



UGC-NET

History

NATIONAL TESTING AGENCY (NTA)

PAPER – 2 || VOLUME – 3



UGC NET

HISTORY

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Unit -9

RISE OF INDIAN NATIONAL MOVEMENT

Rise and Growth of Indian Nationalism

Stimulus-Response Debate

Traditional Indian historiography explains rise and growth of Indian Nationalism in terms of Indian response to stimulus generated by British Rule through creation of new institutions, new opportunities, resources etc. In other words, Indian Nationalism grew partly as a result of colonial policies and partly as a reaction to colonial policies.

But this theory gives a very simple and one-dimensional understanding of the rise of Indian nationalism which is not completely true as well; more over it shows the better face and positive role of colonial rule in development of nationalism. In reality the growth of Indian national consciousness in the latter half of the nineteenth century was not to the liking of British colonial rulers. That's why British scholars deliberately described India as mere 'geographical expression' and some of them forecasted that India will never become a united nation.

When the closing decade of 19th century demonstrated that nationalism had grown and was gaining strength, British scholars holding a new position started giving credit to British Raj for the growth of Indian nationalism. As **R. Coupland** wrote: "Indian nationalism was the child of British Raj, and British authorities blessed its cradle." But reality was that, Indian nationalism was an unwanted child of Raj whom it refused to feed at birth and sought to strangle it subsequently.

Thus it would be more correct to say that Indian nationalism was partly the product of a world wide upsurge of the concepts of nationalism and right of self-determination initiated by the French revolution, partly the result of Indian Renaissance, partly the offshoot of modernisation initiated by the British in India and partly developed as a strong reaction to British imperial policies in India.

Major factors responsible for the growth of Indian nationalism can be discussed under following heads:

Impact of British Rule

British colonial rulers followed modern methods- political, military, economic and intellectual to establish and continue their stronghold over India and for fuller economic exploitation of India's resources. A dose of modernisation was an essential concomitant of the colonial scheme of administration and this modernisation-

distorted though it was- generated some developments and one of these was growth of Indian nationalism.

Political and Administrative Unification of India

Imperial Britain conquered the whole of India and created a larger state than that of Mauryas or the great Mughals as a result India became politically unified under British hegemony. While Indian provinces were under "direct" rule of British, Indian States were under "indirect" British rule. Thus British sword imposed political unity in India and despite imperial efforts to sow communal, regional, and linguistic antagonism, pan-Indianism grew.

British also established a highly centralised administrative system in India that brought administrative unity inside the country. Under one rule, one administrative framework, one set of law, unified judicial set up, administrative officers, etc. India got a new dimension of administrative unity which strengthened hitherto cultural unity that had existed in India for centuries. It created awareness among Indians that this vast united India belongs to the and by the way, created nationalism within them.

Development of Rapid Means of Transport and Communication

Lord Dalhousie made a lasting contribution for Indians by introducing railways, telegraph, and new mode of postal system. Roads were connected with India from one end to the other.

Though, all these were meant to serve imperial interest, the people of India capitalised it. The railway compartment reflected a united India. All persons, from North to South and East to West, rich and poor and master and servant - all were found inside it. It narrowed down gap among them and gave them the feeling that they all belonged to this vast India which was under the grip the British raj.

Impact of Western Education

The introduction of English education in 1835 was a milestone in the British administration. It was primarily meant to create an educated Indian mass who would be faithful servants to the British raj. However, with the gradual march of time, the English educated Indians became the pioneers in the socio-politico-economical and religious reforms in India. English system of education opened to the newly educated Indians the floodgates of liberal European thoughts.

The liberal and radical thoughts of European writers like Milton Shelley, Bentham, Mill, Spenser, Rousseau and Voltaire and inspired the Indian intelligentsia with the ideals of liberty nationality and self-government and made clear to them the anachronism of British rule in India.

Men like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Swami Vivekananda, Feroz Shah Mehta, Dadabhai Nairabi, SurendraNath Banerjee championed the cause of liberty, equality humanitarianism etc. The role of Mazzini, Garibaldi, and Cavour in the unification of Italy, the unification of Germany by Bismarck, the French Revolution, American War of Independence, etc. influenced their mind and these intelligent and well informed persons formed the nucleus for the newly-arising political unrest and it was this section of the society which provided leadership to the Indian political associations. Thus, gradually, the English educated Indians became the torch-bearers of Indian nationalism and aroused national consciousness in the minds of millions of Indians.

