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The Role and Place of India in Collapse of the British Empire (Specific Historical and Historiographical Aspects)

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Abstract: Today among academic historians a considerable interest is revived in the study of the phenomenon of empires. The British Empire was the greatest of all the existed ones in the history of mankind as well as the largest colonial empire with colonies on all continents. Modern home and foreign researchers put the subject of the history of British India forward as one of the most original. Over the past few decades, the studies on the topic that we are interested in have appeared which require generalization and systematization. The researchers of the article review how researchers characterize the causes, conditions and circumstances of the disintegration of the British Empire as well as the course, outcomes and consequences of the partition of British India. This article deals with understanding the role and place of India in the collapse of the British Empire, analysis and evaluation of raising and studying the proposed topic in the works of modern historians.

Key words: The British Empire, British India, crisis and collapse of the British Empire, formation of independent India, mankind

INTRODUCTION

First and foremost, one should note that the ongoing changes in the world led to the formation of the dramatically new geopolitical situation. Currently, in the active stage are the processes of transformation of some regions in which the interests of major powers and sectors of international affairs more and more insistently intersect. Further strengthening of the strategic competition, the elements of which have already become so directly apparent, gives rise to new contradictions on the ideological and geopolitical basis.

It becomes obvious that the last decade is characterized by the revival of theoretical-conceptual and concrete historical studies of the international relations.

As noted above, modern scholars pose the problem of assessing the facts and events of the crisis and the collapse of the British Empire as an actual one. Such scientific analysis of the history of the Empire will give the opportunity to understand the current situation of Great Britain which today continues to be an active member of the coalition of confrontation of Russia in the Middle East as it has been for centuries.

The greatest empire in the history of mankind, where, as every time the British recollected, «the sun never disappears», had been ruling the world in fact for cent uries. «Divide et impera!» was the motto of the British conquerors, who built his empire with fire and sword all over the continents-in Europe and America, Asia and Africa.

The British Empire was a state formation consisting of the metropolitan country-Great Britain being also often called England and many dominions on all the inhabited continents. It is considered as it has been already mentioned, the largest imperial formation ever existed in the history of mankind, although, for example in terms of territorial measures, this name has been challenged by the Mongolian Empire. Pax Britannica (on the analogy with the Latin Pax Romana) is the period of domination of the British Empire in the international relations since the Battle of Waterloo in 1815.

The term «British Empire» came into official usage in the 1870s and had to demonstrate the greatness and power of British civilization, as well as reflect the title of the British monarch. The peak of power and prosperity of the empire was in the 1920s, after the First World War, when its territory part and population coverage was about a quarter of the world (area reached 37, 2 million km^2, population >450 million people). The British Empire became the regular result of the expansion of the English/British civilization.

A distinctive feature of the British Empire was its territorial differentiation and decentralized management, which was reflected in the coexistence of different types of dependent territories: holdings of private companies, colonies, protectorates, dominions, mandates.

The British colonies were divided into the «conquered» and «resettlements». A typical representative of the «conquered» colony was India. In 1858, the Indian Empire was formed which was ruled directly by the Queen

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of England, at that time Victoria, crowned in 1876 as the Empress of India. The viceroy who ruled the Indian empire and the Executive Council were subordinate to the Queen. It is India, «Pearl of the British Crown» which has played a key symbolic role in the collapse of the British Empire.

THE MAIN PART

Most of India was a British colony and the rest about 600 principalities had bilateral treaties with England and also was a part of the British Empire. The mighty and mysterious India in the crown of the British Empire was considered to be the most brilliant diamond. India supplied their tiny British mother country with raw materials and labour power. For decades, Britain had ruthlessly suppressed the rebellions, stirring up one peoples of India against the other.

Until the middle of the 19th century, the British territories in India were under the control of the British East India Company which had been for obvious reasons called the English until 1707. It was created in 1600 by decree of Elizabeth I as a joint stock company, having been received the extensive privileges to trade with India. India and a number of Eastern countries were colonized. With the help of the British company. During the first hundred years of the activity, the company as it has been indicated, focused on trading operations on the Indian subcontinent.

