

Understanding Origin Of Nationalism And Feminism In The Western Context

Pori Borah¹, Chandana Rajkhowa²

¹Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, St. Xavier's College, Sonabheel,
Tezpur.

²Guwahati, Assam, India.

Abstract

Nationalism stands for the doctrine which extends its support towards the notions of freedom, liberty, and equality. The issue of identity is a crucial element of the doctrine of nationalism that creates an environment of awareness among the people for their all round development. Traces of its origin can be found primarily in the writings of different western thinkers as well as in the several revolutionary expressions. The spirit of French Revolution deserves a special mention here as it introduces the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity. It helps in building the foundation of the doctrine of nationalism especially in the context of west. Simultaneous growth in the direction of the principle of feminism is observed alongside the doctrine of nationalism in the west. Close observation of the scenario of its origin reveals the impact nationalism exerts upon the principle of feminism by making the women aware about their identity and rights. Later on, development of feminism in the west is characterized by the emergence of diverse strands within the fold like liberal feminism, radical feminism, black feminism, co-feminism, and others.

Keywords: nationalism, revolutionary, simultaneous, feminism.

Objectives

1. To study the process of development of nationalism in the western context.
2. To examine the role of nationalism in the growth of feminism in the west.

Research Questions:

1. How does nationalism grow in the west?
2. What is the connection between nationalism and feminism in the western context?

Methodology:

The present research work is primarily descriptive in nature. It aims to describe the events which are taking place in the context. For the purpose of conducting the proposed study, data is collected from the secondary sources like books, articles, magazines and others.

Introduction:

The doctrine of nationalism, either in the broad spectrum or the narrow, is always connected in one way or the other with the notion of identity. Sanjib Baruah has compared the notion of nationalism with one of the various forms of national consciousness. Nationalism is an ideology that tends to increase people's level of consciousness towards their identity by projecting its uniqueness. Being an ideology, nationalism tends to protect some projected identities which vary from context to context by making people conscious about it. Emergence of several independence movements in different parts of the world was the result of such increasing level of consciousness among the subaltern population. Being an all inclusive notion, nationalism helps feminism to flourish in its own way by providing it the necessary ground.

A Brief Outline of the Growth of Nationalism in the Western Context

Evidential emergence of the concept of nationalism in the Western context took place in the eighteenth century. Andrew Heywood in his book "Political Ideologies: An Introduction", states, "it was not until the eighteenth century that individuals and groups were described as 'nationalists', and only in 1789 that the term 'nationalism' was first used in print, by the anti-Jacobin French priest, Augustine Barruel." The developmental map of nationalism in terms of its theme of understanding within the Western countries slightly differs from one context to other. Heywood further stated that the doctrine itself was born during the French Revolution. The French revolutionaries were influenced by the writings of Jean Jacques Rousseau who was a supporter of popular sovereignty which believes in democratic principles. Heywood further associated the revolutionary tendencies and democratic ideals with the notion of nationalism where people should be considered as citizens rather than the subjects. He didn't confine such an explanation of nationalism exclusively to French as influence of nationalism was also visible in some other parts of the European continent. Unification of Italy and Germany in the years 1870 and 1871 respectively was the result of the rising tide of nationalism. The cultured nature of nationalism that emerged in French has gradually started to change its nature to different forms. Heywood in his Political Ideologies states,

"By the end of the nineteenth century, nationalism had become a truly popular movement, with the spread of flags, national anthems, patriotic poetry and literature, public ceremonies and national holidays. Nationalism became the language of mass politics, made possible by the growth of primary education, mass literacy and the spread of popular newspapers. The character of nationalism also changed. Nationalism had previously been associated with liberal and progressive movements, but was increasingly taken up by conservative and reactionary politicians. Nationalism came to stand for social cohesion, order and stability, particularly in the face of the

growing challenge of Socialism, which embodied the ideas of social revolution and international working class solidarity. Nationalism sought to integrate the increasingly powerful working class into the 'nation' and so preserve the established social structure. Patriotic fervour was no longer raised by the prospect of political liberty or democracy, but by the commemoration of past national glories and military victories. Such nationalism became increasingly chauvinistic and xenophobic. Each nation claimed its own unique or superior qualities, while other nations were regarded as alien, untrustworthy, and even menacing. This new climate of popular nationalism helped to fuel policies of colonial expansion which intensified dramatically in the 1870s and 1880s and which, by the end of the century, brought most of the world's population under European control."

