
**RENAISSANCE, A POLITICAL DOCTRINE OF TODAY'S LIBERALISM:
JOTTINGS IN INDIAN CONTEXT**

Kamal Chandra Barman

Assistant Professor, Dept. of Political Science,
M. U. C. Women's College, Burdwan, West Bengal, India.

DOI: 10.46609/IJSSER.2020.v05i02.007 **URL:** <https://doi.org/10.46609/IJSSER.2020.v05i02.007>

ABSTRACT

Liberalism, a political and economic doctrine becomes popular among philosophers, economists and political thinkers is the successor of Renaissance. Renaissance which means rebirth or revival of the Graeco-Roman learning in the 15th and 16th centuries paved the way for liberalism in Europe and in 19th century, it becomes a part of Indian political system. Liberalism founded with ideas of John Locke which deals with liberty, rights and equality of individual. Later on, with the light of Renaissance and fundamental ideas of 17th and 18th century European thinkers-like Rousseau, Smith, Ricardo, Hayek and Nozick etc. had strengthen the path of liberalism. With the impact and influence of renaissance concepts of economic freedom, democratic government, civil rights etc. had got a new orientation. Historical and descriptive method has been used to get elicit information regarding renaissance and liberalism. This paper also tries to find out a correlation between renaissance and liberalism. Indian Renaissance popularly known as Bengal Renaissance, a brain child of European Renaissance initially was a socio-cultural, intellectual awakening and artistic movement, but gradually it became political. It was started with Raja Ram Mohan Roy along with many other stalwarts like Vidyasagar, Vivekananda, Bankim Ch. Chattopadhyay, R. N. Tagore, J. C. Bose, etc. who had a greater contribution to the Indian Renaissance. Their writings, ideas and inventions are still helping to make a clear image of transition from medieval age to enter into a new liberal era.

Keywords: Renaissance, Liberalism, Democratic Government, Liberty, Equality

INTRODUCTION

'Indian Renaissance' which can also be known as 'Bengal Renaissance', the brain child of 'European Renaissance' initially was different, because it was a socio-cultural, intellectual awakening and artistic movement in Bengal region of the Indian subcontinent during British rule.

But gradually it became political. Renaissance, a cultural and intellectual movement took place in 15th and 16th century in the west, though most of the historians would not be disagree with the view that Renaissance really started in 14th century with antecedents reaching back into the 12th century, whereas in India it has took place in 19th century. Indian Renaissance started with Raja Ram Mohan Roy, the founding father of modern India along with many other stalwarts like Vidyasagar, Swami Vivekananda, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Rabindra Nath Tagore, Keshub Chandra Sen, Nazrul Islam, Jagadish Chandra Bose, C. V. Raman, Meghnath Saha etc. who had a greater contribution to the Indian Renaissance. Their writings, ideas and inventions were helpful to make a clear image of transition from the medieval age to enter into a new liberal era.

Liberalism, the socio-political and economic movement, the signature philosophy of Europe, firstly becomes popular among the philosophers, economists and political thinkers in Europe during the age of Enlightenment which is the succession of the European Renaissance. After a long darken medieval period, this very terminology ‘Renaissance’ which means rebirth or revival of the Graeco-Roman learning in the 15th and 16th centuries, pave the way for liberalism in Europe. Later on in 20th century, it becomes a part of Indian political system. As an ideology, liberalism founded with the ideas John Locke which deals with individual’s liberty, rights and equality. Later on, with the light of Renaissance and Enlightenment movement, fundamental ideas of 17th and 18th century British and French political philosophers like Jean Jacques Rousseau, Montesquieu, Voltaire, Adam Smith, David Hume, Friedrich Hayek and Robert Nozick etc. had strengthen the path of liberalism. With the direct or indirect impact and influence of renaissance and enlightenment movement concepts of economic freedom, laissez faire economy, limited democratic government, civil rights, international relation etc. had got a new orientation.

