

The Making of the National Movement

The advent of Gandhiji: Gandhiji was 46 years old when he came to India after leading the Indians in South Africa in non-violent marches against racist restrictions.

Indian National Congress: The Indian National Congress was established in December 1885. Around 72 delegates attended the first meeting of the Indian National Congress held in Bombay. The early important leaders were Dadabhai Naoroji, Ferozshah Mehta, Romesh Chandra Dutt, and S. Subramania Iyer.

Radicals in the Congress: Since the 1890s, the Congress party witnessed the emergence of the trend of radicals. They began to question the nature of the political methods and approach of the moderates in Congress.

The Swadeshi Movement: The Swadeshi Movement emerged out as a result of many demonstrations and mass protest against the partition of Bengal in 1905. The movement was very strong in Bengal. It encouraged the ideas of self-help, swadeshi enterprise, national education and use of Indian languages.

The All India Muslim League: The All India Muslim League was formed at Dacca in 1906 by a group of Muslim landlords and Nawabs. It supported the partition of Bengal because of its desire for separate electorates for Muslims.

The Congress Split: The Congress split in 1907 because the moderates were opposed to the use of boycott by the Radicals. The Moderates dominated the Congress after its split. The Radicals and the Moderates of the Congress reunited in December 1915.

Demands of Moderates: The moderates demanded a greater voice for Indians at higher positions in government and administration. They also demanded the legislative councils to increase the number of representatives by including Indians. They demanded the introduction of legislative councils in the provinces.

The Lucknow Pact: The Lucknow Pact was a historic agreement signed in 1916 between the Congress and the All India Muslim League. Both parties decided to work together for the representative government in the country.

The Khilafat Agitation: The Indian Muslims Community launched the Khilafat Agitation. Its two important leaders were Mohammad Ali and Shaukat Ali. It was launched against the Britishers' imposition of a harsh treaty (Treaty of Sevres) on the Turkish Sultan or Khalifa.

The Non-Cooperation Movement: The leaders of the Khilafat Agitation, Mohammad Ali and Shaukat Ali, persuaded Gandhiji to launch the Non-Cooperation Movement. Gandhiji accepted it and urged the Congress to protest and demonstrate against the Jallianwala massacre, the Khilafat wrongdoing and in favor of Swaraj.

The Chauri Chaura Incident: Gandhiji was against the use of violent methods and movements. He called off the Non-Cooperation Movement abruptly due to the Chauri Chaura incident in which 22 policemen were killed when a crowd of peasants set fire to the police station in February 1922.

The Rowlatt Satyagraha: In 1919, Gandhiji launched an anti-Rowlatt Satyagraha, which received a countrywide response. April 6, 1919 was observed as the day of "humiliation and prayers" and hartal (strike). Satyagraha Sabhas were held throughout the country.

The Rowlatt Act: The Britishers passed the Rowlatt Act in India, under which people could be imprisoned without trial. This act was called the 'Black Act'. This strengthened the power of the police.

The Simon Commission: In 1927, the British government in England sent a commission headed by Lord Simon to decide India's political future. The commission did not have any Indian representative, due to which it faced protest by Indians.

The Salt March: In 1930, Gandhiji decided to lead a march to break the Salt Law. The march began at Sabarmati Ashram and ended at the coastal village of Dandi and Gandhiji broke the Salt Law by gathering salt naturally found on the seashore.

Quit India Movement: In 1942, Gandhiji launched Quit India Movement against the Britishers. The movement urged the Britishers to quit India and followed a popular slogan "Do or Die", calling upon the people's full effort to fight against the Britishers in a non-violent manner.

League and the Independent States: The All India Muslim League moved a resolution demanding "Independent States" for Muslims in the 1940s. The league located its "Independent States" in the north-western and eastern areas of the country.

After the Revolt of 1857, people of India became determined to root out British rule from the country.

As awareness spread among them, they began to feel that India was for the people of India and its resources were meant for all the Indians. Unless British control over the resources of India and its people was ended, India could not be for Indians.

Hence, the first and foremost task of every Indian was to fight against the foreign rule unless and until it was rooted out.

Political associations came into being in the 1870s and 1880s. The more important ones were the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha, the Indian Association, the Madras Mahajan Sabha and the Bombay Presidency Association. The aim of all these associations was to empower Indians so that they might take decisions regarding their affairs.

The British were aware of all these developments. They began to take action. In 1878, the Arms Act was passed which disallowed Indians from possessing arms. In the same year, the Vernacular Press Act was passed, which tried to silence all those who were critical of the government.

The need for an all-India organization of educated Indians had been felt since 1880. Finally, in 1885 the Indian National Congress came into being.

In the beginning, the congress was more or less moderate in its objectives and methods. It demanded a greater voice for Indians in the government and in administration. It also demanded separation of the judiciary from the executive, the repeal of the Arms Act and the freedom of speech and expression.

Congress, in the early years, also raised several economic issues. It declared that an increase in the land revenue had impoverished peasants and zamindars. Hence, reduction of revenue was essential.

The Moderate leaders in the Congress published newspapers, wrote articles and showed how British rule was leading to the economic ruin of the country. All this they did in order to draw public attention towards the unjust rule of the British.

Some leaders in the Congress such as Bipin Chandra Pal, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, and Lala Lajpat Rai, did not like the ideas of the Moderates. They criticized the Moderates for their 'politics of prayers' and emphasized the importance of self-reliance and constructive work. They argued that people must fight for swaraj. Tilak raised the slogan, "Freedom is my birthright and I shall have it".

