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Introduction to the National Movement

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, India witnessed significant political and social changes under British colonial rule. Various groups and classes expressed dissatisfaction with British policies, including the conquest of territories, introduction of new laws, changes in peasants' and tribals' lives, educational reforms, debates on women's conditions, challenges to the caste system, social and religious reforms, the Revolt of 1857, and the decline of crafts alongside industrial growth. These developments led to the emergence of a national consciousness that India belonged to all its people regardless of class, caste, creed, language, or gender, and that British control needed to end for India to be truly for Indians.

Early Political Associations and the Indian National Congress

After 1850, political associations began forming, led mainly by English-educated professionals such as lawyers. Important associations included the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha, Indian Association, Madras Mahajan Sabha, Bombay Presidency Association, and the Indian National Congress (INC). These groups aimed to represent all Indians and sought sovereignty for the people. The INC was established in 1885 with leaders like Dadabhai Naoroji, Pherozeshah Mehta, and Badruddin Tyabji. Early demands included greater Indian participation in government, Indianisation of administration, freedom of speech, and economic reforms to reduce poverty and famines caused by British policies.

Exam Question

Q: What were the main objectives of the early Indian National Congress?

A: The early INC aimed to increase Indian participation in government, Indianise the administration, ensure freedom of speech, and address economic issues like poverty and famines caused by British rule.

Moderate and Radical Leadership in the National Movement

By the 1890s, leaders like Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Bepin Chandra Pal, and Lala Lajpat Rai began advocating more radical approaches, criticizing the Moderates for their cautious methods. They emphasized self-reliance, mass mobilisation, and boycott of British goods and institutions. The partition of Bengal in 1905 by Viceroy Curzon sparked widespread opposition and led to the Swadeshi movement, promoting the use of Indian-made goods and national education.

Exam Question

Q: What was the significance of the Swadeshi movement?

A: The Swadeshi movement opposed the partition of Bengal, encouraged the boycott of British goods, promoted Indian-made products, and helped build national pride and mass participation in the freedom struggle.

Growth of Political Parties and Communalism

The All India Muslim League was formed in 1906, supporting the partition of Bengal and demanding separate electorates for Muslims. The Congress split in 1907 into Moderates and Radicals but reunited in 1915. The Lucknow Pact of 1916 saw cooperation between Congress and the Muslim League for representative government. However, communal tensions grew in the 1930s and 1940s, with the Muslim League demanding independent states for Muslims, leading to eventual partition.

Exam Question

Q: What was the Lucknow Pact and its importance?

A: The Lucknow Pact (1916) was an agreement between the Indian National Congress and the All India Muslim League to work together for representative government, marking a rare moment of Hindu-Muslim political cooperation.

Growth of Mass Nationalism

After World War I, the Indian independence struggle became a mass movement involving peasants, tribals, students, women, and workers. Economic hardships due to war expenditures and inflation increased dissatisfaction. Mahatma Gandhi emerged as a mass leader advocating non-violent resistance (ahimsa). Early campaigns included the Rowlatt Satyagraha (1919), the Non-Cooperation Movement (1920–22), and the Khilafat agitation, which united Hindus and Muslims in the fight against British rule.

Exam Question

Q: How did Mahatma Gandhi contribute to the growth of mass nationalism?

A: Gandhi introduced non-violent resistance, mobilized diverse groups including peasants and women, led campaigns like the Rowlatt Satyagraha and Non-Cooperation Movement, and emphasized Hindu-Muslim unity.

Non-Violent Movements and Local Protests

Gandhiji's call for non-violence inspired various local movements such as the Kheda peasants' campaign, liquor shop picketing in Tamil Nadu, forest satyagrahas by tribals, and the Akali agitation by Sikhs. Women also participated actively, with leaders like Ambabai from Karnataka and Sarojini Naidu playing significant roles. The Salt March (1930) was a landmark civil disobedience campaign against the salt tax, symbolizing the fight for freedom.

Exam Question

Q: What was the significance of the Salt March?

A: The Salt March protested the British salt tax, united Indians across classes, and demonstrated the power of peaceful civil disobedience in the independence movement.

Political Developments in the 1930s

The Congress formed provincial governments in 1937 after elections under the Government of India Act 1935. The Second World War led to Congress ministries resigning in protest against British war policies. The decade also saw the rise of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the Communist Party of India, and revolutionary nationalists like Bhagat Singh, who advocated more militant resistance.

Exam Question

Q: Who was Bhagat Singh and what was his role in the freedom struggle?