Historians have already rediscovered the prehistory of the political nature of liberalism in 1812 when Spanish political party ‘Liberales’ adopted it as a modern political movement. Concept of Liberalism, its features, characteristics and global impact has already been discussed in many works. John Gray in his book ‘Liberalism’ clearly defines what exactly Liberalism is? What are the features of it? And criticise this liberal outlook on different grounds. To him “Liberalism is a clear insight into its historicity, its origin in a definite cultural and political circumstances and its background in the context of European individualism in the early modern period.” He has clearly shown the evolutionary process of liberalism like- i) termination of the feudalism in Europe of 16th and 17th centuries, ii) impact of French and American Revolution of 18th century, iii) emergence of democratic and socialist ideologies during 19th century and iv) totalitarian government of 20th century etc, and reached in a new modern intellectual political movement known as Neo-Liberalism.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

But there is no so such writings and works which deal with relationship between the impact of European renaissance and the liberal ideas of modern Indian political thinkers. Actually this article tries to correlate between renaissance and liberalism in Indian context and find out some logical answers to these questions, such as - i) how much benefit has India got from European renaissance? And ii) how much renaissance and enlightenment movement is responsible for liberal outlook in India?

METHODOLOGY

This article tries to put forward an analytical study of the correlations between European Renaissance and Liberalism in Indian context. For that purpose an analytical and historical method has been used to get and consulted a series of secondary data and information regarding renaissance and liberalism. So that by analysing these historical inputs it can be said that there are interdependencies of Indian liberal approaches on European renaissance.

Renaissance and Liberalism:

Liberalism, a conception of man and society and an independent rational justification of moral values, touches the heart of an individual. It is individualist in nature because liberalism always talked about the liberty of individual against any kind of obstacles either from any other individual or from any majority. Due to its more emphasis on the moral unity of the human species, it has its universality, but at the same times the states who adopted liberalism as an ideology, can learn how to coexist with the non liberal cultures and nations. Because during the renaissance in Bengal, lots of liberal ideas adopted and followed by the political thinkers like Raja Rammohan Roy who introduced so many colleges with modern education, Jagadish Chandra Bose with his Plant Physiological science and Prafullya Chandra Roy with his Chemical research led Bengal as well as India in the study of science. Besides C. V. Raman, Dr. Sarbapalli Radhakrishnan etc. made a greater contribution to the liberal thoughts of India which is a non liberal nation at that point of time. Finally, Liberalism like any other political ideology has acquired a different flavour in each of different national culture and has got a persistent life. History of French liberalism is something different from the liberalism of United Kingdom; history of German liberalism is different from the liberalism of United States of America. So all these liberalisms of different countries loosely connected with each other and constitute an integral political movement. John Gray rightly observed that John Locke, Immanuel Kant, John Stuart Mill, J. M. Keynes and later on John Rawls, Robert Nozick and F. A. Hayek etc. presented their separate branches of a common ancestry.

So far as liberty of individual, freedom of speech, rights, power and equality of Indian political thinkers are concern which are also borrowed from west. They understood the importance of these political terminologies and tried to make mind set of Indians more modern highlighting by more and more scientific outlook of west. At this juncture 'Sadharan Brahma Samaj' (1878) publicly announced in 'Tattvakaumudi' (1882) that "by placing justice over injustice, equality over inequality, power of the people over king is making arrangements to establish a worldwide Republic... .. It is for this spirit of independence that many people are flocking in here." Gradually different indigenous Indian political concepts like Swadeshi movement, Partition of Bengal movement, Boycott movement, Civil Disobedience movement, Quit India movement etc. had grown up which are the result of the impact of western renaissance.

