

Nationalism in India

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Nationalism in India

Colonial authority led to the revival of nationalist sentiment in India, allowing the British East India Company to gain influence. People developed an anti-colonial sentiment, which was exploited by the Indian National Congress to unify against colonial rule.

1. The First World War, Khilafat, and Non-Cooperation

- The First World War and its consequences instilled in the people a sense of rage and hatred.
- As the war dragged on, men from villages were forced to leave their homes to fight.
- Crop failures in various places of India caused widespread starvation in 1918-19 and 1920-21.
- An influenza epidemic hit India during the war years.
- An estimated population of 12 to 13 million died due to famines and epidemics in India.

1.1 The Idea of Satyagraha

Satyagraha was the idea of truth overcoming all obstructions, which inspired Mahatma Gandhi to unify India against British oppression.

- Mahatma Gandhi organised numerous satyagraha movements throughout India. Champaran in Bihar in 1917 – against the plantation system.
- In 1917, the Kheda district of Gujarat supported peasants who were badly affected by crop failure and plague and thus demanded tax relief.
- Ahmedabad in 1918 – supported cotton mill workers.

1.2 The Rowlatt Act

- In 1919, the Rowlatt Act was passed.
- The Act empowered the government to suppress political activities and imprison political prisoners without charge for two years.
- Starting on April 6th, Mahatma Gandhi initiated a civil disobedience movement.
- As a result, peaceful processions were stopped and attacked, leaders were imprisoned, and Mahatma Gandhi was barred from entering Delhi.
- The Jallianwalla Bagh incident occurred on April 13th.

According to Dyer, the goal of such a cruel act was to "produce a moral effect," or to instil fear in the people.

- As word of the incident spread, people began to revolt violently.
- There were soon clashes with the police.
- People were mistreated, they were treated horribly - forcing them to rub their nose on the ground, do salaam to the officers, crawl on the streets, etc.
- When he saw the spread of violence, Mahatma Gandhi called a halt to the movement.

The Khilafat Movement:

- The Ottoman emperor's power was threatened with the end of World War I and the collapse of Ottoman Turkey.
- To protect the Ottoman emperor's position and power as the spiritual head of the Islamic World, a Khilafat Committee was formed in Bombay in 1919.
- Mahatma Gandhi raised the issue for his support by two young brothers and leaders, Mohammed Ali and Shaukat Ali, so that the greatest number of people could support it.
- Sensing a chance to unite Hindus and Muslims, Mahatma Gandhi persuaded Indian National Congress members in Calcutta in September 1920 to embrace the Khilafat issue and promote swaraj.

1.3 Why Non-cooperation?

- Mahatma Gandhi believed that British rule in India lasted for many years due to Indian cooperation.
- If the Indians refuse to cooperate, the East India Company will find it difficult to assert its authority.
- The movement was supposed to happen in stages.
- First, Gandhi urged people to reject official titles and boycott civil services, courts, legislative councils, police, and other institutions.

- If the government used force, Gandhiji predicted that the people would launch a full-fledged civil disobedience movement.
- Mahatma Gandhi and Shaukat Ali organised various rallies to spread their message to a wide audience.
- Some Congress members were torn between supporting the Non Cooperation campaign and voting in the approaching provincial elections.
- The members believed that securing seats on the decision-making body would give them some influence over issues concerning the welfare of the people.
- Finally, in December 1920, during the Congress Session in Nagpur, all members resolved to support the Non-Cooperation campaign.

2. Differing Strands within the Movement

2.1 The Movement in the Towns

- The movement began in the towns.
- Provincial elections were also boycotted in several areas, with the exception of Madras.
- The boycott of foreign goods was also a result of the non-cooperation movement.
- This resulted in a decrease in the import of foreign-made items.
- People stopped trading in foreign goods, and the popularity of Indian-made clothing and goods grew.

However, this movement had limitations.

- Wearing Indian-made things became popular as the non-cooperation movement spread.
- However, Khaki was more expensive than machine-made foreign goods, and the poor could not afford it.
- Furthermore, as students and officials stopped attending government-controlled institutions and offices, there were few alternatives.
- Because schools and offices were slow to emerge, students and citizens began to return to institutions and offices after a while.

2.2 Rebellion in the Countryside

Peasants of Awadh:

Peasants in Awadh were in a dire situation prior to the start of the Non Cooperation movement. Their rage and hatred were directed at their landlords, who forced them to do begar (unpaid labour) and extracted high rents and other taxes.

- Peasant movements occurred in several parts of the region.
- They wanted the beggar to be abolished and rents to be reduced.
- They also planned nai-dhobi bandhs for it.

