



Government of Tamilnadu

Department of Employment and Training

Course : TNPSC Group I Mains Material
Subject : Modern History of India and Indian Culture
Topic : Indian national congress

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INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS

Introduction:

The idea of forming a political organization that would raise issues and grievances against the colonial rule did not emerge in a vacuum. Between 1875 and 1885 there were many agitations against British policies in India.

- The Indian textile industry was campaigning for imposition of cotton import duties in 1875. In 1877, demands for the Indianisation of Government services were made vociferously. There were protests against the Vernacular Press Act of 1878. In 1883, there was an agitation in favour of the Ilbert Bill.
- But these agitations and protests were sporadic and not coordinated. There was a strong realisation that these protests would not impact on the policy makers unless a national political organisation was formed.
- From this realisation was born the Indian National Congress. The concept of India as a nation was reflected in the name of the organisation. It also introduced the concept of nationalism.

In December 1884, Allan Octavian Hume, a retired English ICS officer, presided over a meeting of the Theosophical Society in Madras. The formation of a political organization. That would work on an all India basis was discussed and the idea of forming the Indian National Congress emerged in this meeting.

The Indian National Congress was formed on 28 December 1885 in Bombay. Apart from A.O. Hume, another important founding member was W.C.Bannerjee, who was elected the first president.

- Though the activities of the INC then revolved around petitions and memoranda, from the very beginning the founders of the INC worked to bring every section of the society into its ambit.

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- One of the main missions of the INC was to weld the Indians into a nation. They were convinced that the struggle against the colonial rule will be successful only if Indians saw themselves as the members of a nation.
 - To achieve this, the INC acted as a common political platform for all the movements that were being organised in different parts of the country. The INC provided the space where the political workers from different parts of the country could gather and conduct their political activities under its banner.
 - Even though the organization was small with less than a hundred members, it had an all India character with representation from all regions of India. It was the beginning of the mobilisation of people on an all-India basis.

The major objectives and demands of INC were:

Constitutional

Opportunity for participation in the government was one of the major demands of the Indian National Congress. It demanded Indian representation in the government.

Economic

High land revenue was one of the major factors that contributed to the oppression of the peasants. It demanded reduction in the land revenue and protection of peasants against exploitation of the zamindars. The Congress also advocated the imposition of heavy tax on the imported goods for the benefit of swadeshi goods.

Administrative

Higher officials who had responsibility of administration in India were selected through civil services examinations conducted in Britain. This meant that educated Indians who could not afford to go to London had no opportunity to get high administrative jobs. Therefore, Indianisation of services through simultaneous Indian Civil Services Examinations in England and India was a major demand of the Congress.

Judicial

Because of the partial treatment against the Indian political activists by English judges it demanded the complete separation of the Executive and the Judiciary.



Contributions of Early Nationalists (1885–1915)

- The early nationalists in the INC came from the elite sections of the society. Lawyers, college and university teachers, doctors, journalists and such others represented the Congress. However, they came from different regions of the country and this made INC a truly a national political organisation.
- These leaders of the INC adopted the constitutional methods of presenting petitions, prayers and memorandums and thereby earned the moniker of “Moderates”. It was also the time some sort of an understanding about colonialism was evolving in India.
- There was no ready-made anti colonial understanding available for reference in the late nineteenth century when the INC was formed. It was the early nationalists who helped the formulation of the idea of *we* as a nation.
- They were developing the indigenous anti-colonial ideology and a strategy on their own which helped future mass leaders like M. K Gandhi. From the late 1890s there were growing differences within the INC. Leaders like Bipin Chandra Pal, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Lala Lajpat Rai were advocating radical approaches instead of merely writing petitions, prayers and memorandums. These advocates of radical methods came to be called the “extremists” as against those who were identified as moderates.
- Their objective became clear in 1897 when Tilak raised the clarion call “Swaraj is my birth right and I shall have it”. Tilak and his militant followers were now requesting Swaraj instead of economic or administrative reforms that the moderates were requesting through their petitions and prayers.
- Though they criticised each other, it would be wrong to place them in the opposing poles. Both moderates and militants, with their own methods, were significant elements of the larger Indian nationalist movement. In fact, they contributed towards the making of the swadeshi movement.
- The partition of Bengal in 1905, by the colonial government, which you will be studying in the next lesson, was vehemently opposed by the Indians. The swadeshi movement of 1905, directly opposed the British rule and encouraged the ideas of swadeshi enterprise, national education, self-help and use of Indian languages.