From the above explanation given by Heywood regarding the changing nature of nationalism, one can say that in due course of time nationalism had encouraged in the expansion of colonialism by the end of nineteenth century throughout the globe. While this process of colonial expansion was taking place, the colonial powers were highly influenced by their past national glories and military victories that developed among them a sense of superiority complex and they have started to view others as inferior races who needs the supervision of superior races. In other words, nationalism has helped in the growth and expansion of colonialism across the nations. Apart from a vital factor of colonial expansion, nationalism impacted a lot in the occurrence of several revolutions in the World that aimed at the realization of democratic ideals of liberty, equality, freedom and fraternity. In short, in the western context, nationalism had played a pivotal role in the process of nation-building sometimes with the help of colonial forces as well as with the emergence of the democratic revolutions at different parts of the West.

Viewing the Growth of Feminism in the Western Scenario

The growth of nationalism in the West is also accompanied by several other developments among which the rise of several women movements that later on assumed the character of feminism was a notable one. The categorization of women as the second sex is a universal phenomenon which reveals the fact that the process of women subjugation is prevalent in all the societies of the World without the distinction of West, East, North and South. An analysis of the views of Aristotle and Jean Jack Rousseau, prominent philosophers of West, reflect the attitude of most of the men of that period towards women. Aristotle in his work Politics considered male as superior and female as inferior between sexes. On the other hand, Rousseau in his book Emile had suggested different roles to both men and women on the basis of their gender where women were entrusted with more feminine responsibilities like child bearing, child rearing, duties towards the husband and the family and so on. In his classic of educational philosophy, Emile, he considered rationality as the most important goal of education for boys but not for girls. For him, "men should be educated in virtues such as courage, temperance, justice, and fortitude, whereas women should be educated in virtues such as patience, docility, good humor, and flexibility." This gives an account of the condition of women enjoyed in the Western context where they were not regarded as equals rather inferior positions were conferred upon them. Their involvement in the public arena was seen as an

act of unwanted encroachment and they were often equated with private property. They were supposed to play their roles inside the boundary set up by the family laws. Labeling of some virtues as feminine and others as masculine and the imposition of certain roles on women on the basis of those virtues were acts performed by the agents of a patriarchal structure. The need to initiate some positive changes for the liberty of women and to establish an egalitarian society arose due to such an unhealthy condition. Before gaining popularity as a movement and an ideology since nineteenth century, feminist views have got expression in the influential works of Christine de Pisan's *Book of the City of Ladies* (1405), Olympe de Gouges's *The Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen* (1791) and Marry Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792). Among these works, the works of Gouges and Wollstonecraft dealt with the issue of women's equality against the backdrop of French Revolution. After the stage was decorated by the influential writings of several prominent thinkers who belonged to the period of early feminism that has drawn attention towards women rights and liberties, the responsibility to carry forward the trend was undertaken by the persons like John Stuart Mill, Harriet Taylor, Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony and Lucy Stone with their supportive stand in regard to the political rights of women. They provided an organizational character to the various movements centered on the issue of women suffrage with the formation of Equal Rights Association (1866), National Woman Suffrage Association (1869) and American Woman Suffrage Association (1869). Eventually both the National Woman Suffrage Association and American Woman Suffrage Association merged into the National American Woman Suffrage Association in the year 1890 that primarily dealt with the issue of voting rights of women. The first wave feminism that arose in the nineteenth century Europe is characterized by their fight for legal and political rights for women as they were being denied to enjoy such rights. Patriarchal nature of the society was mainly responsible for such denial of equality. After the attainment of their demand for women suffrage almost in all the societies of the World first started from New Zealand in the year 1893, South Australia in the year 1894, Finland in the year 1906, Switzerland in the year 1917, America in the year 1920 and so on. The overall growth of feminism can be categorized into three waves. The supporters of first wave feminism, occurring in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, believed that by winning political and legal rights complete emancipation of women would be possible so they have focused upon the attainment of equality for women at the public domain. The second wave of feminism, emerged during 1960's to 1980's, has regenerated the issue of women's movement and bestowed more emphasis upon the changes in the social sphere which is largely controlled by the private domain. The third wave of feminism, begun its journey since the early 1990's to till date, has broaden the scope of feminist activities with the inclusion of elements like class, caste, gender and so on. Development of several forms of feminism in the name of Black feminism, eco-feminism, third world feminism, post colonial feminism etc. have been taking place within this broader scope of third wave of feminism. Despite these three waves of feminism, based on their values, beliefs and outlook towards the power-relation of the society, the various feminist strands can be represented as liberal feminism, socialist feminism, radical feminism and post-feminism. Among them, the post-feminist strand