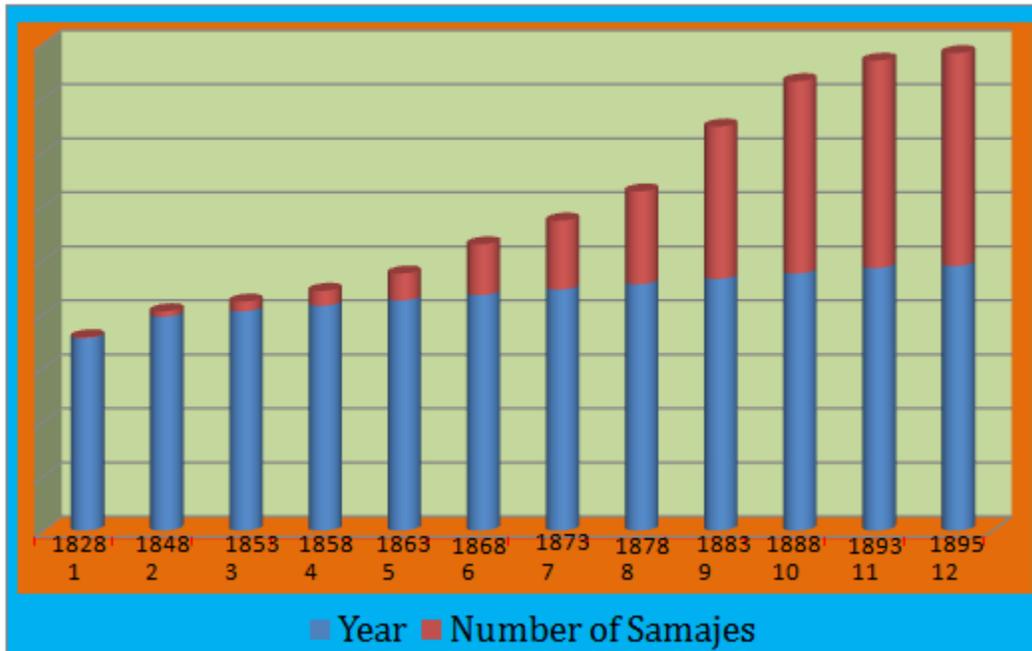
Raja Rammohan Roy and his ideas:

Modern Indian political thought was influenced by the writings of western scholars. Raja Rammohan Roy (1772 - 1833), the father of modern India, who was not only a religious and social reformer, a journalist but also an outstanding political thinker who's thought, was the production of synthesis between what he taught in the East and the West. He developed his ideas of separation of power and rule of law with the influence of French philosopher Montesquieu 1748. The impact of British scholar William Blackstone is clearly shown in Raja Rammohan Roy's concept of civil society. He was strongly influenced by Karl Marx's ideas of the role of middle class in revolution and Rammohan Roy in his paper 'The Bengal Herald' (13th June, 1829) welcomed middle class people in the reformation movement in India.

Socio-Cultural changes:

Raja Rammohan Roy, the first endeavour who lead to an all India level Socio-Cultural movement known as Brahma Samaj in 28th June, 1895. Actually through this movement he always tried to emancipate Indian society as a whole and Bengal in particular from blind faith of superstition, traditionalism and ritualism to rationalism, from the deadliest impact of medieval feudalism to national liberal democracy. Brahma Samaj was a synthesis of Indian and western cultures, through its long evolutionary process from 1828 to 1895 had a greater impact on Indian society under the leaderships of Raja Rammohan Roy, Ramchandra Vidyavagish, Maharshi Devendranath Tagore, Keshubchandra Sen, Pandit Sibnath Sastri and Anandamohan Bose and others. Renaissance has created an awareness regarding the unity of Indian culture through its contribution to the nationalism as well as sub-nationalism. The spiritual aspect of Indian renaissance created buzz among India's religions through the teachings of Ramkrishna, Vivekananda, Aurobindo and a number of Gurus and Saints.

Brahmo Samaj and Indian society:



Sources: Atulchandra Gupta, *Studies in the Bengal Renaissance*, 1958, pp-479

Educational changes:

Atulchandra Gupta rightly pointed out that India still has a fund of knowledge and wisdom which did not displayed properly and has stored up through long centuries. India’s progress in art, architecture, philosophy, science and technology etc. is still a matter of excellence. Some of the Indian patriotic and prominent figure strongly argued in favour of western education along with Indian inheritances for regeneration of India. One of the major examples was Satishchandra Mukherji who formed the ‘National Council of Education’, which tried to introduce classes for both literary and for technological studies. Sir Ashutosh Mukherji also tried to reorganise education system with his contribution.

