



Original Article

Changing Perspectives of the Indian National Movement 1857–1947: An Analysis of the Official School Post-Independence Government of India Viewpoint

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Abstract

This study critically examines the Official School's perspective on the Indian National Movement, specifically through the lens of the state-conducted writings on it by the tardy Chand in the post-Independence era. While they acknowledge that colonial exploitation was part of India's history, this Official School account also claims that British colonialism helped to create a politically aware public due to its school systems and subsequent legal reforms, thus leading to greater awareness of political issues amongst Indian sensibilities/activities. The Official School focuses on the political evolution that occurred during British colonial times and therefore puts elite constitutional leaders and moderates at the heart of the Indian freedom struggle. The research applies a qualitative, interpretative historiographical method, and it is done through the analysis of government publications, archival sources, and political writings alongside the scholarly critiques from Marxist, Subaltern, and postcolonial perspectives. The study highlights how the Official School overlooks critical dimensions such as imperial economic exploitation, revolutionary movements, class-based struggles, and colonial strategies of communal division. These omissions reveal an ideological tendency that aligns post-Independence historiography with state priorities, promoting a unified and moderate representation of nationalism. The findings suggest that the Official School functions not merely as historical writing, but as a selective construction of nationalist memory that legitimizes elite leadership while marginalising popular, radical, and socially diverse forms of resistance. A more inclusive understanding of the freedom struggle requires recognising these neglected voices and interpreting nationalism beyond state-approved narratives.

Keywords: Colonialism, Historiography, Indian National Movement, Official School, Post-Independence Narrative, Revolutionary Movements, Tara Chand

Introduction

India's freedom struggle has been seen through various ideological lenses, each one trying to justify how a politically fragmented and socially diverse civilization managed to create a common national consciousness. Among these interpretations, the Official School of Indian Nationalism led by Dr. Tara Chand has played a major role in shaping post-Independence historiography. Dr. Tara Chand's multi-volume work, which was commissioned and published by the Government of India, provided a narrative that situated the birth of nationalism primarily in the political consequences of British rule. This view claimed that the disruption of the Indian traditional social order by the modern political ideas, administrative structures and liberal reforms introduced by the colonial rulers was the factor that contributed to the awakening of India as a nation.

The Official School regarded the colonial presence as a contradictory but constructive force one that simultaneously harmed the Indian social fabric yet stimulated movements of reform, intellectual regeneration, and political unity. This view emphasizes that British modernism acted as a catalyst, provoking Indians to rediscover the cultural roots of their civilization and ultimately mobilize for political liberation.

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Within this framework, the rise of the Indian National Congress is interpreted less as a revolutionary step and more as a product of political education and constitutional agitation inspired by Western influences. The early nationalism, in this narrative, appears cautious, urban-based, elite-driven, and initially dependent on the goodwill of the colonial administrators.

This official interpretation yet has come up for thoroughgoing academic criticism. The critics claim that this story fails to highlight the exploitative nature of colonial power, and the part of peasantry and the working-class in the struggle is relegated, revolutionary and militant aspects of nationalism are current, and that the economic motives behind the imperial policy are only partly accounted for. Besides, according to the official narrative, communal strife is presented merely as a social consequence that is unfortunate, rather than being considered as part of imperial strategy. Such silences and omissions actually compel to re-read Tara Chand especially from the point of view of discussing his argument not merely for opposing but also for locating it in a larger historiographical debate. Therefore, it is very important that one engages critically with the Official School if one wants to see how the memory of nationalism, and thus the legacy of India's freedom movement, was shaped by the post-Independence government. This paper intends to revisit the Official School narrative and evaluate its relevance in the broader discourse on Indian historiography by uncovering the ideological biases, interpretative gaps, and the selective use of historical evidence employed in the process.

Critical Review of Literature

The historiography of the Indian national movement has developed through various ideological frameworks, mirroring the political and intellectual atmosphere of the time. The Official School, which is best exemplified by Dr. Tara Chand, regards the birth of Indian nationalism as primarily the product of the British-created political framework. In the colonial context, the Official School sees colonial rule as both a disruptive and a constructive phenomenon weakening the old socio-religious institutions while at the same time awakening the modern political consciousness. Chand argues that British imposition of new administrative, judicial, and educational systems created a national awakening and made it possible for the Indian National Congress to emerge.

Although the Official School presents a comprehensive account of political changes, its main critics often point to the fact that it has assigned too little weight to the economic aspect of the process. Marxist historians like Bipan Chandra and R. Palme Dutt, for instance, have put forth the view that Indian nationalism was not only the result of political modernization but also of the contradictions arising from colonial capitalism, decline of traditional industries, and outflow of wealth. The trend described here stands at the point where nationalism is viewed as a reaction to material deprivation and class oppression that come, rather than to the liberal ideals of the West. These historians assert that colonialism was first and foremost an economic venture and that one cannot comprehend the freedom struggle without

taking into account the ways in which imperialism subdued Indian markets and labour.