Rise of Middle class Intelligentsia

British administrative and economic innovations gave rise to a new urban middle class in town.

This class, prominent because of its education, new position and its close ties with the ruling class came to the forefront. The new middle class was a well-integrated all-India class with varied background but a common foreground of knowledge ideas and values. It was a minority of Indian society, but a dynamic minority. It had a sense of unity of purpose and of hope. Thus this middle class proved to be the new soul of modern India and in due course infused the whole of India with its spirit. This class provided leadership to the Indian National Congress in all its stages of growth.

Understanding of Contradiction in Indian and Colonial Interest

People came to realise that colonial rule was the major cause of India's economic backwardness and that the interest of the Indians involved the interest of all sections and classes- peasants, artisans, handicraftsmen, workers, intellectuals the educated and the capitalist. The nationalist movement arose to take up the challenge of these contradictions inherent in the character and policies of colonial rule.

Rediscovery of India's Glorious Past through Historical Researches

The nineteenth century Indian Renaissance created several avenues in the field of oriental studies. Western scholars like Max Muller, Sir William Jones, Alexander Cunningham, etc. translated several ancient Sanskrit texts of this land and established before the people the glorious cultural heritage of India.

Inspired by them, the Indian scholars like R.D. Banerjee, R.G. Bhandarkar. Mohan Mukhopadhyaya Haraprasad Shastri, Bal Gangadhar Tilak etc. rediscovered India's glory from the history of this land. This encouraged the people of India who felt

that they were the decedents of grand monarchs of this country and ruled by foreigners. This flared up the fire of nationalism.

The theory put forward by European scholars that the indo-Aryans belong to the same ethnic group of mankind from which stemmed all the nations of Europe gave a psychological boost to educated Indians. All this gave a new sense of confidence to the educated Indians and inspired them with a new spirit of patriotism and nationalism.

Impact of Contemporary European Movements

Contemporary strong currents of nationalist ideas which pervaded the whole of Europe and South America did stimulate Indian nationalism. A number of national states came into existence in South America on the ruins of the Spanish and Portuguese empires. In Europe the national liberation movement of Greece and Italy in general and of Ireland in particular deeply stirred the emotion of Indians. Educated Indians touring Europe were greatly impressed by these nationalist movements. Surendranath Banerji delivered lectures on Joseph Mazzini and the "Young Italy" movement organised by him. Lajpat Rai very often referred to the campaign of Garibaldi and the activities of Carbonaris in his speeches and writings. Thus, European nationalist movement did lend strength to the developing nationalism in India.

Progressive Character of Socio-Religious Reform Movements

The national awakening in the nineteenth century was largely due to the socio-religious movements launched by Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Swami Dayananda Saraswati, Vivekananda, Syed Ahmad Khan, Annie Besant etc. These reformers championed the causes of human equality, individual liberty, abolition of social disparity and so on. This reformed the minds of Indians and awakens them from centuries of thraldom.

The Memory of the Revolt of 1857

When nationalism was flaring up in the minds of Indian people, the memory of the Great Revolt of 1857 flashed back before them. The heroic action of Nana Sahib, Tata Tope, Rani Laxmi Bai and other leaders of the Revolt became fresh in their mind. It inspired the people to cherish with their memory and to give a toe fight to the British.

Growth of Vernacular Literature

The influence of western education prompted the educated Indians to reflect the idea of liberty, freedom, and nationalism through the vernacular literature. They aimed at arousing the mass to oppose British rule being surcharged by the spirit of nationalism.

BankimChandra Chatterji's Anand Math (which contained the song Vande Mataram) and Dinabandhu Mitra's play Nil Darpan extorted tremendous influence upon the people and created anti-British feelings among them. Bharatendu Harish Chandra's play Bharat Durdasa reflected the miserable condition of Indian mass under British rule.

Besides several eminent poets and writers in different languages, e.g. Rabindranath Tagore in Bengali, Vishnushastri Chiplunkar in Marathi, Lakshminath Bezbaroa in Assamese, Mohammad Hussain Azad and Altaf Hussain Hali in Urdu etc. contributed a lot to rouse nationalism among the local people through their writings.

