

10th – Nationalism In India II



Swaraj in the Plantations: For plantation workers in Assam, freedom meant the right to move freely in and out in the areas confined Inland Emigration Act of 1859. Under this law, plantation workers were not permitted to leave the tea gardens permission and in reality, they were rarely given such permission. When they heard of Non-Cooperation Movement, they left plantations and headed home. But they never reached their destination and were caught by the police and brutally beaten up. The visions of these movements were not defined by the Congress programme.

Yet, when the tribal chanted Gandhiji's name and raised slogans demanding Swatantra Bharat, they were also emotionally relating to an all India agitation.

Towards civil disobedience: Mahatma Gandhi in February 1922, decided to roll back the non-cooperation Movement. The Chauri Chaura incident occurred at Chauri Chaura in Gorakhpur district of United Province on 4th February, 1922. A peaceful demonstration in bazaar turned into a violent clash with the police. This incident led to the deaths of three civilians and 22 or 23 policemen. Gandhi felt that movement was turning violent in many places, and Satyagrahis needed to be properly trained before they would be ready for mass struggles. Mahatma Gandhi called a halt to the Non-Cooperation Movement.

Different Views Within the Congress: Some leaders within Congress were tired of mass struggle and wanted to participate in the election to the provincial councils that had been set up by the Government of India Act of 1935. They felt it was important to oppose British policies within the councils. CR Das, Motilal Nehru, NC Kelkar formed the Swaraj Party within the Congress to argue for a return to council politics. But younger leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose pressed for more forceful mass agitation and for full independence. In the situation of internal debate and discussion, two factors again shaped Indian politics towards the late 1920s.

(i) The first was the effect of the worldwide economic depression.

(ii) The second was agricultural prices which began to fall from 1926 and collapsed after 1930.

Formation of Simon Commission: As the demand for agricultural goods fell and exports declined, peasants found it difficult to sell their harvest and pay their revenue. Under these circumstances, Simon Commission was constituted under John Simon. The main objective of it was to review the functioning of the constitutional system in India and suggest changes. Indian leaders opposed the commission as there were no Indians in it. When the commission arrived in India in 1928, it was greeted with the slogan Simon Go Back. All parties including the Congress and the Muslim League participated in the demonstrations.

Demand of Purna Swaraj: In October 1929, the Viceroy, Lord Irwin announced an uncertain offer of dominion status for India and a Round Table Conference to discuss a future constitution. In December 1929, under the Presidency of Jawaharlal Nehru, the Lahore Congress formalised the demand of Purna Swaraj or full independence for India. It was also declared that 26th January, 1930 would be celebrated as the Independence Day, when people were to take a pledge to struggle for complete independence.

The Salt March and the Civil Disobedience Movement: Mahatma Gandhi found that salt is a powerful symbol that could unite the nation. On 31st January, 1930,

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Gandhiji sent a letter to Viceroy Irwin urging eleven demands. Some demands were of general interest and some were specific demands. These demands were different classes from industrialists to peasants.

The letter also included the demand to abolish the salt tax. Salt was one of the most essential food items and was consumed by both rich and poor.

Dominion status: It refers to semi-autonomous country within the British empire that is also called British commonwealth countries. The tax on salt and the government monopoly over its production, revealed the cruelest side of British rule. Mahatma Gandhi's letter was an ultimatum stating that if the demands were not fulfilled by 11th March, the Congress would launch a civil disobedience campaign. Irwin was not ready to talk upon the demands. Then Gandhiji took the decision to launch the movement.

Beginning of Civil Disobedience Movement: Alongwith 78 followers, Gandhiji started his march from Sabarmati Ashram on 12th March, 1930, for Dandi, the coastal town of Gujarat. On 6th April, he reached Dandi and ceremonially violated the Salt law, he manufactured salt by boiling seawater. The march was over 240 miles. This marked the beginning of the Civil Disobedience Movement.

As the movement spread,

- Foreign clothes were boycotted. Liquor shops were picketed.
- Peasants refused to pay revenue and chaukidari taxes.
- Village officials resigned.
- In many places, forest people violated forest laws.
- Worried by the ongoing movement, the colonial government began arresting the Congress leaders one by one.

Calling Off the Civil Disobedience Movement: Peaceful Satyagrahis were attacked, women and children were beaten and about 1,00,000 people were arrested. When a prominent leader Abdul Gaffar Khan was arrested on April 1930, angry crowd demonstrated in Peshwar and several violent incidents were reported. In such a situation, Mahatma Gandhi once again decided to call off the movement and entered into a pact with Irwin on 5th March, 1931.