The main method of colonial capture of India were «Subsidiary Agreements», the system of which was first invented by the French colonialists however, applied by the British on a large scale. According to it, the company consistently forced the Indian principalities to sign agreements on «subsidies» payout for the maintenance of the mercenary army and to conduct the affairs only through the British resident. «Subsidies» paid out to the company by local rulers were spent on the levy of troops, consisting mainly of the local population and thus, the expansion was carried out by the very Indians and with the money of the Indians.

The spread of such system contributed to the disintegration of the Empire of Great Mughals by the end of the 18th century. Then the territory of modern India, Pakistan and Bangladesh consisted de facto of several hundreds of independent principalities. Administratively, the British territory in India will have been later divided into three Presidencies, each of which had its own armed forces generally called «Presidency armies» which will have been integrated into the British Indian Army.

In the second half of the 18th century the company expanded its possessions by governing the Indian territories, either directly or through the local puppet rulers under the threat of the British Indian Army, consisting of the salaried Indian soldiers Sepoys, who were still in the service of the French and then recruited by the British colonizers. Being rank and file of the infantrymen, they are still used in the armies of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

The Sepoys became the driving force of the largest rebellion in the history of the colonial period the Sepoy rebellion of 1857-1859, called to be the First War of Indian Independence in the modern historiography. The sepoys simply turned from the «privileged class» into «food for powder». By the time, Britain had been fighting continuous wars in Southeast Asia nearly for 20 years. Resistance to the colonial policy of the British turned the region into a «powder keg». The uprising was suppressed, and it became a turning point: in 1874, the East India Company was liquidated, and the British Empire established administrative control over the entire territory of South Asia, consolidating it with the coronation of the Queen of England as the Empress of India in 1876. The English-language sources tend to call the established system as «British Raj», when the traditional Indian feudal organization was used, and the supreme overlord of the rulers of the Indian princedoms was the British crown.

Thus, the apparatus of colonial oppression in India was initially created by degrees, without radical change. But when the East India Company became the Government of India de facto and completely new tasks were set, it did not create a new mechanism to decide these tasks but re-equipped with the old one. The trade machine was gradually turning into a functionary bureaucratic apparatus of governance over the huge country. The structure was cumbersome, unwieldy and in some cases, simply became a hindrance to governing.

Further, having fairly assessed the sepoy mutiny as a powerful popular explosion of discontent, the British colonial authorities were forced to think seriously over the further methods of governing. Henceforth, the Governor-General who soon received the official title of viceroy had to be the ruler of the country. His activity and the activity of the whole administration of British India was controlled and submitted by India office to be accountable to the parliament.

However, the final part of the colonization process proved to be the most difficult for the British, it was connected with the transformation of the traditional Indian structure. The intervention of the British administration in the internal affairs of the country led to the painful conflicts in the country. The customary norm of relations functioned for centuries was bursting at the seams, a painful crisis was more and more obvious.

The second layer that prepared the collapse of the empire was associated with the so-called cultural and political modernization of the Indian society.

In British India the process of searching by the British for the ways of coexistence supposed not their adaptation to the Indian reality but the Indians' reorientation towards European values. In other words, it was about Westernization of Indian society.

An active introduction of the elements of European (British) political culture and practice, as well as the European education which was connected with the opening of Calcutta, Madras and Bombay Universities and the possibility of getting education by the Indians in Britain itself in the leading universities of the country Cambridge and Oxford were conductive to penetrating many European ideas and ideals, knowledge and experience into India, led to the acquaintance with European sciences, arts, culture and way of life.

This acquaintance was also for the most part restricted to a narrow circle of the upper classes and the Indian intellectuals but nevertheless, it was a fact and the use of English which became the norm as an official and uniting the representatives of various Indian peoples contributed to disseminating the orientation to European cultural values among the intellectual elite.

From the middle of the 19th century in India there took place an ideological and cultural «renaissance« of national self-consciousness of the society based on the religious reformism and liberal and constitutional ideas. Here the leading role belonged to the national intelligentsia, who facing discrimination, violation of the national dignity, brought the ideas of liberalism and democracy into society.