Emergence of Modern Press and Newspapers

Press and magazines played a dominant role in injecting national feelings in the minds of Indians. Raja Rammohan Roy was the pioneer of Indian press and journalism. He edited Sambad Kaumudi in Bengali and Mirat-uI-Akbar in Persian.

Gradually, several newspapers were edited in different parts of the country in several languages. To mention a few notable ones, The Amritbazar Patrika, Hindu Patriot, Indian Mirror, Sanjivani in Bengali, the Maratha Kesari, Native Opinion, Indus Prakash in Maharashtra; The Hindu, Kerala Patrika, Andhra Prakashika in Madras; The Tribune, Akbar-i-Am, Koh-i-Noor in Punjab etc. were the important publications that reflected the colonial rule of the bruisers and aroused nationalism in the minds of Indian people.

Economic Exploitation by the British

British paralyzed Indian economy by draining wealth from this country. The industrial revolution in England helped in the productive process and they needed markets all over the world for selling their products and also needed raw-materials for their factories.

India was robbed away in both the ways i.e. by providing market for the British goods and supplying raw materials for the factories of England. The creation of absentee landlords by the British and in association with them the local money-lenders exploited the Indian mass and made them poorer and poorer.

The adverse effects of British exploitation were reflected in Indian economy. Dadabhai Naoroji with his theory of agricultural decay; G. V. josh and Ranade with

their charges against the ruin of Indian handicrafts brought before the people the exploitative policy of the British which ruined the Indian economy, factory, handicrafts etc. and brought untold miseries to the people and made them poor. This psychologically developed a hatred for foreign rule and love for Swadeshi goods and Swadeshi rule. The spirit of nationalism received a powerful stimulus in the process.

Racialism

The Englishmen considered themselves as superior in all respects than the Indians. They never wanted to offer the Indians higher jobs even though they were qualified and intelligent. The age limit for Indian Civil Service examination was kept at twenty-one and the examination was held at England.

Aurobindo Ghosh was declared disqualified in horse-riding and could not get through that examination, even if he had qualified the written examination. Thus, the colonial rule was well apparent before the educated Indians who became the vanguard in spreading discontent against the British rule among the Indian mass.

Lord Lytton's Reactionary Policies

The administration of Lord Lytton discharged venom in the minds of Indian people. He celebrated a ceremony at Delhi Durbar when Queen Victoria assumed the title Kaiser-e Hind (the Empress of India) when the country was famine-stricken. He imposed heavy taxes on the people of India and spent a large chunk of money in the Afghan war. During his time, the Arms Act was passed which prohibited the Indians from keeping arms without licence. His Vernacular Press Act infuriated Indians. Thus, Lytton's unpopular acts provoked a great storm of opposition in the country and led to the organisation of various political associations for carrying on anti-government propaganda in the country.

The Ilbert Bill Controversy

During the period of Lord Ripon as Viceroy, the Ilbert Bill was passed. It empowered the Indian judges to try the Europeans. It created hue and cry among the Europeans and their pressure led to reform the bill inserting a clause whereby a jury of 50% Europeans was required if an Indian judge was to face a European on the dock. Finally, a solution was adopted by way of compromise: jurisdiction to try Europeans would be conferred on European and Indian District Magistrates and Sessions Judges alike. However, a defendant would in all cases have the right to claim trial by a jury of which at least half the members must be European. This clearly exposed the mala-fide intention of the British authority and clearly projected their racial antagonism.

The bitter controversy deepened antagonism between the British and Indians and was a prelude to the formation of the Indian National Congress the following year.

The Birth of Indian National Congress

The birth of Indian National Congress in 1885 gave a final spark to the growth of national consciousness among the Indians. Soon, the National Congress gained momentum in the nook and corner of India. It expressed the desires of the people before the British authorities.

Through many mass movements and their important leaders the congress became able to give an ideological fight to the British raj.

Political Associations before INC

The political associations in the early half of the nineteenth century were dominated by wealthy and aristocratic elements, local or regional in character, and through long petitions to the British Parliament demanded.

- a. Administrative reforms,
- b. Association of Indians with the administration, and
- c. Spread of education.

The political associations of the second half of the nineteenth century came to be increasingly dominated by the educated middle class—the lawyers, journalists, doctors, teachers, etc. and they had a wider perspective and a larger agenda.