Relaunching of Civil Disobedience Movement: In December 1931, Gandhiji 'went to London for the Round Table Conference. But the discussion was of no use and he returned disappointed. Back in India, he discovered that government had begun a new method of control. Congress had been declared illegal; Abdul Ghaffar Khan and Jawaharlal Nehru both were in jail. Mahatma Gandhi relaunched the Civil Disobedience Movement. This movement was continued for a year and lost its momentum by the year 1934.

Formation of Hindustan Socialists Republican Army: Many nationalists did not believe in non-violent method for a freedom. In 1928, some nationalists like Bhagat Singh, Jatin Das Ghosh founded the Hindustan Socialists Republican Army (HSRA) at a meeting in Ferozshah Kotla ground in Delhi. HSRA targeted the symbols of British power. For example, in April, 1929 Bhagat Singh and Batukeswar Dutta threw a bomb on the Legislative Assembly. Bhagat Singh was only 23 when he was tried and executed by the colonial government. He wanted a revolution in society.

Meaning of the Movement for Different Groups: Different social groups participated in Civil Disobedience Movement for different ideals or reasons. Meaning of swaraj was different for different social groups.

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For Rich Peasants: Fight against High Revenue In the countryside, rich peasant communities like the Patidars of Gujarat and the Jats of Uttar Pradesh were active in the movement. These rich peasants became enthusiastic supporters of the Civil Disobedience Movement. They organised their communities to participate in boycott programmes. But they were deeply disappointed when the movement was called off in 1931 without the revenue rates being revised.

For Poorer Peasants: No Rent Movement: As depression continued, the poor peasantry found it difficult to pay their rent to the landlords. They joined a variety of radical movements often led by Socialists and Communists in the hope that they would not have to pay the rent any further. The Congress was unwilling to support no rent camps in most places as it would upset the interests of the rich and landlords. So, the relationship between the poor peasants and the Congress remained uncertain.

For Industrialists: Movement against Colonial Restriction on Business. Merchants and industrialists wanted protection against foreign goods. They formed the Indian Industrial Commercial Congress in 1920 and the Federation of the Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industries (FICCI) in 1927 to organise business interests.

These associations were led by industrialists like GD Birla and Purshottamdas Thakurdas. When the first Civil Disobedience Movement was launched, they widely supported it in the hope that business restriction would be lifted.

They gave financial assistance and refused to buy or sell imported goods. Most of the businessmen hoped that swaraj would end colonial restriction on business and industries would grow. But after the failure of the Round Table conference, business groups were not active in the movement.

Non Participation of Industrial Workers: The industrial working classes did not participate in the Civil Disobedience Movement in large numbers, except in the Nagpur region. As the industrialists came closer to the Congress, workers stayed separated. There were strikes by railway workers in 1930 and dockworkers in 1932. In 1930, thousands of workers in Chhotanagpur tin mines wore Gandhi caps and participated in protest rallies and boycott campaigns.

Participation of Women: Another important feature of this movement was the large scale participation of women. In urban areas women came from high-caste families. In rural areas, women came from rich peasant households. Women were inspired by Gandhiji's call and they began to see service to the nation as their sacred duty. But it did not mean any major changes in their position. For a long time the Congress did not allow women to hold any higher position within the organisation. It preferred only symbolic presence.

Limits of Civil Disobedience: All social groups were not moved by the concept of Swaraj. One such group was the 'untouchables' who began to call themselves Dalit around the 1930s. The Muslims also could not relate to this movement.

Satyagraha for Dalits: For a long time, the Congress had ignored the Dalits for fear of offending the Sanatanis, the conservative high caste Hindus. Gandhiji called Dalits Harijan or the Children of God.

Gandhi believed that Swaraj would not come for a hundred years if untouchability was not eliminated. Gandhiji organised Satyagraha for the 'Harijans' to secure their entry into temples and access to public wells, tanks, roads and schools.

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Gandhiji himself cleaned the toilets to dignify the work of bhangi (the sweepers). Gandhiji urged the upper class to change their mindset regarding the untouchables.

Stand of Dalit Leaders: Dalit leaders wanted different political solution to the problems of their community. They demanded reserved seats in educational institutions and a separate electorate that would choose Dalit members for Legislative Councils.