In the 80's 19th century, the socio-political situation in India and around it in British ruling circles raised the issue of creating a political organization of Indian patriots. The British authorities sought to restrict the political activity of India's propertied classes within the scope appropriate for the colonizers and to win them over to their side at the first opportunity. First, liberal Viceroy of India Lord Rippon (1880-1884) supported the initiative of the group of Indian public figures in this case. In a memorandum of the 25 of December, 1882, he called for implementing political transformations from above in India within the constitutional framework. Next English Viceroy Dufferin (1884-1888) gave to understand to the prominent public figures the Indians that he would also not raise difficulties to form all-India legal political organization. On December 28, 1885 in Bombay, the founding congress opened in a solemn ceremony, founding the Indian National Congress (INC) which was the first non-religious, of secular type, essentially parliamentary, national organization in the history of the ancient country.

Thus, partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Indian intelligentsia meant a departure from the principle of colony governance, based on the absolute power of the British. This led to the fact that the issues about the nature and character of the British rule in India, the form of government, ensuring the longer, lasting and successful stay of the British in the colony, became at that time the subject of fierce debate, split the British society into two camps. The reformers and the advocates of the reforms, believing that in the future a new stratum of the Indian society-European-educated intellectuals-would only strengthen their positions in society and gain an increasing political weight, thought that bringing them to national administration was wiser and more far-sighted policy. Critics of the liberal policy of the British in India, quite the contrary, believed that the only way to keep India under the British flag was to preserve the absolute power of the British because of the risk of opposition from the Anglo-Indian community.

The INC was the first all-Indian organization that favoured the revival of national consciousness of the Indians and played a crucial role in the formation of an organized political struggle of the peoples of Hindustan. He admitted the main line of his policy to be «moderate», loyal opposition to the colonial regime. But at the turn of the centuries in India there were emerging the powers, more resolutely demanding the country to be delivered from the British colonial rule. Within the party there was formed a democratic trend, the supporters of which were called «radical» extremists.

Two slogans had been selected as the basic. «Swadeshi» is the development of own production of the goods needed by the Indians and as one of the measures of influence on the British government is recognition of the mass boycott of the British products in India. And «Swaraj»-self-government which the «left» treated as independence and the «moderates» as the government within the framework of the Empire.

Persistent and clearly growing resistance of the transformed Indian traditional structure was really felt by the colonial authorities. Even though they controlled the situation in the country on the whole, serious concerns prompted them to find a way out. This solution was found in the Indo-Muslim differences and contradictions. The Muslim League was founded supposedly to protect the rights of the Muslim minority in India from the dictatorship of the Hindu majority.

In 1916, the «moderate» and «extreme» united at the Congress and concluded the agreement between the Congress and the League of the joint struggle for India's achievement of self-government «as an equal partner in the British Empire along with the self-governing dominions». In the 20's years of the 20th century from the loyal opposition to the British colonial regime, the organizations moved to the active struggle for national independence, having become a mass party.

As a result, we indicate that there is no doubt that a number of factors have contributed to success in the struggle for independence. These are the obvious economic changes in the country including economic and political life of the national bourgeoisie being brought into the forefront; it is the rise of national consciousness, the main bearers of which were educated strata of the population, especially the Indian intelligentsia and students; this is more difficult position of the colonizers who under changing conditions could no longer rely on the preservation of their political domination, being based on the authority of force. Of course, the important role was played by the international and political circumstances in the period of World War 2 and the early postwar years. But attention in the light of all the above said was deserved by the strategic line of the Congress leaders: in the traditional structure of the great country being dissected into different nations, states and caste with its extremely unusual civilization and system of ethical, social and spiritual values, it was Congressmen in particular the Gandhists, who were able to elaborate the non-violent resistance policy to be the most adequate to realities. The movement led by Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru (1995) was gaining strength all the time and in the end, confronted the colonizers, who made a concession after concession to it, with a dilemma: either to give independence to India and maintain relations well established with it for centuries or risk being thrown out after powerful explosion.

Of course, the British did everything to delay the possible explosion and even extinguish it, direct the energy of the country and the people into another channel-especially into the national-religious conflicts. But that step did not promise a political success but an explosion of high power. In short in India by the mid-1940s a critical situation had been created for the British. And there was no another way than the granting of independence, partition of British India became inevitable. And on August 14 and 15, 1947 there emerged two dominions on the political map of the world the Indian Union and Pakistan. The phenomenon of the conservation of the two dominions, when the king of the United Kingdom of Great, Britain George 6 retained his title of King of India, the last Viceroy of India, Lord Louis Mountbatten, according his plan India actually had been divided was announced to be the first Governor-General of India had been lasted until the adoption of the Constitution of independent India in January 1950 which completely shook the foundations of the empire.