Simultaneously, a new India was taking shape and on the basis of the individuality and continuity of Indian culture the structure of national unity was being built. While before 1850, by and large, cultural integration accompanied by political isolationism had characterized Indian history, after 1850, cultural harmony was sought to be strengthened to effect a permanent and organic political integration. In the beginning, the national movement was "weak and unsure of itself"; it only affected the middle class; it spoke in many voices and it failed to distinguish between political, cultural and religious interests and objectives. It clung to the coat-tails of the British Empire. Thus, the Indian National Congress formed by Hume and others in 1885 was, for nearly decades, largely a pressure group which sought influence rather than control the government on two to in- behalf of the special interests of its members. "Its outlook", wrote two historians, "was urban rather than rural, it had no organic connection with peasants, labourers, or country traders. The great majority of those who attended the Congress were lawyers, teachers or journalists, that is to say, they belonged to the three new professions which had grown up under British rule; a few Englishmen Scotsmen gave substantial help in the early stages: or the procedure was modelled on English practice; and the movement may justly be described as an attempt to influence the Government within the existing constitution, Until the 1920s, the urban, professional intelligent- sia which dominated the Indian National Congress had little communication with the masses of the country. The nationalist movement itself arose first in those areas where the Western impact was greatest: Bengal, Madras, the Punjab, and Maharashtra. The early Congress conferences were held in urban centres: Poona, Calcutta, Bombay Karachi, Delhi and Madras. British influence, wittingly or unwittingly, provided the impetus for a truly nation- list movement. The unification of India by the British had facilitated the growth of a feeling of being "Indian." British higher education not only introduced Western liberal ideas and led to the emergence of professional classes, but also provided the language English by the educated elites of various parts of the where- country could communicate with one another. In the early days of the national movement, there had been some mass participa- tion, but it was largely confined to Bengal, which in 1905 in spite of the uproar of the Bengal population was partitioned by the British. The nationalist movement did not become nation-wide, however, until the 1920s when Gandhi successfully fused religious notions and political objectives and rallied the women and the villagers behind him.

In the early phase of the national movement, its leaders, lacking political experience, accepted the British government's assurances and promises of reform at face value. They failed to recognize that the interests of the colonial rulers were fundamentally opposed to the aspirations of the Indian people. As a result, the Congress, which was supposed to express the national will, appeared uncertain in its goals and imitative in its methods, achieving little in terms of real political progress.



Meanwhile, the suffering of the masses continued to increase, and the growing middle class became more aware of the ineffectiveness of the methods used so far. They began to prepare for a more decisive struggle against colonial rule, though they were unsure of the strategies to adopt. This rising consciousness was reflected in religious and social reform movements, as well as in the renaissance of literature and art, all of which expressed the emerging spirit of nationalism.

The British rulers never recognised India as one country or one nation. London ruled the roost in world politics and the last quarters of the 19th century witnessed unprecedented resurgence of imperialism. While the white part of the British Empire was graduating to dominion status (Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa) which implied a great deal of quality with the mother country, the coloured areas, particularly India was treated as chewers of wood and drawers of water, as cannon fodder, and as producers of the raw materials required for Britain's industrial prosperity and imperialist grandeur. Curzon symbolized the British arrogance and brazenness at its height and his imperial pretensions the partition of Bengal and his convocation address to graduates of Calcutta University 1902 4invoked the inevitable reaction and ushered in the era of nationalism. Militant With the advent of the 20th century, the freedom movement entered upon a new stage because now the consciousness of unity amongst the Indian people developed into the political awareness of a common destiny. British rulers got alarmed at this development. imperial interests demanded plain refusal and The Their non- recognition of India's claim to nationhood. Till almost the end of the imperialist era in India and as a consequence of the second world War, the recession of imperialism of the European states and the replacement of the influence of the competing European nations by the two super powers, the USA and the USSR, the leading statesmen of Britain continued to deny the possibility of self-determination to the countries under their yoke.

The problem of identity and of difference among the inhabitants of India and the imperialist masters arose in the last half of the 18th century, after the British had conquered Bengal and established the administration which made a distinction between the white rulers and their brown subjects. The rulers assumed superior authority, monopolized higher posts and excluded the subjects from the exercise of policy-making rights and all positions of influence. The conquered bemoaned their inferiority in status and began devising plans to recover equality with the conquerors. Among the conquered two schools of thought arose. One advocated the use of force to get rid of the foreign rulers among them were several groups 1 revivalists, revolutionaries, terrorists and others.⁵ The other school believed in methods of peaceful constitutional agitation, of exercising political pressure, of organised opposition. These schools occupied the stage till the end of the First World War and the inauguration of Gandhi's movement of non-violent non-co-operation. The movement grew in intensity and acquired unprecedented popularity.⁶ It became a powerful instrument of forcing people's will. This contributed to the 3- later British conviction that as a

result of the losses suffered during the Second World War, they were no longer capable of maintaining their empire over the unwilling subjects. The treatment of the communal dimensions of Indian politics by the Official School of thought is based on the premise that India had two cultural traditions based on two different religions. One was cultivated by the Hindus who were in a majority and the other by the Muslims. But the two cultures were influencing each other coalescing.⁷ According to Tarachand, the freedom and movement in India is a unique phenomenon. There is hardly any other country, so vast in area, inhabited by such a variety of races, following such different religions, speaking so many languages, professing such diversity of customs, which has developed in the course of a hundred years the consciousness of national unity, constituting the basis of freedom. Not till the middle of the nineteenth century did the concept of political unity arise among the Indians. However, it has to be remembered that unifying forces had been at work throughout the long history previous to the appearance of the British in India. In the ancient times the cultural outlook of the higher classes was identical, which affected also the attitude of the masses and brought about similarity in their way of thinking and feeling. The Muslim conquest introduced a heterogeneous element Indian life an unassimilable religion and a language. The Muslim conquerors were, however, in foreign not to religious fanatics and they soon adapted themselves Indian conditions. ⁸Their policy of using Persian language as the medium for state purposes was modified, for they patronised Indian languages and evolved Urdu as the language of literary expression and common use. ⁹ The geographical environment of both the Hindu and the Islamic cultures and the physical conditions in which they flourished were identical for both. The isolation of the country from the other lands promoted a similarity of outlook. The Muslims learnt to use Indian languages and to practise modes of life which were common. Till middle of the 19th century, the vast multitude of Indian people was steeped in medievalism. Politics of the modern conception were only known to a microscopic minority of the western-educated class. Hence, the revolutionary movements of the first half of the 19th century were feudal in character. They contemplated no change in the system of government or social order. After 1858, politicisation of the Indian mind began in a milieu which was dominated by religious slogans and guided by sectarian beliefs and customs. The policy of the British rulers was to accentuate the biases of their subjects so as widen their differences. In fact, they acted on to the principle that consolidation of the Indian people into a single nation was against the imperial interest, and, therefore, it was their policy to encourage the growth of diverse group consciousnesses which could be played against one another. The disparities between various groups were emphasized and their complaints, just and un- just, used to create suspicion and distrust among the communities¹⁰.In the revolt of 1857-58 the Muslims were regarded as the enemies of the British Raj. But within a short time, they were absolved of the accusation and then the Hindus began to be suspect.¹¹



