

JADUNATH SARKAR(PART-3)

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Jadunath is remembered for his books, some of which he re-edited in his later years. His *Aurangzeb and Shivaji* narrated the history of the seventeenth century around two individuals while his *Later Mughals and Fall of the Mughal Empire* dealt with the personalities and events of the eighteenth century. *Aurangzeb* traced the fall of the Mughal Empire and *Shivaji*, a contrast, the rise of a nation under a heroic leader. To Jadunath, it was individual leadership which mattered, but actually, these two were tales of the decadence of an empire and the rise of another, the state being the principal object.

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The other works almost had the same picture, the decline of both the Mughals and the Marathas and the rise of the English. It was the country and the state that concerned Jadunath in the background of the contrasting forces. Strictly speaking, Jadunath dealt only with the decline of the Mughals and did not go into the details of the decline of the Marathas or the rise of the English, who were kept always in the background, so that their attempts at expansion were not given due attention. This becomes quite clear in his narrative of the fall of Nawab Sirajuddaula in Bengal in 1757, where the internal weakness of the Nizamat, and the weak character of the nawab had been painted

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in detail. Jadunath supported such analysis by drawing on the later Persian sources written under the aegis of the British officials.

Jadunath was attracted to Vincent Smith's pragmatic concept of history as a view of the past, from which one could learn some lessons. But he was far more concerned with the concept of the progress of civilisation, obviously taken from Mill. The change towards the pragmatic concept came somewhere between 1928 and 1932. By then Jadunath had become conscious about the formation of Indian nationality. That Aurangzeb, by his fundamentalist approach, had heightened communal tension, thereby destroying the

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formation of Indian nationality, in contrast to that of Akbar, an Elphinstonian touch, had been the theme of Jadunath. Later researches of *M Athar Ali (Mughal Nobility Under Aurangzeb, 1966)* and *Irfan Habib (Agrarian System of Mughal Empire, 1963)* had shown that the concept of Elphinstone, taken by Jadunath, was historically inaccurate and that there were administrative-economic reasons for the decline of the Mughal Empire. Therefore the theory of the crisis, as seen by Jadunath, caused by moral degeneration and communal politics, would not hold good.

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Nineteenth and twentieth century Maratha nationalism had no impact on Shivaji by Jadunath, who, as seen earlier, was against the nationalists for basing their writings on unhistorical facts. Yet a closer reading of Shivaji would give the impression that Jadunath was not immune to Maratha nationalism. However, he felt that the Maratha movement after Baji Rao had undergone a change, when fundamentalist Hinduism had become dominant, whose seeds Jadunath had traced in the administrative set-up of Shivaji. At the same time, he had written strongly against the Shivaji myth.

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In the 1952 edition of Volume V of History of Aurangzeb, Jadunath had added a chapter entitled 'Aurangzeb and the Indian Nation'. Here he had shown that the Hindus were under the domination of the Muslims, although the Muslims were more progressive. The downtrodden majority could not make the nation. Finally, the Muslims looked beyond India and brought their downfall, while the caste system and their conflicts had brought the downfall of the Hindus. At that time Europe was going forward in acquiring and applying technological knowledge that resulted in their conquest of Asia and Africa.

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In a broader sense, this is the concept of the progress of civilisation as envisaged by Mill. Each conquest is an affirmation of the progress. By the same token, the Sultanate period should have been seen as such, but Jadunath had categorised it as a dark period. Tarafdar has rightly asked how the age of Akbar had become the bacon of civilisation if the preceding age was so dark. Recent researches have shown that while Akbar had limited his patronage to only two Rajput houses, his successors, Jahahgir and Shah Jahan, had expanded it. Actually compared to Akbar's period, the number of Hindu Mansabdars had increased during the period of Aurangzeb, thus belying the thesis of Jadunath. That

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Aurangzeb had given generous grants to non-Muslim monasteries, including the Vrindaban monastery of the Vaishnavas, has been shown in recent years.

Sir Jadunath Sarkar was undoubtedly the greatest historian of India who unconsciously founded a school of Indian Historiography and later historians derived inspiration from his work, his style, methodology and sense of objectivity. He may not be a nationalist or a Leftist in his professional career but he was a true historian and it is a solace to his disciples. He was a Herodotus and Thucydides both in one and did a yeoman's service to Indian history. True, he was a path finder as well as an inspiration to his generation.

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Summing up the long and productive career of Sir J.N. Sarkar , his close historian-associate G.S. Sardesai aptly observe: “ Sir Jadunath Sarkar , as a historian, is not an accident, not a fortunate child of opportunities , but the consummation of a life of preparation , planning, hard industry, and ascetic devotion to a great mission.”

(Concluded)

