



National Movement - The Early Phase 1885-1918

The National Movement in India was an important epoch in the history of India as it helped to weld diverse people and sections of society into one nation. All the sections came together not only to fight against the British rule but also to build a new India.

Early Associations

In Class VII, you had read about the revolt of 1857 in which the soldiers, ordinary peasants, artisans and landlords and even princes joined the struggle against the British rule. While the movement was opposed to the British, it did not have any new vision of the country. It, in fact, wanted to restore the rule of the old kings and queens in India and also old social order.

After English education was introduced during the late nineteenth century, in some major cities like Calcutta, Madras and Bombay, a new consciousness began to develop. The intellectuals of the time opposed the inequalities and injustices of the old social system. They wanted a democratic political order and at the same time, they wanted to point out the exploitation and injustice caused by the

British rule and fight to end it. This was the beginning of the national movement in India.

The seeds of a new consciousness were sown in the second half of the 19th century. The educated Indians, after understanding the nature of the British rule and its impact on India, became more and more critical of the British policies in India. They began to come together and discuss these issues and also formed associations for this. In 1866, Dadabhai Naoroji organized the “East India Association” in London to discuss the Indian question. During 1866 to 1885, various leaders like Surendranath Banerjee, Justice M.G Ranade, Badruddin Tyabji, K. C. Telang and G. Subramaniam organised associations in Calcutta, Pune, Bombay and Madras to discuss the problems faced by Indians in those Provinces. These associations had nationalistic zeal and tried to unite the intellectuals. Though many of these associations functioned in specific parts of the country, their goals were stated as the goals of all the people of India, not those of any one region, community or class. They worked with the idea that the people should be sovereign – a modern



Surendranath Banerjee



Gopala Krishna Gokhale



Dadabhai Naoroji



*Fig 11A.1 :
Meeting at Surat*

consciousness and a key feature of nationalism. In other words, they believed that the Indian people should be empowered to take decisions regarding their affairs. Many of these intellectuals also led campaigns against some British policies like taxes on textiles, racial discrimination against Indians, repressive laws against Indian newspapers etc. They realised the importance of discussing the policies of the government and organising campaigns to change them.

- Do you know of any association in your village or town which discusses the problems faced by all the people? What do they discuss? What suggestions do they have for solving those problems? Discuss some examples in the class.

The Indian National Congress: The Moderate Phase - 1885-1905

All these provincial nationalistic intellectuals came together in the first session of the Indian National Congress

(INC) at Bombay in December 1885. The session was presided over by W. C. Banerjee and attended by 72 delegates from different parts of India. The early leaders – Dadabhai Naoroji, Pherozeshah Mehta, Badruddin Tyabji, W. C. Banerjee, Surendranath Banerjee, Ramesh Chandra Dutt, G. Subramanyam Iyer among others – were largely from Bombay (Mumbai), Madras (Chennai) and Calcutta (Kolkata). A. O. Hume, a retired British official, also played an important role in establishing the Congress. The leaders of the Congress realised that the foremost task before them was to build a nationalist consciousness among the diverse people of India and unite them. At the same time, they realised that this unity could be built only by accommodating the special requirements of different regions and religious communities of India. They, therefore, decided to hold the Congress sessions in different parts of the country every year and not to pass any resolution which was objected to by any one religious group.



Fig 11A.2 : Delegates of the First Indian National Congress meeting, 1885

The second major objective of the early Congress was to create a common political platform or programme around which political workers in different parts of the country could gather and conduct their political activities, educating and mobilizing people on an all-India basis. This was to be accomplished by taking up those grievances and fighting for those rights which Indians had in common in relation to the rulers. They studied the grievances of people and wrote appeals to the government and also used them to educate the people about their political rights.

The third major objective was to promote democratic ideals and functioning in India. The Indian National Congress functioned democratically, discussing all the issues and trying to create consensus or sometimes use voting also.

At this stage, the INC decided not to take up issues relating to social reform as it would divide the Indian people. Reform

was to be carried out through different forums.

In 1886, 436 delegates were elected to the Congress by different local organisations and groups indicating its popularity in one year. Hereafter, the National Congress met every year in December in different parts of the country. The number of delegates soon increased to thousands. Its delegates were mostly lawyers, journalists, traders, industrialists, teachers and landlords. There were very few women who participated in the Congress like Kadambari Ganguli who was the first woman graduate from Calcutta. Mostly, men from higher social background attended these sessions.

During the first 20 years, the Congress was led by the leaders who are known as Moderate Nationalists. The Moderates urged the Government to introduce a number of reforms. They demanded a greater voice for Indians in the government and in administration.

They wanted the Imperial Legislative Council to be made more representative, given more power, and introduced in provinces where none existed. They demanded that Indians be placed in high positions in the government. For this purpose, it called for civil service examinations to be held in India as well, not just in London. The demand for Indianization of the administration was part of a movement against racism, since most important jobs at the time were monopolised by the white Europeans.