However, the division was if not the best decision but nevertheless decision that has stood the test of time. The political intensity was then so strong that the partition of the country into two parts turned out to be probably an optimal solution, for all that, its practical application cost the lives of millions of people. Was it possible to gain independence in some other form? Was there an alternative to the partition of India? In the context of the colonial state there were the processes of formation and identity of many ethnic groups and confessions in India. Their unity, provided with the coersive methods of British imperialism, ended. At the same time, the partition of the country was the tragedy of the whole generation of the Indians

The collapse of the empire was accompanied by the attempts to preserve the imperial idea, an ideal of which did not disappear. For that, since 1947 in the documents, press and literature the term «the British Empire» being unfashionable already was substituted by the name «the British Commonwealth of Nations» and instead of «Dominion» one began to write and say «a member of the Commonwealth». The act on the nationality of 1948 abolished the status of common citizenship in the Commonwealth and the Empire. To open the doors to the Commonwealth for the colonies, having established a republican form of government, the conference of the Prime Ministers of the Commonwealth countries in April 1949 decided to revoke the formula the westminster Statute of 1931 of total allegiance to the Crown. Henceforth, the English monarch has been considered only «a symbol of the free association of independent nations-the members of the Commonwealth and as such the head of the Commonwealth».

In addition, under the conditions of the outbroken «Cold War», the imperial policy of the United Kingdom was based on a close partnership with the self-governing countries of the Commonwealth. Soon the Commonwealth became the union of all the states emerging within the empire. For even more political correctness and removal of the negative associations from the collective historical memory, «the British» had been withdrawn from the name of the British Commonwealth of Nations and later it was common to designate it simply as «the Commonwealth». The relations between the Commonwealth members also underwent many variations, reaching even to open military clashes (e.g., between India and Pakistan due to the Kashmir conflict). By the way, every year every the second Monday in March is celebrated as the Day of the British Commonwealth of Nations. In the upcoming, 2016, it will happen on March 14.

Finally, one can specify that it is the decolonization of India has led to the collapse of the colonial system in the British territories and this circumstance could not help having its impact on the course of global events.

SUMMARY

As a result of our study, based on the analysis of the concrete-historical, source and historiographical material, we have arrived at certain conclusions.

The search for scientifically substantiated answers to the different questions of the taken themes suggest the fundamental nature and large scale of the study of the source and historiographical basis.

The following sources were used as historical. The sources of documentary character. We applied to the use of materials of the westminster statute the United Kingdom Act of the Parliament on the actuation of some of the resolutions adopted by the Imperial Conferences of 1926 and 1930. It establish sovereignty of the dominions and created the legal basis of the British Commonwealth of Nations (Commonwealth realms). At the same time, the United Kingdom maintained its de facto control over foreign policy of the dominions. The members of the British Commonwealth who recognized the statute of Westminster of 1931 had the status of the Commonwealth of States, that meant their full independence as long as the British monarch to be on the post of the head of the State. The Commonwealth was initiated in 1887 in London at the Colonial Conference, where the foundations of a new colonial policy were consolidated: from now the most developed colonies have been bestowed the status of dominions-autonomous quasi-public formations, later-actually independent states. Their «equal status» consisted in the approximation of common loyalty to the Crown and common membership in the British Commonwealth. The legal status of the Commonwealth has been consolidated by the Statute of Westminster.

The sources of the category of personal origin: The focus of our attention was on the works by the first leaders of Great Britain and the British colonies-by Winston Churchill, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, whose works has recently been actively reissued (Gandhi, 2009). Justified is the use of their works on the British imperial policy and their personal position in resolving some of the problems of the indicated epoch.

This complex of the source material has made a significant contribution to the interpretation of our theme. Special investigations concern individual aspects and overall conceptual sides of the designated theme.