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- The method of mass mobilization and boycott of British goods and institutions suggested by the radicals was also accepted by the Moderates. Both the Moderates and the Radicals were of the same view when it came to accepting the fact that they needed to fulfil the role of educators.
 - They tried to instil nationalist consciousness through various means including the press. When the INC was founded in 1885, one third of the members were journalists. Most stalwarts of the early freedom movement were involved in journalism.
 - Dadabhai Naoroji founded and edited two journals called Voice of India and RastGofar. Surendranath Banerjea newspaper called Bengalese.
 - Bal Gangadhar Tilak edited *Kesari* and *Mahratta*. This is the means that they used to educate the common people about the colonial oppression and spread nationalist ideas. News regarding the initiatives taken by the INC were taken to the masses through these newspapers. For the first time, in the history of India, the press was used to generate public opinion against the oppressive policies and acts of the colonial government.
 - Bal Gangadhar Tilak was a firm Believer lower middle classes, peasants, artisans and workers could play a very important role in the national movement, He used his newspapers to articulate the discontent among this section of the people against the oppressive colonial rule. He called for national resistance against imperial British rule in India.
 - On 27 July 1897, Tilak was arrested and charged under Section 124 A of the Indian Penal Code. Civil liberty, particularly in the form of freedom of expression and press became the significant part of Indian freedom struggle.

Naoroji and his Drain Theory

Dadabhai Naoroji, known as the ‘Grand Old Man of Indian Nationalism’, was a prominent early nationalist. He was elected to the Bombay Municipal Corporation and Town Council during the 1870s. Elected to the British Parliament in 1892, he founded the India Society (1865) and the East India Association (1866) in London. He was elected thrice as the President of the INC.

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- His major contribution to the Indian nationalist movement was his book *Poverty and Un-British Rule of the British in India* (1901).
 - In this book, he put forward the concept of ‘drain of wealth’. He stated that in any country the tax raised would have been spent for the wellbeing of the people of that country.
 - But in British India, taxes collected in India were spent for the welfare of England. Naoroji argued that India had exported an average of 13 million pounds worth of goods to Britain each year from 1835 to 1872 with no corresponding return.
 - The goods were in lieu of payments for profits to Company shareholders living in Britain, guaranteed interest to investors in railways, pensions to retired officials and generals, interest for the money borrowed from England to meet war expenses for the British conquest of territories in India as well as outside India. All these, going in the name of Home Charges, Naoroji asserted, made up a loss of 30 million pounds a year.

From its foundation on 28 December 1885 until the time of independence of India on August 15, 1947, the Indian National Congress was the largest and most prominent Indian public organization, and central and defining influence of the Indian Independence Movement. Although initially and primarily a political body, the Congress transformed itself into a national vehicle for social reform and human upliftment. “The Congress was the strongest foundation and defining influence of modern Indian nationalism.

Sessions of Indian National Congress before Independence

Year	Place	President
1885, 1882	Bombay, Allahabad	W.C Bannerji
1886	Calcutta	Dadabhai Naoroji
1893	Lahore	Dadabhai Naoroji
1906	Calcutta	Dadabhai Naoroji
1887	Madras	Badruddin Tyyabji (first Muslim President)
1888	Allahabad	George Yule (first English President)
1889	Bombay	Sir William Wedderburn
1890	Calcutta	Sir Feroze S.Mehta

1895, 1902	Poona, Ahmedabad	S.N Banerjee
1905	Banaras	G.K Gokhale
1907, 1908	Surat, Madras	Rasbehari Ghosh
1909	Lahore	M.M Malviya
1916	Lucknow	A.C Majumdar (Re-union of the Congress)
1917	Calcutta	Annie Besant (first woman President)
1919	Amritsar	Motilal Nehru
1920	Calcutta (Special Session)	Lala Lajpat Rai
1921,1922	Ahmadabad, Gaya	C.R Das
1923	Delhi (Special session)	Abdul Kalam Azad (youngest President)
1924	Belgaon	M.K Gandhi
1925	Kanpur	Sarojini Naidu (first Indian woman President)
1928	Calcutta	Motilal Nehru (first All India Youth Congress Formed)
1929	Lahore	J.L. Nehru (Poorna Swaraj resolution was passed)
1931	Karachi	Vallabhbhai Patel (Here, resolution on Fundamental rights and the National Economic Program was passed)
1932, 1933	Delhi, Calcutta	(Session Banned)
1934	Bombay	Rajendra Prasad
1936	Lucknow	J.L. Nehru
1937	Faizpur	J.L Nehru (first session in a village)
1938	Haripura	S.C Bose (a National Planning Committee set-up under J.L Nehru).
1939	Tripuri	S.C.Bose was re-elected but had to resign due to protest by Gandhiji (as Gandhiji supported Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya). Rajendra Prasad was appointed in his place.
1940	Ramgarh	Abdul Kalam Azad
1946	Meerut	Acharya J.B Kriplani
1948	Jaipur	Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya.

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Questions:

1. Give a detailed answer about Indian National Congress.
2. What are the major objectives and demands of INC?
3. Analysis the contributions of early Nationalists. (1885-1915)

