



The rise of Indian nationalism in the 19th and early 20th centuries was not a sudden or isolated phenomenon. It was the cumulative result of a range of **social, economic, and political developments** brought about under colonial rule. While political causes like racial discrimination and administrative injustice are often highlighted, the **social and economic basis** of Indian nationalism laid the foundational framework upon which a collective Indian identity and consciousness emerged.

Social Basis of Indian Nationalism

1. Impact of Western Education and Modern Ideas

The introduction of English education and Western liberal thought under British rule produced a new class of Indians—the educated middle class—who were exposed to the ideas of **liberty, equality, justice, and nationalism**. Thinkers like Rousseau, Locke, and Bentham shaped their worldview.

Example: Leaders like Dadabhai Naoroji, Surendranath Banerjee, and Gopal Krishna Gokhale were products of this modern education and went on to lay the intellectual groundwork for the national movement.

2. Role of the Press and Literature

The growth of vernacular and English-language newspapers and journals enabled political awakening. These publications disseminated ideas of nationalism and resistance against colonial policies.

Example: Journals like *Kesari* by Bal Gangadhar Tilak and *The Hindu* in the South played a pivotal role in generating national awareness.

3. Socio-Religious Reform Movements

Reform movements like the **Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj, Ramakrishna Mission**, and



Aligarh Movement aimed at purifying religion, eradicating social evils, and creating a sense of pride in India's cultural heritage. These movements fostered **social unity** and **cultural nationalism**, which gradually evolved into political nationalism.

Example: Swami Vivekananda's speeches emphasized India's spiritual glory and instilled confidence among Indians to challenge colonial inferiority narratives.

4. **Pan-Indian Identity and Communication**

Social changes led to the emergence of a pan-Indian identity. The increased mobility due to railways and telegraphs allowed people from different regions to interact, weakening parochial loyalties and strengthening national bonds.

Example: The establishment of organizations like the Indian National Congress (1885) was possible because people from diverse backgrounds began to see themselves as part of a broader Indian nation.

Economic Basis of Indian Nationalism

1. **Exploitation Under Colonial Economic Policies**

British economic policies were designed to benefit the British economy at the expense of India's. Deindustrialization, destruction of traditional handicrafts, and the shift to a raw material supplier economy caused widespread economic distress.

Example: The ruin of the textile industry in Bengal and Maharashtra, and the flooding of Indian markets with British goods, led to rising unemployment and resentment.

2. **Drain of Wealth Theory**

Dadabhai Naoroji's seminal theory of the "Drain of Wealth" argued that India was being impoverished through systematic economic exploitation. This theory became a rallying point for nationalist agitation.

Example: In his book *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India*, Naoroji calculated how colonial



practices such as excessive taxation and profits repatriation drained Indian resources to Britain.

3. Peasant and Rural Distress

Heavy taxation, land revenue systems like **Zamindari** and **Ryotwari**, and lack of agricultural investment led to rural impoverishment and frequent famines.

Example: Famines such as the **Great Famine of 1876-78** killed millions, and British apathy generated strong discontent against the regime.

4. Rise of the Indian Capitalist Class

With the rise of indigenous industrialists, a new class of Indian entrepreneurs began to support nationalist demands, hoping for economic policies that favored Indian industries.

Example: Industrialists like Jamsetji Tata and G.D. Birla were early supporters of the Swadeshi movement, which aligned with their interest in protecting native industry.

5. Unemployment and Growth of the Urban Middle Class

The mismatch between the number of educated youth and the availability of employment created frustration. This urban middle class became vocal critics of British policies and emerged as the backbone of the nationalist movement.

Example: The Ilbert Bill controversy (1883) saw mass urban protests led by this class, contributing to the formation of the Indian National Congress.

Synthesis: Nationalism as a Product of Colonial Modernity

The **social and economic awakening** under colonial rule produced a class of Indians who were aware of their exploitation and equipped with the tools to challenge it. The Indian nationalist movement drew strength from the **discontent of peasants and workers**, the



frustration of the educated middle class, and the **cultural pride** fostered by reform movements.

Economic hardship acted as a **material foundation**, while social reforms provided the **ideological consciousness** needed to articulate the idea of a nation. The convergence of both gave birth to Indian nationalism—not merely as a political protest, but as a mass awakening against foreign domination.

Conclusion

The rise of Indian nationalism cannot be attributed to a single factor. It was the outcome of a **complex interplay between social transformation and economic distress**. British colonialism, while seeking to dominate, inadvertently laid the foundation for its own resistance. The **exposure to modern education, the print revolution, social reform, and economic exploitation** coalesced into a potent force that eventually led India on the path of freedom. Understanding these underlying bases is crucial to comprehending the true depth and character of the Indian national movement.