After 1858, Muslims of the upper classes realised that their anti-British stance was a mistake and that the only profitable course was to adopt western ways and remain loyal to the British connection. The lower classes Muslims under the guidance of their Ulema, however, of continued, their hostility towards the rulers, but the lower classes did not command the influence which the upper-class did. So the upper class continued to gain the favours of the Government. So far as the Hindus were concerned, their growing sense of solidarity was considered dangerous to British supremacy. Differences between Brahmins and non-Brahmins, upper castes and depressed classes, were exploited, as also the rivalry between Hindus and Muslims. In the circumstances, the struggle for and self-government was an endeavour to bridge the gulf which divided the communities and the castes, for it was realised that only a united India could claim the right of self-determination. The history of India since the middle of the nineteenth century is the story of the attempt at political unification of communities, Hindu and Muslim, and of castes, higher and lower. The favourable factors were the development of a dynamic economic system which modified the old static class groupism and gave rise rationalisation of social conditions. A part of the economy of India was brought into the circle of modern conditions, which necessitated the growth of nationalism, economic and political. Other factors were the establishment of a modern system of government and of education. The unfavourable factors were the persistence of medieval notions of religion, social order and customs. They were encouraged by the selfish interests of the British Government. Conflict between the favourable and the unfavourable factors continued throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The unfavourable factors are deep-rooted and ancient; the favourable factors are modern and of recent origin. The spirit of nationalism is of recent growth. Ram Mohan Roy was the first Indian to apply it to social as well as political institutions.¹³ In politics it made appearance on the national scale in 1885. But with turn of the century, it made rapid strides and from 1919 it flooded the land. The movement of resurgence began in earnest after the partition of Bengal in 1905. Its first fruit was the Morley-Minto Scheme of reforms of 1909. The reforms were a clever device to defeat the movement. They were based on the recognition of the separate identity of the Muslim community and laid the foundations of communal division in Indian political affairs. Ten years later, i.e. in 1919, the principle of separation was repeated in the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms. The two Acts confirmed the vicious theory of two nations which was the basis of British convictions. This was further elaborated in MacDonald's Award after the second Round Table Conference. A number of new claimants for special treatment were added to the two groups, such as the Depressed Classes, the Sikhs and the Indian feudal states. The question of self-determination was left to the hazards of reconciliation of the antagonistic parties. However, the Second World War intervened.¹⁵ It marked the end to both. He had also realised that Pax Britannia had failed to solve the economic problems, that the peasantry was ravaged by famine and despair, that the then Government was

dangerously out of touch with the people, that there was no recognised channel of communication between the rulers and the ruled, and no constitutional means of keeping the Government informed of Indian needs and opinion. In 1872, he had warned Northbrook of the paralysis that was coming over the British dominion. He wrote: "Your Lordship can probably hardly realise the instability of our rule.... I am strongly impressed with the conviction that the fate of the empire is trembling in the balance and that at any moment, some tiny scarcely noticed cloud may grow and spread over the land storm raining down anarchy and devastation. In the seventies, there was a good deal of distress and dissatisfaction in India, and as Secretary to the Government, Hume received information which persuaded him that the situation was alarming. He says, "the evidence that convinced me, at the time (about fifteen months, I think, before Lord Lytton left) that we were in imminent danger of a terrible outbreak, was this. I was shown seven large volumes.... containing a vast number of entries... all going to show that these poor men of the lowest classes were persuaded with a sense of the hopelessness of the existing state of affairs, that they were convinced that they would starve and die, and that they would do something.... They were going to do something and stand by each other, and that something meant violence. The Deccan riots bore testimony to his warning and forebodings. Naturally, in order to avert a disaster, Hume felt that counter-measures were essential, namely, the organisation of a national movement with three objects: "First the fusion into one national whole of all the different elements that constitute the population of India: second, the gradual regeneration along all lines, spiritual, moral, social and political, of the nation thus evolved; and third, the consolidation of the union between England and India, by securing the modification of such of its conditions as may be unjust or injurious."

As Indian leaders across the country were moving toward forming a national political platform, A.O. Hume's support helped speed up the creation of the Indian National Congress in 1885. Though its demands were expressed politely, they aimed at significant constitutional reform from the very beginning. The Congress asked for more elected representatives, wider legislative powers, and a shift from an unaccountable government to one that listened to the people. Although led by the educated middle class, the Congress raised issues affecting all sections of society. It spoke for peasants by demanding fair land revenue and protesting forest and salt laws. It also supported Indian business interests against harmful taxation and tariff policies, and highlighted the need for mass education, judicial reforms, and financial fairness. Thus, despite having neither wealth nor power, it represented emerging national aspirations and became a symbol of a new political awakening.