Leaders like Naoroji, R.C. Dutt and Ranade studied the economic impact of the British Rule and concluded that the British were draining India of her wealth through taxes and other means and leaving her poorer and poorer. They drew attention to the problem of poverty and famines and blamed it on the British policies of excessive land revenue, export of grains etc. The Congress passed many resolutions on the salt tax, treatment of Indian labourers abroad, and the sufferings of forest dwellers caused by an interfering forest administration. The early leaders were convinced of the need for national industrial development to end poverty in India. However, the British rule was standing in the way of development as they were not only draining India of its wealth to England but also enabling selling of British goods at a cheaper rate in India and restraining Indian crafts and industries.

The Moderate leaders reached out to people in different parts of the country by holding lectures, meetings and tours. They believed that the British were committed

to freedom and justice and would accept the demands when expressed properly. They carried on their agitation through newspapers, public lectures. They passed resolutions and led deputations to submit petitions to the government. In short, it may be said that they adopted a policy of pray, petition and protest. Often, they were not able to persuade the government to change, but in the process, formulated Indian opinion on important issues. This was very important for the future growth of Indian national movement.

There were major famines in British India from the late 18th century to the Great Bengal Famine of 1943. They were triggered by bad harvests, but their consequences were devastating because of the policies of the colonial government. The government collected a huge part of the produce as tax which did not leave any buffer with the peasants even in the times of bad harvests. The government also did not intervene by controlling prices or supply of foodstuff during famines allowing traders to hoard and increase prices. All this led to the death of millions of people during the famines.

- Why did the early nationalists believe that the British were responsible for the poverty and famines in India ?
- Why do you think the early nationalists did not want to reestablish the rule of the old kings in India? Would it not have been better than the British rule?

Extremist Phase - 1905-1920 (Swadeshi Movement)

With the start of the *Swadeshi* Movement around 1903, the Indian national movement took a major leap

forward. Women, students and a large section of the urban and rural population of Bengal and other parts of India became actively involved in politics for the first time. One major trigger for the movement was the proposal for the partition of Bengal into East and West Bengal in 1903 by Curzon. The Nationalists immediately saw this as a political act by the government to divide the Bengali people and also weaken the national movement. Even the ordinary people of Bengal were enraged by this act and took to streets to protest against it. There were massive protests, petitions and campaigns but they were not heeded to and the government partitioned Bengal in 1905. Several protest meetings were held and together they decided to boycott English cloth and salt. There was a tremendous mass response to this call. Boycott and public burning of foreign cloth, picketing of shops selling foreign goods became common in remote corners of Bengal as well as in many important towns and cities throughout the country. Women refused to wear foreign bangles and use foreign utensils, washermen refused to wash foreign clothes and even priests declined offerings which contained foreign sugar. This spontaneous unity of diverse social groups was the basis of Indian nationalism. The early nationalists were successful in germinating this nationalism.

There was also a call for boycott of all government institutions like schools, colleges, courts etc. People set up *Swadeshi* schools and colleges and parallel courts in which they settled their mutual disputes. The idea was to refuse to

cooperate with the government and in this way, undermine its position. The *Swadeshi* Movement gave tremendous impetus to Indian industry. In fact, beginnings were made in the manufacture of *Swadeshi* salt, sugar, matches and other products on a large-scale. The movement gave a stimulus to P. C. Ray's Bengal Chemical Works, and encouraged Jamshedji Tata of Bombay to open his famous Steel Plant in Bihar. The movement also created tremendous demand for indigenous goods. The textile industry of India, in particular received a great impetus from the *Swadeshi* movement.

The Moderates and the Extremists

In the next Congress session (1905), the extremist Nationalists led by Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal and Lala Lajapat Rai were in favour of extending the movement to the rest of India and to demand for full fledged freedom or 'SWARAJ'. Bal Gangadhar Tilak gave the famous slogan, "SWARAJ is my birthright and I shall have it." They wanted to move away from the earlier strategy of submitting petitions to government to the new strategy of mobilising the masses against the British rule and forcing the British to give up and go. They called the earlier strategy as 'mendicancy' (or begging for alms). The old leaders, called 'Moderate nationalists', wanted to continue on a more gradual pace of movement and felt that the masses were not yet not ready for a full scale movement for freedom and self rule. The difference between the two sections of leaders grew and eventually led to a split of the Congress into two in the Surat session of 1907. The extremist leaders like Tilak were



Lala Lajapati Rai



Bala Gangadhar Tilak



Bipin Chandra Pal



Annie Besant

forced to leave the Congress.

