

THE RISE AND GROWTH OF INDIAN NATIONALISM

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ABSTRACT

The various aspect of Indian National Movement during its earlier phase. Resistance to British rule had always been there, but it was in 1857 that large sections of Indian people in various regions made a combined effort to overthrow the British. That is why it is often termed as the first war of independence. Due to certain weaknesses the uprising was crushed by the British but as far as the struggle was concerned there was no going back. This inspired a new kind of struggle. The intelligentsia which earlier believed in the benevolence of British rule now came forward to expose its brutality. Political associations were forward and the Indian National Congress played a vital role in directing the freedom struggle. Indian nationalism was the child of the British Raj, and British authorities blessed its cradle. Nationalism is really only anti- colonialism.

Keywords: Intelligentsia, Epoch, Revolt, Imperialist, Boycott, Struggle, Economic Exploitation, Dominion, Non-Cooperation, Violation, Freedom Movement and Indian National Congress.

INTRODUCTION

The rise and growth of Indian nationalism has been traditionally explained in terms of Indian response to the stimulus generated by the British Raj through creation of new institutions, new opportunities, resources etc. The year 1885 marks the beginning of a new epoch in Indian History. In that year an all-India political organisation was set on foot under the name of the Indian National Congress. The Indian mind became increasingly conscious of its political position. Political associations were formed and the Indian National Congress played a vital role in directing the freedom struggle.

1857: THE FIRST WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

In 1857 occurred the Revolt known as Indian's First War of independence when millions of soldiers, artisans and peasants made a combined effort to overthrow foreign rule. The Revolt was, however, no sudden occurrence. It was the culmination of nearly a century-old discontent with British policies and imperialist exploitation. The British conquered India and colonized its economy and society through a prolonged process. The colonial Indian peasant working with the primitive plough and on an uneconomic holding, had to compete in the Indian and world market with powerful agrarian capitalist trusts. (A.R.Desai, P.63)¹ This process led to continuous resistance by the people through a series of civil rebellions led by deposed rulers, impoverished zamindars and poligars and ex officials of the conquered Indian states. From 1763 to 1856 there were more than 40 major rebellions apart from hundreds of minor ones. The revolt of 1857 was, however, to involve millions in large parts of the country and to shake the British rule to its very roots.

CAUSES

The Revolt of 1857 started on 10 May when the Company's Indian soldiers (sepoys) at Meerut rebelled, killed their European officers, marched to Delhi, entered the Red Fort and proclaimed the aged and powerless Bahadur Shah 11 as the Emperor of India.

The Company's sepoys had many grievances against their employers, ranging from declining material and other service conditions to religious interference and racial arrogance. The hopes, desires, despair and discontent of other sections of Indian society they were reflected in them. Above all, the colonial policy of intensifying land revenue demand led to a large number of peasants losing their land to revenue farmers, traders and moneylenders. Destruction of traditional handicrafts ruined and impoverished millions of artisans. The economic decline of peasantry and artisans was reflected in 12 major and numerous minor famines from 1770 to 1857. (Ahir, 2014, pp. 1-19).²

FACTORS FAVOURING GROWTH OF INDIAN NATIONALISM

At first, British scholars and administrators denied the existence of any feeling of nationality in India. In 1883 J.R Seeley described India as mere "geographical expression" with no sense whatever of national unity. In 1884 John Strachey, an ex- Indian civil servant told the alumni of Cambridge University, "This is the first and most essential thing to learn about India- that there is not, and never was an India". When the closing of the 19th century and first decade of the 20th century demonstrated that nationalism had grown and was gaining strength, British scholars struck a new posture.

In the years after 1919, we see the national movement spreading to new areas, incorporating new social groups, and developing new modes of struggle. The war created a new economic and political situation. It led to a huge increase in defence expenditure which was financed by war loans and increasing taxes: customs duties were raised and income tax introduced. Through the war years prices increased doubling between 1913 and 1918 leading to extreme hardship for the common people. Then in 1918-19 and 1920-21, crops failed in many parts of India, resulting in acute shortages of food. (Mehta, 2015, p. 292)³

- Impact of British Rule
- Political Unity of India
- Establishment of peace and Administrative Unification of India
- Development of rapid means of transport and Communications
- Introduction of Modern Education
- Emergence of a Modern Press
- Rise of the Middle Class Intelligentsia
- Influence of Historical Researchers
- Impact of Contemporary European Movements
- Progressive Character of Socio-Religious Reform Movements
- Racialism
- Economic Exploitation

THE IDEA OF SATYAGRAHA

Mahatma Gandhi returned to India in January 1915. The idea of satyagraha emphasised the power of truth and the need to search truth. It suggested that if the cause was true, if the struggle was against injustice, then physical force was not necessary to fight the oppressor. By this struggle, truth was bound to ultimately triumph. Mahatma Gandhi believed that this dharma of non-violence could unite all Indians. Then in 1917, he organised a satyagraha to support the peasants of the kheda district of Gujarat. Affected by crop failure and a plague epidemic, the peasants of kheda could not pay the revenue, and were demanding that revenue collection be relaxed.