The rise of the Congress alarmed feudal elites but gradually attracted business communities and common people, who saw in it a defender of their interests. Foreign observers, too, recognised its growing significance, warning the British government not to underestimate its potential. It is like the two hand-writings on the walls of Belshazar's



palace." Samuel Smith, another Member of Parliament on a visit to India, echoes Slagg's words "The time has come for an extension of the political rights of the natives and a larger introduction of the best of them into the administration of the 3 countries." As for the government, Dufferin reacted sharply to the Congress demands. He called Hume "a mischievous busybody" and the Congress as "this little clique". He confessed to the Secretary of State Cross"... moreover you must understand that it is not merely the Bengalee Baboos who are raising all this clamour, but it is all educated India, inclusive of the Mohammadans, that are anxious to be more freely consulted in the management of their domestic affairs. "But he was emphatic in keeping British authority supreme. He said: "Of course, I entirely agree with you that what really secures the welfare of the Indian people is English justice and English administrative efficiency, and that the ascendancy of both these elements must, under any circumstances, be maintained absolute and pre-eminent." He showered on the Indian National Congress such bouquets and brickbats as "childish", "Eton and Harrow Debating Society", "hysterical assembly, in which the more violent and silly of their members rule the roost", "Babu Parliament", "supported by a microscopic minority".³ Curzon waited and hoped for the death of the Congress. He said: "My own belief is that Congress is tottering to its fall, and one of my great ambitions while in India is to assist it to a peaceful demise." The imperialistic theories of the conservatives continued to govern the British policies in relation to the Indian problem. They never thought of leaving India which, in Curzon's phrase, was "by far the greatest and most valuable of all the customers we have".² The Liberals in whom Gokhale reposed great trust swore by the principle of trusteeship which seemed to entrust the British people with the fate of all the backward peoples of the world.³ In 1912, the liberal Secretary of State Crewe told the House of Lords that the Government had no intention even to introduce federal homerule in India.⁴ It was in 1919 that Asquith admitted the need for "a different angle of vision"⁵ towards India and this produced the Government of India Act in 1919. This was followed by an ugly exhibition of imperialist arrogance and repression amid the Rowlatt Act and the Jallianwala Bagh. The Liberals' India policy had obviously failed. Dr Tarachand blissfully ignores the impact of the Bolshevik Revolution on the colonial world, in his History of Freedom Movement. He only refers to the damaging effect of the war of 1914-18 on the British economy²⁷ and to resulting disorganization of the world economy.¹ The This generated social discontent, the rise of fascism and the economic crisis of 1929-32. The Baldwin Era (1924-39) witnessed the gradual push of the world towards the second world war. Britain's India policy in 1929-39 is described as one that lacked "statesmanship", and "initiative and direction". Montague's declaration of August 1917 was vague. The British Raj appeared to be "like a man who has fallen off a ladder on the neck of an elephant, and doesn't know what to do or how to get down."² The Indian leaders had been provoked to anger by the British wooden-headed repression. The Labour Government of 1924 showed little anxiety to conciliate India: indeed,

they were more eager to prove their "fitness to govern the Empire" than to conciliate India." The Simon Commission comprising of seven Englishmen was hardly designed to resolve the Indian deadlock. It was boycotted by the Indians. The pressure of events compelled Lord Irwin to declare that the ultimate goal of Indian political aspirations was the realization of Dominion status and that after the Simon Commission Report had been published, a Round Table conference (RTC) would be held to afford an opportunity Indian opinion for full expression. Even this caused an uproar in the House of Commons where all parties joined in ruling out Dominion Status for India. In view of this Irwin backed out of his declaration and on 15 January, 1930 declared that the assertion of a goal was wholly different from its attainment.

The RTC met in November 1930. It was foredoomed failure, as London was more interested in hearing to the tall claims of the minorities, and the native princes, than in hearkening to India's call for freedom. The British ruling classes believed that it was diversity not nationality that was the basic fact of Indian life. They called the Indian nationalists "Babus" and the Babu was the "devil incarnate", without conscience, with a nimble mind and "crooked as sin", "mean-spirited, coward who sneaks through life doing mischief because he likes it".³ Churchill called Gandhi "the naked fakir who had the audacity to negotiate on equal terms with the viceroy of the mighty British Empire". King George V refused to shake hands with Gandhi when he visited the Buckingham Palace on the occasion of RTC. The Labour Party's attitude in 1924-42 was not sympathetic. According to Professor Laski (private Secretary of Lord Sankey), Sir Samuel Hoare and the Muslim delegates had wrecked the RTC. But even Attlee was then not willing to abandon the liberal concept of trusteeship. The failure of the RTC was followed by the retrograde Government of India Act 1935 which was "unceremoniously rejected by living voice of India".¹ In 1937, the Congress decided to contest the elections in the provinces under the Act of 1937. They won the elections and formed provincial governments. These resigned in October 1939 on the ground that India had been dragged into the second world war without its consent. As Nehru put it, India refused to "come to the rescue of tottering imperialism". The British became alarmed and sought to win over Indian support. The Government chose Sir Stafford Cripps, a left-wing socialist and a friend of Nehru, to visit India and persuade the Congress leaders to cease opposition. But even at this critical stage of the war the British Government was more interested in imperial economic unity and defence than the situation in India. Churchill, the Prime Minister, declared, "I have not become King's First Minister in order to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire." The Labour published an interim report on the problems of war the Party and peace reconstruction under the title "The Old War and the New Society" which was endorsed at the London Conference in 1942. Concerning it GDH Cole says: "About India too, the Report was completely vague, half supporting the view that self-government, in any full sense, must wait an agreement between the several parties in India, though it added that 'it