A: Bhagat Singh was a revolutionary nationalist who believed in armed resistance against British rule. He was involved in the assassination of a police officer and bombing the Central Legislative Assembly to protest colonial oppression.

Quit India Movement and Later Events

Launched in 1942, the Quit India Movement demanded immediate British withdrawal. It saw mass arrests, police repression, and widespread participation from peasants and youth. Subhas Chandra Bose formed the Indian National Army (INA) to fight British rule militarily. The Muslim League's demand for Pakistan intensified communal tensions, leading to partition in 1947, accompanied by violence and mass displacement.

Exam Question

Q: What were the causes and consequences of the Quit India Movement?

A: The movement was caused by the demand for immediate British withdrawal during WWII. It led to mass protests, arrests, repression, and ultimately weakened British control, contributing to India's independence.

Independence and Partition

In 1947, India gained independence but was partitioned into India and Pakistan, leading to communal violence, mass migrations, and refugee crises. Leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru, Mahatma Gandhi, Maulana Azad, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, and Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan played crucial roles during this period. The partition caused immense suffering but marked the end of British colonial rule in India.

Exam Question

Q: What were the effects of the Partition of India?

A: Partition caused widespread communal violence, displacement of millions as refugees, loss of lives, and the creation of two separate nations, India and Pakistan.

Solved Examples

Example 1: Explain the significance of the Ilbert Bill controversy.

Answer: The Ilbert Bill of 1883 proposed allowing Indian judges to try British offenders. Its withdrawal due to white opposition exposed British racial attitudes and united Indians in political awareness, strengthening the demand for equality and justice.

Example 2: Describe the role of women in the Indian freedom struggle.

Answer: Women from diverse backgrounds participated actively, breaking social barriers. Leaders like Sarojini Naidu and Ambabai led protests, picketed shops, and faced imprisonment, contributing significantly to the movement and advancing women's rights.

Practice Set

Easy

- What was the main demand of the Quit India Movement?
- Who was known as the "Father of Indian Unrest"?

Moderate

- Explain the significance of the Swadeshi movement.

- What were the main objectives of the early Indian National Congress?

Challenging

- Discuss the causes and consequences of the Partition of Bengal in 1905.
- Analyze the impact of the Rowlatt Act and the Jallianwala Bagh massacre on the Indian independence movement.

Answer Key

- Quit India Movement demanded immediate British withdrawal from India.
- Bal Gangadhar Tilak was known as the "Father of Indian Unrest".
- The Swadeshi movement opposed Bengal's partition, promoted Indian goods, and fostered national pride.
- The early INC sought greater Indian participation in government, Indianisation of administration, and economic reforms.
- The Partition of Bengal was intended to divide and weaken nationalist sentiment but led to widespread protests and the Swadeshi movement.
- The Rowlatt Act curtailed freedoms, and the Jallianwala Bagh massacre intensified anti-British sentiments, uniting Indians against colonial rule.

Quick Reference

- **Indian National Congress:** Founded in 1885 to represent Indian interests.
- **Swadeshi Movement:** Boycott of British goods after Bengal's partition in 1905.
- **Non-Cooperation Movement:** 1920–22 campaign led by Gandhi for self-rule.
- **Salt March:** 1930 civil disobedience against salt tax.
- **Quit India Movement:** 1942 mass protest demanding British exit.
- **Partition of India:** 1947 division into India and Pakistan.

Glossary

Ahimsa

Non-violence; a principle of peaceful resistance advocated by Mahatma Gandhi.

Boycott

Refusal to buy or use goods and services as a form of protest.

Drain of Wealth

The economic exploitation of India by Britain, where wealth was transferred from India to Britain.

Partition

The division of British India into two independent dominions, India and Pakistan, in 1947.

Satyagraha

A method of non-violent resistance or civil disobedience developed by Gandhi.

Swadeshi

The movement promoting Indian-made goods and self-reliance.

Vernacular Press Act

1881 law to restrict Indian-language newspapers critical of British rule.

Chronology of Key Events

Year	Event	Significance
1878	Arms Act and Vernacular Press Act	Restricted Indian rights and freedom of expression
1885	Formation of Indian National Congress	Beginning of organized political movement
1905	Partition of Bengal	Triggered Swadeshi movement and mass protests
1919	Rowlatt Act and Jallianwala Bagh massacre	Intensified anti-British sentiments
1920–22	Non-Cooperation Movement	Mass mobilization under Gandhi's leadership
1930	Salt March	Symbolic civil disobedience against salt tax
1942	Quit India Movement	Demand for immediate British withdrawal

1947

Independence and Partition

End of British rule; creation of India and Pakistan

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