Political Associations in Bengal

The Bangabhasha Prakashika Sabha was formed in 1836 by associates of Raja Rammohan Roy.

The Zamindari Association, more popularly known as the 'Landholders' Society', was founded in 1838 by Dwarkanath Tagore to safeguard the interests of the landlords. Although limited in its objectives, the Landholders' Society marked the beginning of an organised political activity and use of methods of constitutional agitation for the redressal of grievances.

The Bengal British India Society was founded in 1843 by the efforts of George Thompson with the object of "the collection and dissemination of information relating to the actual condition of the people of British India... and to employ such other means of peaceful and lawful character as may appear calculated to secure the welfare, extend the just rights and advance the interests of all classes of our fellow subjects".

In 1851, both the Landholders' Society and the Bengal British India Society merged into the British Indian Association.

It sent a petition to the British Parliament demanding inclusion of some of its suggestions in the renewed Charter of the Company, such as:

1. Establishment of a separate legislature of a popular character
2. Separation of executive from judicial functions
3. Reduction in salaries of higher officers
4. Abolition of salt duty, Abkari and stamp duties.

These were partially accepted when the Charter Act of 1853 provided for the addition of six members to the governor-general's council for legislative purposes.

The East India Association was organised by Dadabhai Naoroji in 1866 in London to discuss the Indian question and influence public men in England to promote Indian welfare. Later, branches of the association were started in prominent Indian cities.

The Indian League was started in 1875 by Sisir Kumar Ghosh with the object of "stimulating the sense of nationalism amongst the people" and of encouraging political education.

The Indian Association of Calcutta superseded the Indian League and was founded in 1876 by younger nationalists of Bengal led by Surendranath Banerjea and Ananda Mohan Bose, who were getting discontented with the conservative and pro-landlord policies of the British Indian Association.

The Indian Association of Calcutta was the most important of pre-Congress associations and aimed to:

1. Create a strong public opinion on political questions, and
2. Unify Indian people on a common political programme.

Branches of the association were opened in other towns and cities of Bengal and even outside Bengal. The membership fee was kept low in order to attract the poorer sections to the association.

Political Associations in Bombay

On the lines of British India Association of Calcutta, on 26th August 1852 was founded the Bombay Association with the object of 'memorialising from time to time the Government authorities in India or in England for the removal of existing evils, and for prevention of proposed measures which may be deemed injurious or for the introduction of enactments which may tend to promote the general interests of all connected with this country'. The Bombay Association sent a petition to the British parliament urging the formation of new legislative council to which Indians should be also represented. It also condemned the policy of exclusion of Indians from all

higher services, lavish expenditure on sinecure posts given to Europeans. However, the Bombay Association did not survive for long.

The Poona Sarvajanik Sabha was founded in 1867 by Mahadeo Govind Ranade and others, with the object of serving as a bridge between the government and the people.

The Bombay Presidency Association was started by Badruddin Tyabji, Pherozshah Mehta and K.T. Telang in 1885.

Political Associations in Madras

A branch of British Indian association of Calcutta was set up at Madras under the name of Madras Native Association. The Madras Association also sent petition to the parliament on the eve of the passing of the Charter Act of 1853 making demands similar to the British India Association and Bombay Association. Right from its inception, it was worked by some officials, possessed very little vitality, had hardly any hold upon the public mind, and languished into obscurity after 1857.

The Madras Mahajan Sabha was founded in 1884 by M. Viraraghavachari, B. Subramaniya Aiyer and P. Ananda-charlu to co-ordinate the activities of local associations and 'to provide a focus for the non-officials intelligence through the presidency'. At its conference held on 29, 31 December 1884 and 1-2 January 1885 the Sabha demanded expansion of legislative councils, representation of Indians in it, separation of judicial from revenue functions etc.

Foundation of the Congress: The Myth and the Reality

The foundation of the Indian National Congress in 1885 was not a sudden event, or a historical accident. It was the culmination of a process of political awakening that had its beginnings in the 1860s and 1870s and took a major leap forward in the late 1870s and early 1880s. The year 1885 marked a turning point in this process, for that was the year the political Indians, the modern intellectuals interested in politics, who no longer saw themselves as spokesmen of narrow group interests, but as representatives of national interest vis-a-vis foreign rule, as a 'national party,' saw their efforts bear fruit. The all-India nationalist body that they brought into being was to be the platform, the organizer, the headquarters, the symbol of the new national spirit and politics.