- They did this by depriving landlords of the services of barbers and washermen.
- Jawaharlal Nehru visited these areas at the time, and after listening to their concerns, the Oudh Kisan Sabha was formed, led by Jawaharlal Nehru and Baba Ramchandra.
- When the noncooperation movement began, the issues of the peasants were also highlighted, and the peasants actively engaged in the movement.
- Congress tried to include peasants in the battle because they were in huge numbers and also provided food for the society.

Gandhi's supporters attempted to incite peasants to violence by attacking the landlord's house, food grain storehouses, and bazaars.

Tribal peasants:

- The tribals of Andhra Pradesh's Gudern Hills were misled in the name of swaraj.
- The tribals were victims of the colonial government's cruelty.
- The government had prohibited livestock grazing and entering forest areas.
- Not only was the people's way of life at stake, but they also believed that their traditional rights were being eroded.
- This infuriated the tribals.

Around this time, a leader named Alluri Sitaram Raju appeared among them.

- He claimed to have supernatural abilities, including the ability to perfect astrological predictions and to survive bullet shots.
- People began to follow him after being inspired by him.
- Raju spread Mahatma Gandhi's message of noncooperation by encouraging people to wear khaki and abstain from alcohol.
- Instead of nonviolence, he told the people that if they wanted their lands back, they would have to resort to violence.
- Raju was captured and executed in 1924, and he became a folk hero as a result.

2.3 Swaraj in the Plantations

- Assamese plantation workers had their own interpretation of swaraj.
- Plantation workers were not permitted to emigrate under the Inland Emigration Act of 1859.
- Everyone had a different interpretation of what swaraj meant.
- Regardless of their views on swaraj, they all desired a nation free of the colonial government.
- Everyone wanted the miseries inflicted on them directly or indirectly by the Company government to end.

3. Towards Civil Disobedience

- In February 1922, Gandhiji called an end to the Non-Cooperation movement. Gandhiji believed that people needed to be properly trained for peaceful mass struggles.
- Meanwhile, an internal discussion within the Congress party erupted.

- Some members were hesitant to announce the approaching elections.
- This internal debate resulted in the foundation of The Swaraj Party within the Congress, led by C.R. Das and Motilal Nehru.

The younger members, such as Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose, desired total independence from British rule.

- The economic depression, leading to agricultural prices from 1926 and complete collapse till 1930, left farmers and peasants in complete devastation.
- Along with it, a commission under Sir John Simon was constructed by the Tory government in Britain.
- The commission was set up to regulate the functioning of the constitutional system in India against the nationalist movement.
- The Simon Commission was met with the slogan "Go back, Simon" in 1928.
- To calm the uprising Under Jawaharlal Nehru's leadership, the Lahore Congress officially declared the democratic revolution in December 1929.

3.1 The Salt March and the Civil Disobedience Movement

Everyone worshipped salt as a deity. Gandhiji used the Britishers' monopoly over its production and salt tax to spread his swaraj message.

On January 31, 1930, Mahatma Gandhi issued 11 demands in a letter to Viceroy Irwin. The requests came from all segments of society.

He made certain that the demands were broad enough to encompass as many people as possible. One of the demands was to abolish taxation. Gandhiji stated in the letter

The Salt March:

- Gandhiji began the salt march from his Sabarmati ashram to the coastal town of Dandi.
- He was accompanied by 78 volunteers. The distance was approximately 240 miles.
- To reach their destination, Gandhiji and his volunteers walked for 24 days, covering 10 miles per day.
Many people gathered at a
- During Gandhi's march, many people came over to join him. They listened to what he had to say about Swaraj and the importance of fighting for independence peacefully.
- Gandhiji broke the salt law on April 6, manufacturing salt by boiling seawater.

The Civil Disobedience Movement :

- The civil disobedience began at the conclusion of the Salt March. Along with refusing to cooperate with the British, locals were also asked to violate colonial laws. In many parts of India, people broke the salt law and protested outside salt factories.
- In various places of India, people defied the salt law, protested outside salt plants, refused to pay revenue and chowkidar taxes, and resigned from their positions. People picketed liquor stores and boycott foreign goods, and they entered restricted areas in forests to obtain wood and pasture animals.

- As a result of the uprising, government officials began to arrest Congress leaders. When Abdul Ghaffar Khan was arrested, there were protests in Peshawar against police shootings, and many people were killed.
- When Mahatma Gandhi was arrested, police stations, municipal buildings, and train stations were all attacked. Because it was unable to control the people, the government took more aggressive measures.
- As violence escalated, Mahatma Gandhi called a halt to the movement by signing the Irwin Pact on March 5, 1931. Gandhiji promised to attend the Round Table Conference in London, according to the agreement.
- However, after attending the Conference, he was dissatisfied with the outcome of the negotiations. When he returned to India, he discovered that the government had declared Congress illegal, that prominent leaders were imprisoned, and that meetings and gatherings were prohibited.
- Gandhiji relaunched the Civil Disobedience Movement, which lasted over a year before losing steam by 1934.