is also the duty of the British Government to take every possible step to promote that agreement.¹ There was no endorsement of the Indian claim to full independence or that of any other country falling within the British Empire. In the background of such opinion the offer of Cripps for self-government after the war was bound to look ² suspicious. The Quit India campaign of 1942 naturally followed. But the results of the war made it plain that the ideas of imperialism or trusteeship had become otiose, Britain had at long last realised that it was neither possible nor profitable to retain political domination in India. War had seriously eroded its capability in men and money to sustain by force the empire. With economic and military power in a shambles, and workers and funds required urgently at home to efface the ravages of war and reconstruct the industry, it was bound to be an expensive, if not a suicidal, adventure to follow the advice of Churchill, especially when its closest ally, the United States of America, was definitely unsympathetic and its great rival, the USSR was likely obstructions. The British Empire in India had been sustained by the British control of the seas.³¹ But the war had shattered the supremacy of the British navy and with the States naval power ruling the waves, Britain's United pillar of imperialism had crumbled. It was also clear that for the preservation and security of British interests finance, investment and trade, it was no longer advisable or necessary to maintain political domination. Dependent India could not suddenly discontinue an in- the economic relations established for many years. Any interference with them which affected trade or industry was sure to react adversely on the Indian economy. India's national self-interest was sufficient guarantee for the safeguard of British trade and finance. Considerations like these, as also the impact of the rise of national democratic forces in all the countries under foreign rule and possibly some regard for solemn commitments made by the highest British authorities' compelled the Labour Government under Attlee to face the inevitable. He decided to send a Cabinet Mission to India to devise ways and means of transferring power. ¹ A new Viceroy, Lord Mountbatten, was appointed in March 1947 to give effect to this policy in the shortest period of time (1) Independence should be immediately conceded; and (2) the country should be partitioned and two independent states created in order to fulfil the demand of the minority. The leaders of the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League concurred. Parliament quickly passed the Indian Independence Act. On midnight August 15, 1947, the Act came into operation, Britain had relinquished its authority over the Indian sub-continent, and two sovereign states India and Pakistan, were ushered into existence. The long and agonising struggle between India and Britain was at last ended. The British peacefully yielded the demand for independence, but did not change old stand on the character of Indian society. The country there was partitioned to prove their theory. Unfortunately, the proof was written in the blood and tears of men.^{600,000} dead. 14,000,000 driven from their homes, 100,000 young girls kidnapped by both sides, forcibly converted sold on the auction block.⁷ India had won its India had paid the price. or freedom. and from 1900 to 1947 Britain had traversed a journey full of

vicissitudes. The years before the First World War had marked the zenith of British imperialism. Then the descent began. It was just perceptible in the twenties, but became manifest after the great depression of 1929. There was a recovery in the mid-thirties which, however, did not last long and foundered in the tidal flood of the Second Great War. Though the sun of Imperial glory had set, England's national honour was saved. The Official School's treatment of the economic consequences of the British rule in India is not only perfunctory but is also misleading. Tarachand blames the "historic political conditions" which prepared the moulds that shaped the structure and functioning of society. Nowhere has an attempt been made to analyse in depth the imperialist exploitation to which the Indian agriculture and industry had been subjected. On the contrary, as almost a spokesman of imperialism, he has softpedalled the whole issue. Witness his ill-conceived general conclusions about industrialization of India during British rule: ¹ the A general survey of the development of Indian industry in the first half of the twentieth century yields interesting conclusions which have a bearing upon the social and political movements of the times. The advance in industries was considerable during the fifty years of the twentieth century, although it was not commensurate with the growing needs of the country and was dangerously slow considering the urgency of expansion of avenues of employment for the increasing force of the rural unemployed. The Government was indifferent to the serious problem of unemployment in the rural areas and in the pursuit of imperial interests either negligent or hostile to the Indian industrial needs. When obliged to change its attitude its response was either tardy or inadequate. Yet, it was impossible for Indian economy to stand still. The new forces let loose affected Indian agriculture and induced a change from self-sufficiency in production towards commercialization. The ratio of non-food to food production which was 1:5 in 1893-94 increased to 112 in 1945-46. increase in the production of cotton, The instance, led to the setting up of gins and for presses, of wheat to flour mills, and so on.

The investment of foreign capital mainly British, in various industries was bound to produce its effects in stimulating India's desire to emulate. The gradual extension of railways, roads and means of communication broke up the isolation of medieval India and created a large internal market. They also pushed India into the world market and the development of foreign trade.⁸ There is a listless catalogue of views of other writers on the subject and enumeration of factors and policies which he holds to be responsible for the economic backwardness.

There is a listless catalogue of views of other writers on the subject and enumeration of factors and policies which he holds to be responsible for the economic backwardness of India during the British rule. But even a careful perusal of this dreary stuff does not touch the roots.

The Official School's attempt to explain the philosophical basis of the freedom movement remains weak. It tends to focus on individual leaders rather than the wider historical forces that shaped nationalism, and ignores the economic conditions that drove resistance. Although it



acknowledges the ideas of different leaders and their role in shaping public opinion, it reduces the movement to personal motivations and moral ideals. By describing the struggle mainly as a clash of values such as liberty, justice and secularism it overlooks how colonial exploitation and material hardships pushed the nation toward freedom. As a result, the philosophical portrayal appears attractive in language but shallow in understanding of the real forces behind the movement.

"The history of freedom movement is, therefore, not a simple narrative of the incidents which happened on the stage of politics, but an essay in understanding the rationale of the total process of social evolution both the emergence and propagation of new ideas, as also the clash of interests and forces ranged on the contending sides. The history has to be viewed in the background of world developments and of changing conditions in the United Kingdom and India. The vicissitudes of the movement were the result of the interaction of these three India, the United Kingdom and the world. ² His analysis of the sources of British Imperialist strength makes pathetic reading. Writing about Tilak, he has stated:

"He (Tilak) knew that the structure of the Raj was erected on two pillars force of armed might or fear, and the psychological superiority consciousness or prestige." ³⁴ The strength of the British empire evidently rested on its economic resources which in turn were based on the economic exploitation they carried on in India and other colonies. He also accuses Tilak of having supported Hindu communalism, and insinuates that instead of directing his wrath against the British, he turned his guns against the Muslims ⁸ and organized the Hindus to gang up against the Muslims!