Indian National Congress was founded in December 1885 by seventy-two political workers. It was the first organized expression of Indian nationalism on an all-India scale. A.O.Hume, a retired English ICS officer, played an important role in its formation. But why was it founded by these seventy- two men and why at that time?

Myth

A powerful and long-lasting myth, the myth of 'the safety valve,' has arisen around this question. Generations of students and political activists have been fed on this myth. But despite widespread popular belief, this myth has little basis in historical fact. The myth is that the Indian National Congress was started by A.O. Hume and others under the official direction, guidance and advice of no less a person than Lord Dufferin, the Viceroy, to provide a safe, mild, peaceful, and constitutional outlet or safety valve for the rising discontent among the masses, which was inevitably leading towards a popular and violent revolution.

Consequently, the revolutionary potential was nipped in the bud. The core of the myth, that a violent revolution was on the cards at the time and was avoided only by the foundations of the Congress, is accepted by most writers; the liberals welcome it, the radicals use it to prove that the Congress has always been compromising if not loyalist vis-avis imperialism, the extreme right use it to show that the Congress has been anti-national from the beginning. All of them agree that the manner of its birth affected the basic character and future work of the Congress in a crucial manner.

Lala Lajpat Rai maintained that the INC was organized to serve as a 'safety valve' for the growing unrest in the country and strengthen the British Empire. He wrote that the idea was not only to save the British rule that threatened it but even to strengthen it...the redress of political grievances and the advance of India was only a by-product and of secondary importance.

Reality

It will not be correct to trace the genesis of the INC to the efforts of a single individual like A.O.Hume or assume that it appeared as a sudden efflorescence. Rather various political organizations in different parts of India and the ferment of ideas had already prepared the ground and the foundation of Indian National Congress in 1885 was only a visible embodiment of that national awakening.

Recent researches have proved that A.O. Hume was an enlightened imperialist. He was alarmed at the growing gulf between the rulers and the ruled. Hume saw with considerable misgivings the establishment of the Indian National Conference in 1883 by S.N. Banerjee, 'a dismissed government servant' of 'advanced political views' who had done much to popularize the ideas and teachings of Italian nationalists like Mazzini and Garibaldi. Hume decided to bypass this Indian National Conference and instead organize 'a loyal and innocuous' political organization.

And moreover proofs are there that being a keen student of eastern religion Hume was under influence of some gurus and mahatmas of Tibet who claimed to possess

supernatural occult powers that they could communicate and direct from thousands of miles, enter any place go anywhere, sit anywhere unseen, and direct men's thoughts and opinions without their being aware of it. Hume believed all this. He was keen to acquire these occult powers by which the Chelas (disciples) could know all about the present and the future. He started a 'correspondence' with the mahatmas in Tibet. He also began to use his connection with the mahatmas to promote political objectives dear to his heart — attempting to reform Indian administration and make it more responsive to Indian opinion. When these gurus told him that poor men of India were pervaded with a sense of the hopelessness of the existing state of affairs; and with the support of educated middle class such discontentment can erupt as a national revolt. He decided to avoid such situation. Thus guided by his belief in such mahatmas and not by Dufferin, Hume was motivated to create a political organisation which can reduce such discontentment (as told by mahatmas, no real evidences are there for any such possible revolt that time).

And finally Hume did succeed in organizing the Indian National Congress and made it at least in the beginning a forum for pro-British and anti-Russian propaganda to avoid both of possible threat to British Raj.

As for the question of the role of A.O. Hume, if the founders of the Congress were such capable and patriotic men of high character, and the ground was already prepared for the formation of a national political association (congress) why did they need Hume to act as the chief organizer of the Congress? It is undoubtedly true that Hume impressed — and, quite rightly — all his liberal and democratic contemporaries, including Lajpat Rai, as a man of high ideals with whom it was no dishonour to cooperate. But the real answer lies in the conditions of the time.

Considering the size of the Indian subcontinent, there were very few political persons in the early 1880s and the tradition of open opposition to the rulers was not yet firmly entrenched.