3.2 How Participants saw the Movement

Rich Peasant Community:

- Swaraj meant a fight against the rising revenue rates for the wealthier peasants.
- This fueled resentment toward the government, which refused to reduce the revenue demand.
- When Mahatma Gandhi launched the movement, the rich peasant community reacted negatively.
- The rich peasant community actively participated in the fight when Mahatma Gandhi launched the movement.
- As a result, when the movement was relaunched, the wealthy peasants refused to take part.

Poor Peasant Community:

Poor peasants desired a reduction in revenue demands as well as the remittance of unpaid rents to landlords and rich peasants. The poor peasant demands were not voiced for fear of disappointing the rich peasants who financially supported the congress party.

Business-class Community:

- People from the business class wanted to expand their operations in India and abroad.
- However, the Company's control over import duties and trade restrictions hampered their growth.
- Industrialists formed the Indian Industrial and Commercial Congress in 1920 and the Federation of the Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industries (FICCI) in 1927 to oppose colonial policies.
- The business elite saw the Civil Disobedience movement as a watershed moment in which their trade monopoly would be challenged.

- When the movement was halted, they became concerned about military activities, fearing that trade restrictions would be tightened and their businesses would suffer significant losses.

Industrial Working Class:

Except in the Nagpur region, industrial working-class people did not enrol in huge numbers. As they were afraid, the Congress party did not incorporate their demands such as poor salaries and proper working conditions.

Women:

Women joined the campaign because they saw it as their holy duty to the nation.

- Many women came out of their homes to listen to Gandhiji during the salt march.
- Women from wealthy peasant and upper caste households made up the majority of those who took part.
- They boycotted foreign goods, protested, and picketed liquor stores.
- The Congress party did not encourage women's participation since they believed women were supposed to look after household responsibilities and family. Despite their efforts, the women were not offered positions in the party.

3.3 The Limits of Civil Disobedience

The Untouchables:

The 'untouchables' were a sector of society that was discriminated against by the rest of society.

- Inclusion of their interests and demands by the Congress party was not deemed helpful because it would have irritated the upper-class members.
- But Gandhiji saw everyone as equal and stated that every member of society is significant and that every work done contributes to the larger good of humanity.
- He desired equal involvement in the movement for the Dalits, as they became known.
- The Dalits, on the other hand, desired a political advantage by being able to vote separately in the electorate, which would select solely Dalit members for legislative councils.
- They hoped that political status would give them advantages in lawmaking and give them a say in decision making.
- Poona Pact was signed in September 1932, according to which the Dalits would be given reserved seats in the legislative councils.

Muslims:

- Muslims' reaction to the Civil Disobedience Movement was unexpected. Members of the Congress party were more drawn toward religious organisations such as the Hindu Mahasabha.
- The Muslim League and the Congress party attempted to reconcile their differences.

- All those hopes, however, were dashed when M.R. Jaykar of the Hindu Mahasabha openly opposed the reunion at the All Parties Conference in 1928.
- Muslims feared that because they were minorities, their religion would dwindle under Hindu dominance, and their interests would be overlooked.

4. The Sense of Collective Belonging

Opposing colonial rule required a concerted effort from all communities, each with their own reasons.

- The concept of a unified nation arose in the minds of great leaders and gradually took root in the minds of the people.
- India, like many other countries, came to be represented as an image: Bharat Mata. Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay was the first to bring it up.
- Vande Mataram was written in the 1870s by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay. The song was popular during the Swadeshi movement and the fight for independence.
- Abanindranath Tagore painted a portrait of Bharat Mata that portrayed calm, divinity, and spirituality.

Collecting and restoring old stories and songs was seen as a way to connect with a country's culture, leading to a sense of oneness.

- Rabindranath Tagore amassed a collection of ballads, poems, and myths.
- The Folklore of Southern India by Natesa Sastri is a four-volume compilation of Tamil folk stories.

Symbols and icons were also used to bring people together.

- A tricolour flag (red, green, and yellow) was designed in Bengal. It was decorated with eight lotuses and a crescent moon.
- The lotuses represented the eight provinces under British rule, while the moon represented Hindus and Muslims.
- Gandhiji created a tricolour flag (red, white, and green) with a spinning wheel in the centre in 1921. The wheel symbolised its reliance on itself for progress and wealth.
- Redefining history and taking pride in its rich culture and traditions became associated with nationalism.
- People proposed that India was a country of brave and great rulers prior to colonialism.
- Under their leadership, India excelled in scientific, ayurvedic, philosophical, artistic, literary, and other fields.
- Bringing to people's attention what colonisation had done to their wonderful homeland created animosity for British control and developed in people's minds a collective will to fight for their motherland.

5. Conclusion

The movement experienced high points of Congress activity and nationalist unity, but also phases of disunity and inner conflict, creating a nation with many voices wanting freedom from colonial rule.