THE ROWLATT ACT

Emboldened with this success, Gandhiji in 1919 decided to launch a nationwide satyagraha against the proposed Rowlatt Act 1919. This Act had been hurriedly passed through the Imperial Legislative Council despite the united opposition of the Indian members. It gave the government enormous powers to repress political activities, and allowed detention of political prisoners without trial for two years. Mahatma Gandhi wanted non-violent civil disobedience against such unjust laws, which would start with a hartal on 6 April.

On 13 April the infamous JallianwallaBagh incident took place. There were strikes, clashes with the police and attacks on government buildings. The Government responded with brutal repression, seeking to humiliate and terrorise people: satyagrahis were forced to rub their noses on the ground, crawl on the streets and do salaam (salute) to all sahibs; people were flogged and villages (around Gujranwala in Punjab, now in Pakistan) were bombed. While the Rowlattsatyagraha had been a widespread movement, it was still limited mostly to cities and towns. Mahatma Gandhi now felt the need to launch a more broad-based movement in India. But he was certain that no such movement could be organised without bringing the Hindus and Muslims closer together. One way of doing this, he felt, was to take up the Khilafat issue. The First World War had ended with the defeat of Ottoman Turkey.

WHY NON-COOPERATION

In his famous book *Hindi Swaraj* (1909) Mahatma Gandhi declared that British rule was established in India with the cooperation of Indians, and had survived only because of this cooperation. Movement should begin with the surrender of titles that the government awarded, and a boycott of civil services, army, police, courts and legislative councils, schools and foreign goods.

Finally, at the Congress session at Nagpur in December 1920, a compromise was worked out and the Non-Cooperation programme was adopted. The Non-Cooperation Khilafat Movement began in January 1921.

The effects of non-cooperation on the economic front were more dramatic. Foreign goods were boycotted, liquor shops picketed, and foreign cloth burnt in huge bonfires. The import of foreign cloth halved between 1921 and 1922, its value dropped. (Srivastava, 2015, pp. 240-251)⁴

THE SALT MARCH AND THE CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE MOVEMENT

Mahatma Gandhi found in salt a powerful symbol that could unite the nation. As Gandhi said, "There is no other article like salt, outside water, by taxing which the government can reach the starving millions, the sick, the maimed and the utterly helpless...it is the most inhuman poll tax the ingenuity of man can devise." (Ahir, 2014, page 414)⁶ On 31 January 1930, he sent a letter to Viceroy Irwin stating eleven demands. On March 12, 1930 Gandhi led by 78 followers started from Sabarmati Ashram on the famous Salt March to Dandi Beach to manufacture illegal salt. The statesman of Calcutta sarcastically commented that Gandhi could go no boiling sea water till Dominion status was attained. The History of the rise of national sentiment in India is closely bound up with the growth of a unified national economy. (A.R. Desai, P.01)⁷

Rapprochement was effected by the famous Gandhi Irwin Pact (5 March 1931) and the viceroy declared that Dominion status was the goal of India's constitutional development. The Civil Disobedience movement was provisionally suspended and Gandhi attended the Second Round Table Conference to discuss the scheme of constitutional reform for India.

Some of the programme outlined for the Civil Disobedience were the following:

- The violation of the salt law and other laws.
- Non-payment of land revenue, rent or other taxes.
- Boycott of law courts, legislatures, Elections, Government Functions, Government Schools and Colleges.
- Boycott of Foreign Goods and cloths and burning of foreign cloth.
- Peaceful picketing of shops selling liquor and other intoxicants.
- Organizing mass strikes and demonstrations.
- Resigning Government jobs and not going the civil, military or police services.

By the second half of 1932, Civil Disobedience was going down in defeat in the face of an overwhelming repression and not because of a loss of faith in the Congress. However, the days of the Gandhian satyagraha had passed. (Parmar, 2011, pp. 26- 32)⁸. In fact, it has boldly declared that the real political problem in India is not a strictly political, but essentially a psychological problem. The miracle of British rule in India - the government of 300,000,000 of peoples, spread over a whole continent, by a couple of Hundred thousand foreigners, civil and military. (V.C. PAL, 2006, P.42)⁹

CONCLUSION

A growing anger against the colonial government was thus bringing together various groups and classes of Indians into a common struggle for freedom in the first half of the twentieth century. British rule in India became the most spectacular case of imperialism in modern times, but it was a special case as well. (Seal Anil, 1971, page 01)¹⁰ The Indian Nationalism grew partly as a result of colonial policies and partly as a reaction to colonial policies. (Ahir R. 2017, p.265)¹¹ The congress under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi tried to channel people's grievances into organised movements for independence. Through such movements the nationalists tried to forge a national unity. But as we have seen, diverse groups and classes participated in these movements with varied aspirations and expectations. As their grievances were wide-ranging, freedom from colonial rule also meant different things to different people. The congress continuously attempted to resolve differences, and ensure that the demands of one group did not alienate another. This is

precisely why the unity within the movement often broke down. The high points of congress activity and nationalist unity were followed by phases of disunity and inner conflict between groups. In other words, the 1930s and 1940s witnessed a multidimensional thrust for removal of India's backwardness- social, economic, political and even cultural. The congress Election Manifesto for 1937 elections and later of 1945-46 elections were indicative of the multidimensional approach to pull India out of backwardness.

After Indian Independence (1947) although India has made great progress on the socioeconomic front yet Mahatma Gandhi's ideal of "wiping off every tear from every eye" remains a distant dream.

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