Dr BR Ambedkar organised the Dalits into the Depressed Classes Association in 1930. His views differed with Mahatma Gandhi at the Second Round Table Conference by demanding separate electorates for Dalits. When the British Government admitted Ambedkar's demand, Gandhiji began a fast unto death. Gandhiji believed that separate electorates for Dalits would slow down the process of their integration into the main society. Ambedkar ultimately accepted Gandhiji's position and as a result, Poona Pact of September 1932 was signed. It gave the depressed classes reserved seats in Provincial and Central Legislative Council. But they were to be voted in by the general electorate.

Hindu Muslim Clash: Some of the Muslim political organisations in India rarely participated in the Civil Disobedience Movement. After the decline of the Non-Cooperation and Khilafat Movement, a large section of Muslims felt separated from the Congress. From the mid 1920, the Congress came to be more visibly associated with openly Hindu religious nationalist groups like the Hindu Mahasabha.

As relations between Hindus and Muslims worsened. Hindu-Muslim communal clashes and riots occurred in various cities. Every riot deepened the distance between the two religious groups.

In 1930, Sir Muhammad Iqbal, the President of Muslim League demanded the importance of separate electorates for Muslims. He thought it would safeguard their minority political interests. He justified the Muslim demand for the creation of a Muslim India within India.

Difference between Hindu Mahasabha and Muslim League: The Congress and Muslim League made efforts to talk again for unity. In 1927, it appeared that such a unity could be possible. The only difference between Congress and Muslim League was on the representation in the future assemblies that were to be elected. Muhammad Au Jinnah of Muslim League was willing to give up the demand for separate electorates for two conditions

(i) Muslims were assured reserved seats in the Central Assembly.

(ii) Representation would be in proportion to the population in Muslim dominated provinces (Bengal and Punjab).

But all hope of resolving the issue at the All Parties Conference in 1928, disappeared when MR Jayakar of the Hindu Mahasabha strongly opposed efforts at compromise. When the Civil Disobedience Movement started, there was, thus, an atmosphere of suspicion and distrust between the two communities.

Muslim leaders were concerned about the minority status in India. They thought that their culture and identities would be submerged under the domination of Hindu majority.

The sense of collective belonging: Nationalist movements spread when people belonging to different regions and communities began to develop a sense of belongingness. Undoubtedly, this sense of belongingness developed through the

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experience of united struggles. But many cultural processes also contributed to it. History, fiction, folklore, songs, popular prints and symbols, all played a part in the making of nationalism. It was seen in India during its freedom movement.

Creation of Identity for Nation: The identity of a nation is most often symbolised in a figure or image. In the 20th century, the identity of India came to be visually associated with the image of Bharat Mata. This image of Bharat Mata was first created by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay in 1870, when he wrote 'Vande Mataram' for our motherland. Later, this song included in his novel Anandamath and widely sung by the freedom fighters. The image of Bharat Mata was first painted by Abanindranath Tagore. Later the image acquired many different forms as it was drawn by different artists.

Development of Nationalism through Folklore: Indian folk songs and folk tales sung by bard (wandering poets) played an important role for making the idea of nationalism. These gave true picture of traditional culture, which was corrupted by foreigners. In Bengal, Rabindranath Tagore and in Madras Natesa Sastri collected massive collection of folk tales and songs. Which led the movement for folk revival. As the National Movement nationalist leaders accepted symbols which unified people.

Designing of National Flag: During the Swadeshi Movement, a tricolour (red, green, yellow) flag was designed in Bengal. It had eight lotuses representing eight provinces and a crescent moon representing Hindus and Muslims.

By 1921, Gandhiji had designed the Swaraj Flag. It was a tricolour having a spinning wheel in the centre representing the Gandhian ideal of self help. Carrying this tricolour flag (red, green and white) holding it overhead during marches, became a symbol of challenge for Britishers.

Nationalism through Indian Ancient History: Another means of creating feeling of nationalism was explaining the meaning of history again. The nationalist writers urged the readers to take pride in India's great achievements in the past and struggle to change the miserable conditions of life under British rule.

Unification of people involved some problems. When the past that was being glorified was Hindu and the images celebrated were taken from Hindu iconography, the people of other communities felt left out.

Conclusion: A growing anger against the Colonial Government together various groups and classes of Indians into a common struggle for freedom in the first half of century. However different expectations of diverse groups pose a constant threat to unity. The congress under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi tried to channel people's sufferings into organised and united movement for independence.