Courageous and committed persons like Dadabhai Naoroji, Justice Ranade, Pherozeshah Mehta, G. Subramaniya Iyer and Surendranath Banerjea (one year later) cooperated with Hume because they did not want to arouse official hostility at such an early stage of their work. They assumed that the rulers would be less suspicious and less likely to attack a potentially subversive organization if its chief organizer was a retired British civil servant. Gokhale, with his characteristic modesty and political wisdom, gazed this explicitly in 1913: 'No Indian could have started the Indian National Congress. .. if an Indian had. . . come forward to start

such a movement embracing all India, the officials in India would not have allowed the movement to come into existence. If the founder of the congress had not been a great Englishman and a distinguished ex-official, such was the distrust of political agitation in those days that the authorities would have at once found some way or the other to suppress the movement.

In other words, if Hume and other English liberals hoped to use the Congress as a safety-valve, the Congress leaders hoped to use Hume as a lightning conductor. And as later developments show, it was the Congress leaders whose hopes were fulfilled.

Conditions under which Indian National Congress was formed

On the surface, the nationalist Indian demands of pre-congress periods were:

1. No reduction of import duties on textile import
2. no expansion in Afghanistan or Burma,
3. the right to bear arms,
4. freedom of the Press,
5. reduction of military expenditure,
6. higher expenditure on famine relief,
7. Indianization of the civil services,
8. the right of Indians to join the semi-military volunteer corps,
9. the right of Indian judges to try Europeans in criminal cases,
10. the appeal to British voters to vote for a party which would listen to Indians

These demands look rather mild, especially when considered separately. But these were demands which a colonial regime could not easily concede, for that would undermine its hegemony over the colonial people. It is true that any criticism or demand no matter how innocuous in its appearance but which cannot be accommodated by a system is in the long-run subversive of the system. Pre congress associations organised various campaign over these demands with limited success.

The new political thrust in the years between 1875 and 1885 was the creation of the younger, more radical nationalist intellectuals most of whom entered politics during this period. They established new associations, having found that the older associations were too narrowly conceived in terms of their programmes and political activity as well as social bases.

A sign of new political life in the country was the coming into existence during these years of nearly all the major nationalist newspapers The Hindu, Tribune, Bengalee, Mahraua and Kesari.

By 1885, the formation of an all-India political organization had become an objective necessity, and the necessity was being recognized by nationalists all over the country. Many recent scholars have furnished detailed information on the many moves that were made in that direction from 1877. These moves acquired a greater sense of urgency especially from 1883 and there was intense political activity. The Indian Mirror of Calcutta was carrying on a continuous campaign on the question. The Indian Association had already in December 1883 organized an All-India National Conference and given a call for another one in December 1885. Meanwhile, the Indians had gained experience, as well as confidence, from the large number of agitations they had organized in the preceding ten years. Since 1875, there had been a continuous campaign around cotton import duties which Indians wanted to stay in the interests of the Indian textile industry. A massive campaign had been organized during 1877-78 around the demand for the Indianization of Government services. The Indians had opposed the Afghan adventure of Lord Lytton and then compelled the British Government to contribute towards the cost of the Second Afghan War. The Indian Press had waged a major campaign against the efforts of the Government to control it through the Vernacular Press Act. The Indians had also opposed the effort to disarm them through the Arms Act. In 1881-82 they had organized a protest against the Plantation Labour and the Inland Emigration Act which condemned plantation labourers to serfdom. A major agitation was organized during 1883 in favour of the Ilbert Bill which would enable Indian magistrates to try Europeans. This Bill was successfully thwarted by the Europeans. The Indians had been quick to draw the political lesson. Their efforts had failed because they had not been coordinated on an all-India basis. On the other hand, the Europeans had acted in a concerted manner. Again in July 1883 a massive all-India effort was made to raise a National Fund which would be used to promote political agitation in India as well as England. In 1885, Indians fought for the right to join the volunteer corps restricted to Europeans, and then organized an appeal to British voters to vote for those candidates who were friendly towards India. Several Indians were sent to Britain to put the Indian case before British voters through public speeches, and other means.

It thus, becomes clear that the foundation of the Congress was the natural culmination of the political work of the previous years: By 1885, a stage had been reached in the political development of India when certain basic tasks or objectives had to be laid down and struggled for. Moreover these objectives were correlated and could only be fulfilled by the coming together of political workers in a single organization formed on an all-India basis. The men who met in Bombay on 28 December 1885 were inspired by such objective and hoped to initiate the process of achieving them.