He dismisses the impact of Aurobindo on the Indian situation as "negligible"³ and he questions his disapproval of Gandhi's attitude towards the Khilafat question and his later acceptance of the Cripps's offer (1942). His states with approval the idea that Aurobindo had adopted the concept of superman from Bankim is not supported by any evidence. His general formulation that Aurobindo "regarded nationalism as the essence of the Hindu philosophy of self-realization" is also not correct. The official historian has obviously missed Aurobindo's interpretation of the Hindu philosophy. This represented only one phase in the evolution of Aurobindo's thought which eventually did not remain hedged in by any "national" frontier at all.

His treatment of Tagore also suffers from serious blemishes. He has nowhere shown the impact of the soviet experiment on Tagore's thinking and he has failed to relate Tagore's rejection of the fundamental doctrines of Hinduism, ascetic life, and the caste system, and Tagore's humanism to his reading of Lenin.

Tara Chand's portrayal of Gandhi hides several uncomfortable details. He repeats only the well-known story of the Chauri Chaura incident and leaves out what actually happened there. The police fired first at peasants, and in anger the crowd burnt the police station, killing the policemen inside. Three Congress volunteers Bhagwan Ahir, Rampati Chamar, and Abdullah Julaha were hanged

for the incident, yet neither Gandhi nor the Congress supported their families or even acknowledged them as martyrs.

By ignoring these facts, the official narrative presents Gandhi in a selective way. It fails to show that Gandhi's real worry was not violence alone, but that a growing peasant movement and class-based struggle could slip out of Congress control. He feared that if peasants and workers pushed their demands, the nature of the freedom movement would change. His response at Gorakhpur reflected this: instead of encouraging their hopes, he merely advised moral discipline no drinking, gambling, or other habits without promising them any change or relief.

Tarachand's treatment of Gandhi's non-violence is tirely prosaic and lacks depth expected of a professor of political philosophy at that great seat of learning the Allahabad University. Here again his approach is wholly pedestrian. Witness these observations: "But perhaps his most surprising concession to practical considerations was on Ahimsa and civil resistance. He recognized that life lived upon life was himsa, and concluded that killing was not himsa (violence) when life was destroyed for the sake of those whose life was taken. The examples were: (1) the destruction of the bodies of certain death; and (2) the putting an end to the life of a girl threatened violence which could not be avoided." with "In non-violence he discerned three degrees: (1) enlightened and pure; (2) expedient, adopted because of practical consideration as a policy and not as a principle;³ and (3) the passive of the coward. ⁴ In his last years he had begun to feel that a large number of his followers did not practise non-violence out of conviction, but either as an expedient or a substitute for violence which appeared impractical. He admitted that because of the unpreparedness of the people for non-violence, he was placing only a part of its programme before them.

Perhaps it would not be incorrect to state that Gandhi's insistence on non-violence as a means had little to do either with religion or ethics and was more a matter of a political choice governed by the reality of the scenario. Furthermore, Gandhi's non-violence Machiavellism put upside down. It is what has been called "Redeemed Machiavellism". For both, Indian is recently Gandhi and Machiavelli, what was important was force, action and effectiveness. Machiavelli in his Preface to the Prince said: "Men who are anxious to win the favour of a Prince nearly always follow the custom of presenting themselves to him with the possessions they value most, or with things they know especially please him; so, we often see Princes given horses, weapons, cloth of gold, precious stones, and similar ornaments worthy of their high position. Now, I am anxious to offer myself to Your Magnificence with some token of my devotion to you, and I have not found among my belongings anything as dear to me or that I value as much as my understanding of the deeds of a great man, won by me from a long acquaintance with his political campaigns and a continuous study of his contemporaries: these matters I have very diligently analysed and pondered for a long time, and now, having summarized them in a little book, I am sending them to Magnificence. Your "And although I consider this work unworthy to be put before you, yet I am fully confident that



you will be kind enough to accept it, seeing that I could not give you a more valuable gift than the means of being able in a very short space of time to grasp all that I, over so many years and with so much work, have learned and understood. I have not embellished or crammed this book with rounded periods of big, impressive words, or with any other charm or superfluous decoration of the kind which many are in the habit of using to describe or adorn what that have produced; for my ambition has been either that nothing should distinguish my book or that it should find favour solely through the variety of its contents and the seriousness of its subject-matter.

This Preface may be addressed with scarcely any modification to the new Prince (Gandhi), the Prince of Peace, who through Satyagraha would be able to replace the unhappy method of violence and fraud by that which he claims to be the weapon of Love and Truth. One is really struck by Tarachand's superficial analysis of such major issues as the Muslim Thought and Politics, Partition of Bengal, the Anti-Partition Agitation, Morley-Minto Reforms, the so-called Muslim Problem, and the Khilafat Movement. This is followed by a mechanical outline of the RTCs, the perfunctory analysis of the Government of India Act, 1935, and the events from 1937 to 1947 leading to partition and India's independence. Let us briefly see what the official historian has to say about the INA Trial. His research into this vitally important episode is confined to just 30 lines written in the style of a text book designed for matriculation students. He appears to have no knowledge of John Connell's great work: Auchinleck: A Biography of Field Marshal Sir Claude Auchinleck (London, 1959) or of the statesmanlike letter of Nehru to Auchinleck on the inadvisability of the INA trials or of W Russell's Indian Summer (Bombay, 1951) where the author states:

"It was strange and sad that Field-Marshal Auchinleck who loved India most fervently and who understood much of its psychology which was hidden from others, should in the evening of his notable career in India commit such a blunder as the staging of these trials at such a time and in such a place." It was expected of Tarachand at least to throw some light on the reasons why the British Government in 1945 soft-pedalled the issue. The facts were clear much before he wrote his history. Auchinleck and Wavell probably under-estimated the political fervour, and overestimated strength of the army. At the Editors' Standing Committee's the party to the Cabinet Mission, K. Rama Rao told Auchinleck that the trials would serve no useful purpose! for Congress, which was sure to return to office, would the re-lease the convicted persons. Rao then asked a straight question: why should the British hang any recognized patriot before leaving the country? The Commander-in-Chief replied: 'Wait and see. We military men deal in life and death, and we know what death is. We are much more humane in court-martial than your civilian judges.' Rao links this statement with the remission of sentences passed by the court-martial on INA prisoners.