The works of Soviet and foreign authors since «Cold War» contained timeserving evaluation of the events that led to the one-sided understanding of the problems. Our study analyzes and evaluates the scientific literature published for the past decades. We dwell on the problems lying in the field of modern domestic and foreign researchers and pay special attention to the works that exerted an undeniable influence on the problem development of the topic. Modern studies are associated with the innovations that have marked their state of the art.

The 1990s and the beginning of this century have made adjustments in the researches, including the studies of the history of the British Empire. Domestic and foreign experts in English Philology associate their studies with the analysis of retrospective, dynamics and consequences of the collapse of the British Empire in a particular aspect.

We have in turn classified the recent research works on the subject into the following: general works, monographs, dissertations, collections of the materials of scientific conferences, publications in periodicals.

The general works made it possible to determine the relevance of the topic, to orient oneself in the matters of methodology. For example, «World History. The Period of British Conquests» (2000), etc.

Monographs: In our work we carry out the analysis and evaluation of the scientific literature published in the post-Soviet era. All studies consider a complex of issues at the local, regional and national levels. For example, among the leading modern home explorers of the theme one can distinguish the works by the English philologists M.P. Eisenstadt and G.S. Ostapenko (the Institute of Oriental Studies, RAS), S. Ye. Sidorova (M.V. Lomonosov Moscow State University), Tamara Nikolayevna Hella and Apollon Borisovich Davidson (The Institute of World History, RA of S) (Eisenstat, 2007; Ostapenko, 1995).

Many works give the portraits of the important colonial figures such as M.P. Eisenstadt «Heroes of Empires... » and Ye.A. Glushchenko «The Empire Builders... » (Glushchenko, 2000).

Dissertations: We have singled out the Doctoral studies for the reason that they offer the formulation and solution of individual, peripheral issues within the overall perspective of our study. For example, by S.A. Bogomolov (Ulyanovsk State University), the above mentioned T.N. Hella (Orel State University), O.L. Gridasov and N.V. Dronova (Saratov State University), S.A. Trykanova (Vladimir State University).

Periodicals: They are represented primarily by the specialized journals “Modern and Contemporary History”, “International Affairs”, “Diplomatic bulletin”, “Around the World”, “Today”, “Friendship of the Peoples”, “Asia and Africa today”, ‘East = Oriens”. Among the publications directly on our subject, we will mention the articles by modern Russian historians and political

scholars Matveyev (1993), Mrathuzina and Maslova, 2015a, b, Sukhorukov (2006), Postnikov (2003) and Yerekesheva (1998).

Foreign historiography: Which seemed to us affordable, present the names of reputable scholars analyzing the history of the colonial empire of Great Britain, whose works today are also actively reissued. Among them are, first of all, Indian historians-Krishna Narendra Sinha, Anil Chandra Banerjee and Sinharaja Tammita-Delgoda. In this connection, it is of great interest the book, published originally in London and recently in the Russian language, by prominent figure of the Communist Party of England and the greatest specialist in the problems of colonial Indian origin, Rajani Palm Dutt.

Natural interest is in the works authored by well-known British historian-John Robert Seeley, Scottish- John Adam Kremb, containing a large amount of factual material. Today, foreign researchers are reviewing the specifics of the functioning of the administrative machinery of the empire, developing a new concept of the so-called «the anatomy of Britain» as formulated by Anthony Sampson (Seeley, 2013).

On the basis of various documents, modern researchers analyze the dynamics origin and building the empire. In parallel, the authors examine the profound changes as a result of its crisis and decay. The long period of its existence has allowed the authors to trace the evolution, the nature and characteristics of this prolonged historical process.

Of course, this complex material has made a significant contribution to the interpretation of our theme. Although, this list is not final, we give mainly the list of available studies.

CONCLUSION

Thus, based on the holistic source, historiographical, historical and scientific analysis, the works of modern domestic and foreign authors present significant special features of the phenomenon of British India, rethink many aspects of the role and place of India in the disintegration of the British Empire.

In the opinion, the present topic is of scientific and socio-political significance. Our specific historical and historiographical analysis of the stated problems still needs for further investigation of the topics that will give an opportunity to deepen and broaden its study.

In the opinion, future research on the subject should be structured on a pragmatic basis, on the assumption of the necessity to reckon with the new realities.

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