Soon, the government came down heavily upon the extremists and the activists of the *Swaraj* movement. Most of the leaders like Tilak were imprisoned and exiled. Gradually, the movement petered out. Many young *Swarajists* felt let down by these developments and thus targeted the unpopular British officials. They hoped to restrain the repression and oppression unleashed by the British in this way. Even though they did not succeed and were caught and hanged or imprisoned, they kept alive the spirit of nationalism and the idea of making supreme sacrifices for it.

The national movement revived again in 1915 when Tilak came back from his exile and joined hands with Annie Besant to launch a movement for 'Home Rule'.

The two factions of the Congress united again in 1916 through the Lucknow Pact.

- Imagine yourself as a student participating in a burning of foreign cloth. Describe what all would have happened on that day and your feelings at that time.
- If authorities do not agree to the just requests of people, what do you think should the people do?

The First World War : 1914–1918

The First World War broke out in 1914 with Britain, France and Russia on one side and Germany and its allies on the other side. It lasted for nearly five years till Germany was finally defeated. This caused unprecedented human suffering and destruction. As the war ended, an era of revolutions started in Europe. A socialist

On the day of the Partition of Bengal

On 16th October 1905, the day the partition of Bengal went into effect, was observed in Bengal as a day of mourning. Throughout Bengal, no cooking was done and shops and market places were closed. In Calcutta, a hartal was declared, people took out processions and bathed in the Ganges in the morning and then paraded on the streets singing "*Vande mataram*". People tied *rakhis* on each other's hands as a symbol of unity of the two halves of Bengal. Later in the day, Ananda Mohan Bose and Surendranath Banerjee addressed two mass meetings attended by about 75,000 people.



Bankimchandra Chatterji

Krishna Patrika of Machilipatnam

Krishna Patrika was started in Machilipatnam in 1902. Mutnuri Krishna Rao was one of the founders of the paper and since 1902, was associated with it as its sub-editor. In 1907, he became its editor and continued to serve the journal, till he died in 1945. The *Krishna Patrika* carried on its publicity for all the phases of India's struggle for freedom, like, the



Mutnuri Krishna Rao

Vandemataram movement, the Home-Rule movement, the Non-Cooperation Movement, the Civil-disobedience Movement and the Quit India Movement. The *Krishna Patrika* influenced not only the urban educated elite but also the rural masses. Both the magazine and its editor faced the wrath of the British rulers several times.

conditions, when the discontent of the people was increasing and the British were getting more repressive. Mahatma Gandhi came back from South Africa and joined the Indian freedom movement.

revolution took place in Russia in which peasants, workers and soldiers led by communists deposed the Emperor and abolished landlordism and private ownership of land and factories. They also advocated equality among nations and freedom for all the nations that were subjugated by colonial powers. In India, the war brought great suffering for the common people as the British tried to raise funds and resources for the war by raising taxes, exporting food and other necessities to the armies.

This increased the discontent among the people against the British rule. As the news of the Russian Revolution spread, it too inspired people that unjust rulers can be got rid of and a society can be built with equality and justice for all. Everyone expected that the British would accept the just demands for democratic rule in India and bring in the constitutional reforms. However, this was not to be and the British introduced harsher laws. It was under these

- Find out more about the First World War and its impact on the lives of ordinary people.

- During that period, there were massive movements of people who opposed the war and asked their governments to cease fighting with other countries and restore peace. Do you think it was correct?

Keywords

1. Sovereign
2. Racial discrimination
3. Resolution
4. Moderates
5. Petitions
6. *Swadeshi*
7. Boycott
8. Picketing
9. *Swaraj*
10. Protest
11. Extremism

Improve your learning

1. Correct the false statements:

- In the early phase of Indian National Congress, it included only people from Bombay.
- Indian industrialists began to establish companies in different parts of India.
- People in India expected that India would become democratic after the First World War.



- Write an imaginary dialogue between the extremist and moderate activists of Indian National Congress in the context of their a) main demands; and b) mode of mobilisation.
- After reading this chapter, Mariamma thinks that the early phase of national movement was largely participated by educated Indians. And many of their ideas were of western origin. Would you agree with her? Give reasons.
- Why was it important to understand the economic impact of British rule in India?
- What do you understand by *swadeshi*? What were the major areas of its impact?
- How did different parts of the country and people respond to division of Bengal?
- Locate the following in the map of India:
1. Calcutta (Kolkata) 2. Madras (Chennai) 3. Bombay (Mumbai) 4. Lucknow
- Locate the following in the World map:
1. Britain 2. France 3. Russia 4. Germany
- A few leaders like Gandhi, Tilak, Subhash Chandra Bose and Bhagat Singh sacrificed their lives for the sake of our nation.

What would have happened if they did not do so?

10. Are there any movements that have taken place in your region recently? Why?

Project:

- Collect photos of national leaders who participated in the freedom struggle and prepare an album. Make a report on it and present in the class.