The first INA trial began at the Red Fort on 5 November 1945 and was concluded on 31 December. Wavell recorded in his Journal on 24 November that

Auchinleck was worried about the INA trials. On 27 November, George Cunningham, Governor of the NWFP wrote to Wavell recommending cessation of the trials on political grounds, but to no effect. On 19 February, 1946, however, Wavell recorded in his Journal:¹ and finally the C-in-C, most gloomy of all, about the R.I.N. mutiny at Bomby and the trials: though he talked about sticking to our INA principles, he was really hoping hard that I would give a lead to recommend to HMG surrender to public opinion and total abandonment of INA trials. I refused to play and said we should stick it out.² Although in the biography, Nehru's letter to Auchinleck is dated 4 May 1946, on 30 April, Wavell recorded without any comments "I had a talk with the C-in-C. about new INA trials and a letter that he had received from Nehru about them". On 2 May, Wavell told Nehru "that the INA cases, about which he had written to the C-in-C, would be dropped, but asked him not to make public that he had written to the C-in-C, and sought to influence him. He promised not to do so." Wavell ends the entry in his Journal on 2 May by noting: "He (Nehru) was very friendly and is undoubtedly an attractive character."

It is really amazing that even though all the resources of the Government of India were at his disposal, Tarachand should have only managed to produce such a pedestrian account of the transfer of power to India. While Majumdar in his account magnifies the role of the "revolutionary movement" in the freedom struggle, Tarachand's standpoint is beautifully vague. In the first three volumes he had developed certain theories which are supposed to be Marxist, (Presumably to please the boss, 42. Nehru), and theories which are anti-Marxist, and in the 4th some volume (1972) facts are recited as drably as in a government port with occasional pronouncements. The facts are un-re-critically accepted. For instance, his statement that the plan which Lord Ismay carried to London had been shown to Nehru and Jinnah before being sent to London³ is wholly un-founded a most unfortunate and unpardonable error in an official histories. Even Pyarelal admits that "the plan had been discussed with the Congress leaders in general 3 terms only, its text had not been shown to them". Menon fully corroborates this.⁴ Professor Philips states: "Nehru had not seen the text of the plan taken by Ismay to London, and Interpretation can be honest only, if the facts chosen by the historian are at least correct. Tarachand is not wrong when he says: "Interpretation must undoubtedly be based upon facts which constitute the raw material historical narration, but the selection arrangement of facts and their evaluation of and depends upon the choice, judgment and interest of the historian. And no two historians ever agree in their choice of facts or in their approach to the problems of history. As pointed out by CH Carr, 'the belief in a hard core of historical facts existing objectively and independently of the interpretation of the historian is a preposterous falacy. There is much force in the warning of Charles A. Beard that 'history as it actually was, as distinguished ished, of course, from particular facts of history, is not known or knowable, no matter how zealously is pursued the ideal of the effort for objective truth.'⁵ But the whole question is what is to be done if the facts selected and arranged by the historians are



subjective, partial or biased? And it is here that Tarachand's official history is wholly misleading. Again, his claim that he has presented in these volumes a valid and consistent view of the exciting events..." is also unfounded. His official history is consistently inconsistent.

Research Gap

The Official School narrative, represented by Dr. Tara Chand, has not been studied closely through a critique despite an array of publications on the subject of India's national movement. The majority of the literature either takes for granted the state-sponsored interpretation or merely outlines its political aspects without questioning its neglect of economic exploitation, class fights, revolutionary movements, and colonial tactics of dividing communities. In the same way, the role of government ideology after Independence in the formation of this narrative is still mainly neglected. Hence, the Official School is still considered an authoritative reference, and not a selective construction influenced by political priorities. The current research fills this void by challenging the Official School to re-evaluate the narrative as the one that has been influenced by ideologies rather than just an account of nationalistic history.

Objectives of the Study

- The primary goal of this study is to analyze critically and evaluate the Official School view of the Indian national movement as it is depicted in the works of Dr. Tara Chand.
- This state-sponsored narrative that focuses on economic exploitation, communal politics, revolutionary activities, and class-based struggles will be the ground for identifying and analyzing the ideological biases and selective omissions.
- It will be the task of the researcher to assess the extent to which post-Independence government views influenced the writing of history, and how such narratives contributed to the public memory of nationalism.
- The Official School would be reinterpreted as not just a historical narrative but as an ideological construction molded by the political priorities of the post-Independence era.

Research Methodology

In the event of present-day research, its idea is primarily a dimension of the qualitative and interpretative historiographical method where the narrative of the Official School, as characterized by Dr. Tara Chand, is in the spotlight all through the study. Not the gathering of new empirical data, but rather the critical analysis of already existing historical writings, government-sponsored publications, political records, and speeches is how the research intends to perceive the story of the national movement as framed by the post-Independence authorities.

Marxist, Subaltern, and postcolonial historians' secondary sources play an important role in the identification of ideological preferences and selective omissions in the Official School's account. The study employs a comparative reading of different historiographical

approaches to examine the representation or minimization of themes like economic exploitation, communal division, revolutionary action, and class resistance.

Moreover, the research methodology is analytical and comparative with the aim of not only re-evaluating the Official School as history but also seeing it as a narrative influenced by the political priorities of the post-Independence government.