In 1905, Bengal, the biggest province of British India and included Bihar and parts of Orissa, was partitioned by Viceroy Curzon. It enraged people all over India. Both the Moderates and the Radicals unitedly opposed the British action. This led to the birth of the Swadeshi Movement, which boycotted British institutions and goods.

An important development came in 1906 with the formation of the All India Muslim League at Dacca. The founder members of the League were Muslim landlords and nawabs. They supported the partition of Bengal and demanded for separate electorates for Muslims.

However, in the year 1916, the Congress and the Muslim League decided to work together for representative government in the country.

The growth of mass nationalism began to take place after 1919. Peasants, tribals, students, and women became involved in the struggle against British rule.

Mahatma Gandhi emerged as a mass leader. He, first of all, toured the entire country in order to understand the people, their needs and the overall situation.

Afterward, he led to local movements in Champaran, Kheda, and Ahmedabad in which he got immense success.

In 1919 Gandhiji started Satyagraha Movement against the Rowlatt Act that the British had just passed. The Act curbed fundamental rights such as the freedom of expression and strengthened police powers.

In April 1919, there were a number of demonstrations and hartals in the country against this Act. The government used hartal measures to suppress them. The Jallianwala Bagh atrocities in Amritsar on Baishakhi Day were a part of this Suppression.

In the year 1920, the British did another wrong known as khilafat wrong. The British imposed a harsh treaty on the Turkish Sultan also known as Khalifa. This enraged the Muslims and Khalifa agitation started under the leadership of Mohammad Ali and Shaukat Ali. They wished to initiate a full-fledged Non-Cooperation Movement. Gandhiji supported their call and urged the congress to campaign against Jallianwala massacre, Khilafat wrong and demand swaraj.

During the years 1921-22, the Non-Cooperation Movement gained momentum because it got a wide support. However, it was abruptly called off by Mahatma Gandhi when in February 1922 a crowd of peasants set fire to a police station in Chauri Chaura. Twenty-two policemen were killed on that day. It hurt Mahatma Gandhi because he had never thought that people would go violent. He always wished to drive away the British by non-violent methods.

The Congress now resolved to fight for Purna Swaraj (complete independence) in 1929 under the presidentship of Jawaharlal Nehru.

Now efforts began to be made in this direction. In 1930, Gandhiji started Dandi March against the Salt Law. He got immense support from the people.

The combined struggles of the Indian people bore fruit when the Government of India Act of 1935 prescribed provincial autonomy and the government announced elections to the provincial legislatures in 1937.

In September 1939, the Second World War broke out. The Congress leaders were ready to support the British war effort. But in return, they wanted independence after the war. The British refused to concede the demand.

A new phase of movement, popularly known as Quit India Movement was initiated in August 1942 under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. As a result prominent leaders were jailed at once. But the movement spread.

In between these events the Muslim League began to demand independent States for Muslims in the north-western and eastern areas of the country. Mahatma Gandhi was not in favour of this.

The League began to think that Muslims were a minority and they would always have to play second fiddle in any democratic structure. The Congress's rejection of the League's desire to form a joint Congress-League government in the United Provinces in 1937 further annoyed the League.

In 1945, the British opened negotiations between the Congress, the League and themselves for the independence of India. The talks failed because the League now wanted Pakistan.

In March 1946, the British cabinet sent a three-member mission to Delhi to examine the League's demand for Pakistan and to suggest a suitable political framework for a free India.

The Mission suggested that India should remain united and constitute itself as a loose confederation with some autonomy for Muslim majority areas. Neither the Congress nor the League agreed to it. Now, partition of India became inevitable.

Finally, Pakistan came into existence. The violence of partition shook both the newly-independent countries—India and Pakistan. It marred the joy of independence.

Sarvajanik: All the people.

Sovereign: Being independent without outside interference.

Publicist: Someone who publicises an idea by circulating information, writing reports, speaking at public meetings.

Moderate: A person who is against taking extreme action.

Repeal: To undo the law.

Radical: A person who welcomes new ideas or opinions.

Revolutionary Violence: The use of violence to make a radical change within society.

Council: An appointed or elected body of people with an administrative advisory or representative function.

Knighthood: An honor granted by the British crown for exceptional personal achievement or public service.

Picket: A person or a group of people protesting outside a building or shop to prevent others from entering.

Mahants: Religious functionaries of Sikh gurudwaras.

Illegal eviction: Forcible and unlawful throwing out of tenants from the land they rent.

RSS: It stands for Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh.

Purna Swaraj: Complete independence.

Provincial Autonomy: Capacity of the provinces to make relatively independent decisions while remaining within a federation.

General Constituencies: Election districts with no reservations for any religious or other community.

Refugee: One who has been forced to leave his country or home due to some political, religious or social reasons.

1878 – The Arms Act was passed.

1885 – The Vernacular Press Act was passed.

1905 – The Indian National Congress came into existence. Bengal got partitioned.

1915 – Mahatma Gandhi came to India from South Africa. The Rowlatt Satyagraha started.

1919 – Rowlatt Satyagraha started. The Jallianwala Bagh massacre took place.

1920 – The Non-Cooperation Movement started.

1922 – Gandhiji called off the Non-Cooperation Movement.

1929 – The Congress resolved to fight for Purna Swaraj.

26 Jan 1930 – Independence Day was observed all over the country.

1930 – Mahatma Gandhi launched Dandi March.

August 1942 – The Quit India Movement started.

1947 – India got independence. Pakistan emerged as a new country.