But Indian National Congress under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, provide a different indigenous Indian educational outlook against western education. It argued for “Craftwork, a social sense and character building etc. which are the cornerstones of basic Indian education.” Prof. K. A. Paniker endorsed the view of Indian National Congress by saying that “We must guard ourselves against any attempt at educational uniformity throughout India. There is wide

room in India for a diversity of ideals, methods and institutions and we need not copy from any single European country, when the field is so wide and opportunities are so great.” But no one can ignore the influence of American education system on India. Prof. Dewey’s experiment of education system of west in India with Sister Nivedita was a portable example. It would not be over reacted to say that this American system of education today become universal. So how can India ignore the implications of universal education?

Science is another field which can help to bring changes among thinking of a country. “Science is one of the manifestations of man’s intellectual efforts and seldom has it been found to be disassociated from an intellectual revival”. Arabian renaissance of 8th, 9th and 10th centuries was accompanied by the Islamic absorption of the scientific orientation of ancient Greek’s renaissance of 6th century. Later on, European renaissance of 16th and 17th centuries brought a huge change with the introduction of modern science. Initially, individual writings and inventions of western scientists were insufficient and inadequate to regenerate a spirit of scientific enquiry among the Indians. For example, during the time of East India Company, western scientists came to India and act as Royal Medical Man, Engineers, Civil and Military Officials etc. in several fields. One of them is Sir William Jones who studied caste system of India and established ‘The Asiatic Society’ with the objective of more and more scientific study of man and materials. But gradually, trend had been changed and fundamental research in physics, chemistry, math and physiology etc. took deeper roots. Raja Rammohan Roy understood the necessities of modern scientific education and introduced so many colleges with modern science. Jagadish Chandra Bose with his Plant Pshysiological science and Prafullya Chandra Roy with his Chemical research led Bengal as well as India in the study of science. Besides C. V. Raman, Dr. Sarbapalli Radhakrishnan etc. made a greater contribution to the liberal thoughts of India

Political changes:

The liberal ideas of politics, like nationalism and democracy in India borrowed by the Indian political thinkers from the west. They understood the Indian political scenario and tried to adopt and implement these liberal approaches in India. ‘The Brahma Public Opinion’ in its first publication in 21st March, 1878 editorially said that “We shall try to demonstrate that Brahmoism elevates people not only spiritually, but socially, intellectually, physically and politically, that Brahmoism not only affects our soul, but our hearts, our minds Boldly and fearlessly we hope to teach and practice reform in every direction, unmindful of consequences.” Even after independence, with their own viewpoints, Mohan Das Karamchand Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Saradr Ballavbhai Pattel etc. have set an important footstep towards liberal politics in India.

Henry Louis Vivian Derozio and Young Bengal Movement:

Two other important milestones of this study are the political ideas of Henry Louis Vivian Derozio (1809-1831) and some insights of David Here (1775-1842). Both of them were passionate with the impacts of western education on Indians. Dr. Susobhan Sarkar rightly observed that “for India nothing was more essential than a dissemination of European learning and science among her people.” Both of them always encouraged their followers with their inspirational western thinking regarding freedom of speech and secularist approaches. Derozio and his followers collectively known as ‘Young Bengal’ as well as ‘Derozians’, formed an ‘Academic Association’ (1828) which discussed and organise debates on History, Literature, Science, Social and Religious philosophy etc. Derozians, radical Bengali free thinkers emerged from Hindu College, Calcutta deeply influenced by the liberal thinking of west and made a contribution in the modernization process of India.

Swami Vivekananda and his ideas:

Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902), felt proud to be an Indian, who lived every seconds of his life for the development of our nation and who worked hard for the society till the last blood of his body. He was influenced by Bankim Chandra Chattyopadhyay and followed Bankim’s views of ‘Deshbhakti (Patriotism) and ‘Sanatan dharma’ (principles of the heroic band of ‘Sannyasins’) as depicted in the ‘Ananda Math’. One of his fundamental ideas is the concept of nationalism which is mainly based on the ground of spirituality, philosophy and Vedanta. Nationalism is an inspiring spirit and a creative force as well. The inspiration of nationalism has made important contributions in making nations independent and prosperous. So it is a great stimulating force in the process of a nation building. Basically his idea of nationalism is slightly different from the so called western concept of nationalism. But the inner meaning of his idea was same with the western notion of nationalism. To him the main goal of the nationalism is to serve the people and to serve the mother land as well. Vivekananda did not believe in both perverted and aggressive type of nationalism rather the basis of his concept of nationalism is religion. For that purpose by comparing the youths of the nation as lion, Vivekananda proclaimed that “Get up! Oh lions and shake off the delusion that you are sleep.” So it is the time to sacrifice them for the nation. As we know he was not an active politician, rather he was a religious saint, a monk and a thinker by his voice of thought. But he was well aware of Indian nationals, their problems such as moral degradation, lack of value-based leadership, human brutality and forces that constantly want to divide the nation, basic needs and necessities. For the eradication of all these socio-cultural and political evils, he pleaded for political liberation of the country and urged for a positive concrete action which meant “wiping away the widow’s tears and bringing a piece of bread to the orphan’s mouth”. For that reason he straggled to bring in equity, justice and fairness among all Indians

But by praising the greatness of India Vivekananda said that pointed out that there are lots of nations and cultures in the world, some of which have come and gone, some other still surviving but it is Indian nation and culture which is not only alive but also may guide the world in future. In India religion is the only ground through which we can move forward. The Britishers can understand religion through politics and the American can understand religion through social reforms. But the Hindu can understand even politics through religion. He proclaimed the essence of my religion is strength which is greater than religion and nothing is greater than strength, because strength is the backbone of Indian nation and the main source of this strength is proper education which makes each individual in such a way so that they can bring back their lost glory and greatness of India.

Sri Aurobindo Ghosh & his Ideas:

Sri Aurobindo Ghosh (1872-1950) who begun his life as a student in England, came back as a teacher to Baroda, moved as a revolutionary to Calcutta and went to Pondicherry and became a philosopher. So it would not be justified to say that his 'Shikshabhoomi' was England, 'Karmabhoomi' was Baroda, Calcutta was his 'Krântibhoomi' and 'Yogabhoomi' was Pondicherry. Spiritual giants like Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda etc, Sri Aurobindo was the first person who took the movement from the drawing room and conference room and put it on the streets, minds and hearts of the Indian citizens. Sri Aurobindo, one of them who were not against the idea of adopting something which is best in western culture and tradition though he was a critique of westernization. He was deeply influenced by two well-known western revolutionary movements – 1stly, the Sinn Fein movement in Ireland for Irish freedom under Charles Parnell and Eamen de'Vealara and 2ndly, the Resurgimento in Italy for the reunification of Italy led by Matsini, Garibaldi and other great revolutionary leaders. But he absolutely believes that India could never become like Europeans because histories are completely different. Aurobindo believed that there are five forces which have transformed the entire European continent in to a strong political body of nation states. Renaissance, Reformation, Industrial Revolution, French Revolution and Socialism which were helpful to the people of West to change, adjust and adapting their values with the changing social, political and economic situations. But in India all these factors like impact of capitalism, role of mass media, modern education, socio-cultural history, political and economic infrastructure and especially individuals who mainly play an important role are necessary to understand what actually nationalism is? That is why he told to the members of his secret society 'The Lotus and the Dagger' that "people don't have to depend upon the charity of the Britishers and the actual enemy of our nation is not any external force but our internal forces (selfishness, hypocrisy, cowardice, sentimentalism etc)".