Discussion and Analysis

Dr. Tara Chand, the foremost figure of the Official School, is interpreting the Indian national movement in such a way that the British political modernity becomes a prerequisite and nationalism only a consequence of that. Admitting that the colonial rule was characterized by colonial exploitation, he talks about the Hindus as the "colonial subjects" who experienced the full thrust of the repressive system yet, at the same time, saw the system being slowly changed towards their favor which gave rise to the gradual development of the Indian nationalism. This he did through a long process starting with the introduction of the British rule and ending with an organized movement like the Indian national congress which led the Indian people to their final liberation. It was a close relationship with the British that formed the basis for the political awakening of the people and the latter's gradual aspiration for freedom through the medium of elite organizations like the Indian National Congress.

When one reads the subtext carefully, one starts to see how this whole pattern of thinking pushes into the background the case of economic exploitation as a major factor in the creation of political resistance. The representatives of the Official School cannot argue otherwise than that the main factor contributing to the coming of Indian nationalism was the political Modernity that was brought to India by the British. This is the exact opposite of what the Marxist historians like Bipan Chandra and R. Palme Dutt assert when they talk about the colonial capitalism, drain of wealth, industrial destruction, and peasant misery as the foundational causes of nationalism. The Official School deploys this economic factor as a motivator very mildly. Such a skewed representation gives insufficient comprehension on one hand of the reasons for the popular discontent to become more intense, and on the other hand of the politics that the middle-class leadership went through that were shaped by socio-economic changes rather than simply by political enlightenment.

In a parallel manner, the Official School gives an inadequate account of the revolutionary and mass-based struggles as an incomplete picture. By assuming constitutional methods and moderate politics as the superior ones, it considers militant nationalism and the grassroots movements as secondary or emotional responses, instead of being ideological alternatives. On the contrary, Subaltern scholars like Ranajit Guha point out that the participation of peasants, tribals, and workers in local rebellions and uprisings was autonomous, without any elite influence. This indicates that nationalism was not solely a top-down process from educated leadership downwards but also involved a



bottom-up growth through the experiences of economic oppression and imperial violence.

The Official School's treatment of communalism is another area where its limitations are revealed. Tara Chand links Hindu-Muslim clashes to medieval consciousness and social customs which have been inherited without analyzing how colonial policies made these divisions active and institutionalized. Historians like Ayesha Jalal and Mushirul Hasan maintain that separate electorates, communal representation, and selective patronage were deliberately employed by imperial authorities, turning communalism into a political strategy rather than an accidental occurrence of history. The non-consideration of this political aspect causes a watering-down of the understanding of how colonialism created the very divisions that eventually became the issues in nationalist politics.

So, the Official School seems not to be a neutral historical narrative but a biased interpretation of the state that gives importance to elite leadership, constitutional reform, and moderate nationalism while downplaying colonial exploitation and underrepresenting the oppressed. Therefore, it slowly turns the freedom struggle into a linear, reform-oriented movement instead of a complex interplay of class struggles, economic grievances, radical resistance, and diverse regional aspirations. This shows that the Official School is in tune with the ideological needs of the post-Independence state, trying to portray a unified and controlled memory of nationalism that sustains the legitimacy of state power.

Conclusion

The Official School continues to be one of the most powerful interpretations of Indian national movement, yet the analytical rigor in questioning its authority has been very rare. The current research is revealing by looking at it as a state-supported historiography rather than a purely objective narrative, how official history very often builds selective truths. The emphasis on constitutional politics, the mild treatment of colonial exploitation, and the neglect of popular, revolutionary, women-led and class-based movements show that the Official School is a controlled portrayal of nationalism designed by the post-Independence government's priorities. Through this research, it becomes clear that history is not only a record of the past but also a political tool to shape national identity. When official historiography adopts selective memory, it also risks repeating some aspects of colonial knowledge production and at the same time claiming to narrate its closure. A more inclusive and critical understanding of nationalism requires acknowledging the voices that are outside the state narratives the voices of peasants, workers, women, rebels, regional movements, and forgotten revolutionaries. Recognizing the histories that have been excluded does not undermine national unity; on the contrary, it fortifies it by rendering the freedom struggle more democratic, diverse, and reflective of the experiences of the people who actually shaped it.

Limitations of the Study

- We are talking about a critical examination of the Official School narrative, more so through the writings

of Dr. Tara Chand, which is why the research does not contain a comprehensive analysis of other schools of historiography.

- The study is primarily based on textual and archival interpretation and does not employ any empirical or field-based data. Thus, the research is more of an interpretable nature rather than a quantitative one in terms of its findings.
- Some of the primary archival documents are not in their complete form and this situation could be a hindrance to the investigation of the reading control and ideological influence of the government on published histories going deeper.
- By concentrating mainly on the government narratives of the period after Independence, this research has not taken into account the current political manipulations of nationalism in school textbooks or public discourse, which may be a separate area for future investigations.

Recommendations

- The future exploration of this matter should include the analysis comparison of the Official, Subaltern, Marxist, and Postcolonial interpretations in order to shape a wider comprehension of the influence of different ideological perspectives on the nationalist history.
- It is necessary to uncover the ways in which the post-Independence governments affected the writing of history through the educational institutions, funding agencies, and the curriculum boards which could then expose the deeper connection between state power and historical memory.
- It is a must for the scholars to investigate the portrayal of the unrecognized characters the farmers, women, tribal communities, and revolutionaries in the official stories so that there will be a more inclusive and democratic comprehension of the freedom movement.
- It can be said that a critical reevaluation of the school and university textbooks especially those dominated by the official historiography might reveal the way in which such selective narratives still influence the public perception of nationalism through their very nature.
- Interdisciplinary collaboration between scholars through the use of archival documents, oral histories, regional papers, and vernacular literature will not only be the means of questioning the narratives endorsed by the state but will also contribute to the reconstruction of a more plural and decentralized account of India's freedom struggle.

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