Moderate Phase and Early Congress

Their Ideology & Objectives

As India had just entered the process of becoming a nation or a people, the first major objective of the founders of the Indian national movement was to promote this process, to weld Indians into a nation, to create an Indian people. It was common for colonial administrators and ideologues to assert that Indians could not be united or freed because they were not a nation or a people but a geographical expression, a mere congeries of hundreds of diverse races and creeds. The Indians did not deny this but asserted that they were now becoming a nation. India was as Tilak, Surendranath Banerjee and many others were fond of saying — a nation-in-the-making. The Congress leaders recognized that objective historical forces were bringing the Indian people together. But they also realized that the people had to become subjectively aware of the objective process and that for this it was necessarily to promote the feeling of national unity and nationalism among them.

Above all, India being a nation-in-the-making its nationhood could not be taken for granted. It had to be constantly developed and consolidated. The promotion of national unity was a major objective of the Congress and later its major achievement.

The Congress leaders realized that the diversity of India was such that special efforts unknown to other parts of the world would have to be made and national unity carefully nurtured. In an effort to reach all regions, it was decided to rotate the Congress session among different parts of the country. The President was to belong to a region other than where the Congress session was being held.

To reach out to the followers of all religions and to remove the fears of the minorities a rule was made at the 1888 session that no resolution was to be passed to which an overwhelming majority of Hindu or Muslim delegates objected. In 1889, a minority clause was adopted in the resolution demanding reform of legislative councils. According to the clause, wherever Parsis, Christians, Muslims, or Hindus were a minority their number elected to the Councils would not be less than their proportion in the Population. The reason given by the mover of the resolution was that India was not yet a homogenous country and political methods here had, therefore, to differ from those in Europe. The early national leaders were also determined to build a secular nation, the Congress itself being intensely secular.

The second major objective of the early Congress was to create a common political platform or programme around which political workers in different parts of the country could gather and conduct their political activities, educating and mobilizing people on an all-India basis. This was to be accomplished by taking up those grievances and fighting for those rights which Indians had in common in relation to the rulers.

For the same reason the Congress was not to take up questions of social reform. At its second session, the President of the Congress, Dadabhai Naoroji, laid down this rule and said that 'A National Congress must confine itself to questions in which the entire nation has a direct participation.' Congress was, therefore, not the right place to discuss social reforms. 'We are met together,' he said, 'as a political body to represent to our rulers our political aspirations.'

Modern politics — the politics of popular participation, agitation mobilization — was new to India. The notion that politics was not the preserve of the few but the domain of everyone was not yet familiar to the people. No modern political movement was possible till people realized this. And, then, on the basis of this realization, an informed and determined political opinion had to be created. The arousal, training, organization, and consolidation of public opinion were seen as major tasks by the Congress leaders. All initial activity of the early nationalism was geared towards this end.

The first step was seen to be the politicization and unification of the opinion of the educated, and then of other sections. The primary objective was to go beyond the redressal of immediate grievances and organize sustained political activity along the lines of the Anti-Corn Law League (formed in Britain by Cobden and Bright in 1838 to secure reform of Corn Laws).

The leaders as well as the people also had to gain confidence in their own capacity to organize political opposition to the most powerful state of the day. All this was no easy task. A prolonged period of politicization would be needed and early nationalists provided that successfully with their persistent efforts through various petitions, prayers, and memorials.

As part of the basic objective of giving birth to a national movement, it was necessary to create a common all-India national-political leadership, that is, to construct what Antonio Gramsci, the famous Italian Marxist, calls the headquarters of a movement. Nations and people become capable of meaningful and effective political action only when they are organized. They become a people or 'historical subjects' only when they are organized as such.

The first step in a national movement is taken when the 'carriers' of national feeling or national identity begin to organize the people. But to be able to do so successfully, these 'carriers' or leaders must themselves be unified; they must share a collective identification, that is, they must come to know each other and share and evolve a common outlook, perspective, sense of purpose, as also common feelings. According to the circular which, in March 1885, informed political workers of the coming Congress session, the Congress was intended 'to enable all the most earnest