Aurobindo contributed his theory of purified and sanctified nationalism in modern Indian political practice. Three important stages of his concept of nationalism- “First stage of development arises out of some kind of looses yet sufficiently compelling orders of society and common type of civilization” (kichhu dharoner asangbaddata theke uditto hoy). “Second stage is a period of stringent organization directed towards unity and centrality of control” (Aikyer pathe jatra o khamotar kendrikaron). “Third stage is the stage of the formation of a nation state which can be called as free internal development.”(Jatio ekok gathoner parjay) His concept of spiritual nationalism is mainly based on two key concepts. The first is the concept of the nation. To him nation was not only a political construct but a divinity. It was a divinity into which one had to be prepared to offer everything as a sacrifice. It was ‘Bhavâni Bhârati’, Mother India. He looked upon the nation as a living goddess. The second is the concept of the spirituality. In 1908 he publicly declared his “spiritual nationalism is not a mere political programme; Nationalism is a religion that has come from God; Nationalism is a creed which you shall have to live if you are going to assent to this religion of nationalism, you must do it in the religious spirit.” He put forward the demand for national freedom from the point of religious faith so that the masses could be awakened. Nationalism could not be destroyed which can only be attained when there is a faith in God. Sri Aurobindo's message of spiritual nationalism is that the nation is a spiritual power and nationalism is a spiritual imperative which is only possible through fulfil of one's ‘dharma’. After coming back to India in 1892 his mother Swarnalata Debi, daughter of Vedantic scholar Rajnarayan Basu, introduced Aurobindo with Indian philosophy despite his father’s highly westernized outlook. Very soon Aurobindo learnt Bengali and Sanskrit language and begun to read Anandamath, Dharma Tatva, and Krishna Charitha etc. and influenced by two reasons- i) feeling of Indians and ii) political. All these writings deeply implant a sense of patriotism and spiritual enthusiasm in him. By observing Aurobindo’s concept of nation and spiritual nationalism it becomes very clear that early phases of his political philosophy were influenced by western concept of nationalism, but the later part of his political thinking guided by his own spiritual philosophy. Thus it can be said that his concept of nationalism is a product of both West and Indian.

FINDINGS

Indian social reformers, saints, religious ‘Gurus’ and political thinkers understood that adoption of liberal philosophy by the Indian society is too much tough because post modern liberal approaches confronted with the local practices of Indian society which are typically grounded themselves in its own religion claims. At the same time underdeveloped nations like India has no option but to adopt these principles of liberalism. They also understood that through the process of renaissance and enlighten movement; this confrontation may be replaced by the impact of universality and secular character of liberalism. Richard Rorty rightly viewed that “A liberal

society is one whose ideals can be fulfilled by persuasion rather than by force, by reform rather than by revolution, by free and open encounters of present linguistic and other practices with suggestions for new practices.” In this way renaissance is the precursor of modern liberal socio-cultural and political ideas and at the same time adoption of liberal approaches by the India is the prelude to an epoch of Indian renaissance’s decline.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Gray, John, *Liberalism*, Delhi, World View Publications, 1998, Print.
2. Majumdar, R.C., Majumdar, A. K., and Ghosh, D.K., *British Paramountcy and Indian Renaissance*, 2nd ed. Bombay, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1981, Print.
3. Gupta, Atulchandra, *Studies in the Bengal Renaissance*, Calcutta, The National Council of Education, 1958, Print.
4. Sarkar, Susobhan, *On the Bengal Renaissance*, Calcutta, Papyrus, 1979, Print.
5. Paniker, K. Ayyappa, *Indian Renaissance*, New Delhi, Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1983, Print.
6. Dasgupta, Subrata, *The Bengal Renaissance*, New Delhi, Permanent Black, 2007, Print.
7. Varma, V. P., *Modern Indian Political Thought*, Agra, L N Agarwal, 1971, Print.
8. Varma, V. P., *Studies in Hindu Political Thought and Its Metaphysical Foundations*, Delhi, Motilal Banarasidass, 1974, Print.
9. Mehta, V.R., *Foundations of Indian Political Thought*, New Delhi, Manohar publishers & Distributors, 1992, Print.
10. Pantham, T. and Deutsch K. L., *Political Thought in Modern India*, 1st ed New Delhi, Sage Publication, 1986, Print.
11. Heimsath, Charles H., *Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reform*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1964, Print.
12. Majumdar, B. B., *Militant Nationalism in India and Its Socio- Religious Background 1897-1917*, California, General Printers and Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1966, Print.
13. Basu, Shankari Prasad, *Vivekananda O Samokalin Bharatbarso*, Calcutta, Mondal Book House, 1985, Print.

Websites:

1. www.jstor.org
2. www.newindianexpress.com
3. www.enotes.com
4. rbalu.wordpress.com
5. www.wikipedia.org