers of the land. While recognising the authority of the present government the nationalist leaders demand for the people – freedom of opportunities for the exercise of their own primary rights. But the repression of the Raj have openly attacked the primary rights of the people, and it is this repression that are entirely responsible for the appearance of the revolutionary violence in a movement of lawful, self-reliant activities and peaceful, passive resistance. But if one follows through the soul of Indian nationalism than the spiritual path will be followed and the revolutionary path can be controlled in a very swift way.

In the book entitled, “Nationality and Empire, A Running study of current Indian Problems”, Bipin Chandra Pal vividly argues regarding the ⁴loss of India’s loss spirit in terms of decadence of revived moral God appointed mission as the spiritual leader of modern humanity. But he still believes that sooner or later, India will regain it. The struggle of regaining is defiantly not violence or revolutionary movement which are destructive in character. As violence have no constructive programme and is not capable of practical end realisation. But if violence continues than it will upset the administration and paralyse it by undermining moral hold of the government. Government whose authority is based upon hypnotic influence over the people are peculiarly liable to be paralysed by revolutionary violence. Apart from political danger, there are very serious economic risks involved in the increase or continuance of the political unrest in India. India being the largest field of economic exploitation by British capital, the present revolutionary violence will not end the economic neither the political hegemony foot hold.

There are ways in which the unrest can be radically cured as they radically started. The remedy is though bold and it needs tremendous courage but surely it will lead to achieving independence not only politically but also in the field of spirituality and religious order. Great Britain will have to relinquish her power on the present ground of unnatural and irresponsible dealings. She must learn to contemplate with absolute equanimity of certainty of an independent political status for the nations which are made great dependency on her. Bipin Chandra Pal himself though admits that it is very hard to achieve because a country like England, which is high profiling in

⁴ Pal, Bipin Chandra (1916) Nationality and Empire A running study of current Indian Problems, Thacker Spink and company, Calcutta, India.

imperialism will do things according to the need of morality capabilities of nations, as well as of individuals residing in the nations. It is however inevitable because if the new spiritual order is followed than future provisions are in the favour of India and best compromise on the part of England. But if Britain commands the statesmanship according to ethics than Gods and angels saves India and England too.

Bipin Chandra Pal had an insightful spiritual and religious sight. His concept of Indian nationalism was in fact a perfect apostle of Indian age old traditions, culture and modernity. He believed in the idea of nation state which started after the treaty of Westphalia.⁵ He was not only an assertive leader but also a social reformer. He wanted to see an India devoid of all types of social evils, and worked heart and soul to eradicate them. He said all social norms must be eradicated and subservient to nationalism. In the words of Dr. Rajendra Prasad, he was one of those pioneers, whose lifelong efforts created the climate in which the struggle for freedom could be waged successfully, leading to the desired consummation, our political emancipation. Posterity will judge and evaluate the extent of success of Bipin Chandra Pal achieved in his political life and in the freedom battle.

Questions generally arise in the mind of readers regarding the backdrop of how Bipin Chandra Pal got his inspiration and ideals of religious nationalism! It was impossible without vociferous readings and religious as well as political gurus. In the book entitled, *The Brahmo Samaj and the Battle for Swaraj*, Pal himself speaks about his student life's inspirational character like, Keshub Chunder Sen who followed Debendra Nath as his leader.⁶ The movement of Keshub Chunder Sen was more outspoken and sturdy movement of freedom. He stood out as apostle of freedom in every department of intellectual, moral and social activities. Keshub carried his movement further and proclaimed the absolute supremacy of the individual conscience over every form of outside authority in the determination of human conduct and customs. Bipin Chandra Pal in his later political life also follows the same idea of supremacy for human activities and inspiration. Pal further points out that India possessing a past of Nanak, Kabir, Ramanand, Shree Chaitanya was all more or less attempts a synthesis between the diversity of practices and belief. Hence there underlays the inspiration and spirit of the concept of amalgamation by Bipin Chandra Pal from his predecessors as well.

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