encompasses various forms of feminism that have been highlighting the presence of several other factors while discussing the cause of women exploitation and emancipation for example psychoanalytical feminism, third world feminism, eco feminism and so on. The liberal feminism viewed the discrimination of women in the academy, the forum and the marketplace due to the social belief that women are by nature less capable of men both intellectually and physically is unfair. For them women should have equal chance of excellence in the public sphere as the men do. They are in favour of making the rules of the game fair as well as to make equal distribution of society's goods and services among the runners of the race. The radical feminist viewed patriarchy as a system which is characterized by power, hierarchy, dominance and competition. According to them, for women's liberation legal, political, social as well as cultural institutions and structures which rest upon the values of patriarchal system need to be uprooted. The social feminist linked women's oppression with the system of private property. They advocated the replacement of capitalism with socialism where women would enjoy equal share in the process of production and distribution. They believed that it would help women to fight back for their cause. The post-feminist strand deals with the various other issues like colour, environment and so on that are linked with the cause of women's oppression and continue the fight in various dimensions.

Conclusion

Thus, in the conclusion it is observed that the journey of nationalism in the west traces its origin since the eighteenth century. Various revolutionary tendencies and the emerging democratic ideals of that period influenced the process of development of this doctrine. The most prominent among them is the French Revolution. Earlier it was associated primarily with the progressive and liberal movements but later on influenced by the conservative and reactionary politicians. It has slightly brought changes into the nature of the doctrine. It has also influenced largely the process of colonial expansion across the globe. Moreover, the manifestation of various movements that believes in the realization of democratic ideals of liberty, equality, freedom and fraternity took place due to the impact of nationalism upon them. The doctrine of nationalism has paved the way for the growth of feminism by creating the sense of awareness among the conscious women section of the west. The institute of patriarchy is largely challenged by the believer of the feminist ideology as they regard it as a medium of women exploitation and suppression. In the course of its development in the western context the ideology of feminism assumes different versions in the name of liberal feminism, social feminism, Marxist feminism, radical feminism, black feminism, eco-feminism and others.

References

1. Anderson Benedict, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso, New York, 2006
2. Grosby Steven, *Nationalism: A very short introduction*, Oxford university press, New Delhi, 2006

3. Heywood Andrew, Political Ideologies: An Introduction, Macmillan Education Ltd.,1992
4. Jayawardena Kumari, Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World, Zed Books, London, 1986
5. JayalNirja Gopal & Mehta PratapBhanu(ed.),the oxford companion to politics in India,Oxford University Press,2017
6. Tong Rosemarie, Feminist Thought, Westview press,Philadelphia,2009