



Swadeshi and Boycott Movement

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Introduction

- **Emergence of Nationalism:**
 - It was only in the 19th Century that the concept of a national identity and national consciousness emerged.
 - The social, economic and political factors had inspired the people to define and achieve their national identity.
- **Causes of Growing Nationalism:**
 - **Recognising True British Intents:** The British government was not conceding any of the important demands of the Indians.

The economic miseries of the 1890s further exposed the exploitative character of colonial rule.
 - **Growth of Confidence:** A feeling started gaining currency that the masses had to be involved in the battle against the colonial government to gain freedom.
 - **Increasing Awareness:** The spread of education led to an increased awareness among the masses about the British policies.

Rise in unemployment and underemployment and resultant poverty further aggravated the discontent among the radical nationalists.
 - **International Influences:** The Indian nationalists were inspired by the nationalist movements worldwide in Ireland, Japan, Egypt, Turkey, Persia and China which demolished the myths of European invincibility.
 - **Conservative Policies of Lord Curzon:** Administrative measures adopted during **Lord Curzon's** rule such as the Indian Universities Act, the Calcutta Corporation Act and primarily the **Partition of Bengal** led to nationwide protests.

The Swadeshi Movement; one of the most successful movements of the Pre-Gandhian era, was an outcome of the Partition of Bengal.

Swadeshi Movement

- **Background:**

- The movement had its roots in the **anti-partition movement** which was started to oppose Lord Curzon's decision of dividing the province of Bengal.
- The **Anti-Partition Campaign** was **launched by Moderates** to exert pressure on the government to prevent the unjust partition of Bengal from being implemented.
The petitions were written to the government, public meetings were held and the ideas were spread through newspapers such as ***Hitabadi***, ***Sanjibani*** and ***Bengalee***.
- The partition led to protest meetings in Bengal under which the pledge to boycott foreign goods was first taken.

- **Swadeshi Movement Proclamation:**

- In August 1905, at Calcutta Townhall, a massive meeting was held and the **formal proclamation of the Swadeshi Movement was made**.
- The message was propagated to boycott goods such as **Manchester cloth and Liverpool salt**.
- After the partition came into force, widespread opposition was shown by the people of Bengal by singing ***Vande Mataram***.
 - Rabindranath Tagore also composed ***Amar Sonar Bangla***.
 - People tied ***Rakhis*** on each other's hands as a symbol of unity.
- Although the movement was confined majorly to Bengal, it spread to a few different parts of India:
 - In Poona and Bombay under **Bal Gangadhar Tilak**
 - In Punjab under **Lala Lajpat Rai and Ajit Singh**
 - In Delhi under **Syed Haider Raza**
 - In Madras under **Chidambaram Pillai**.

- **Congres Reaction:**

- The Indian National Congress (INC) in a meeting in 1905 resolved to **condemn the partition of Bengal** and support the anti-partition and Swadeshi Movement.
- The radical nationalists wanted the movement to be taken outside Bengal and go beyond just the boycott of foreign goods.
However, the moderates, dominating the Congress, were unwilling to go that far.
- In the 1906 **Congress Session held at Calcutta**, the INC under the presidentship of **Dadabhai Naoroji declared self-government or Swaraj as the goal of INC**.

- **Rise of the Radical Nationalists:**

- The Extremists (or the **Garam Dal**) gained a dominant influence over the Swadeshi Movement in Bengal after 1905 till 1908; it is also known as the “**Era of Passionate Nationalists**”.
- **Lala Lajpat Rai, Bal Gangadhar Tilak** and Bipin Chandra Pal (**Lal-Bal-Pal**) were important leaders of this Radical group.
- The reasons for the same were:
 - Failure of the Moderate-led Swadeshi movement.
 - Divisive tactics of the governments of East Bengal and Western Bengal.
 - Violent measures of the British to suppress the movement.
- In addition to boycotting the Extremists gave a call for boycotting government schools and colleges, government service, courts, legislative councils, municipalities, government titles, etc.
- Tilak gave the slogan “**Freedom is my birthright and I shall have it**”.

- **Participation of People:**

- **Students:** School and college students were the **most active participants of the movement**.
 - Student participation was visible in Bengal, Poona (Maharashtra), Guntur (Andhra Pradesh), Madras and Salem (Tamil Nadu).
 - The police adopted a repressive attitude towards the students. The students found guilty were fined, expelled, beaten, arrested and disqualified for government jobs and scholarships.
- **Women:** Traditionally home-centered women too took active part in the movement.
- **Stand of Muslims:** Some of the muslims participated, however, most of the upper and middle class muslims stayed away.

They **supported the partition** on the belief that it would provide them a Muslim-majority East Bengal.

Impact of Swadeshi Movement

- **Decline in Imports:** It resulted in significant decline in the foreign imports during 1905-1908.
- **Growth of Extremism:** Movement resulted in growth of extreme nationalism amongst youth which took to violence and wanted to bring an instant end to British dominance.
- **Morley-Minto Reforms:** It forced British dispensation to offer some concessions to Indians in forms of **Morley-Minto reforms** in 1909.

Gopal Krishna Gokhale played an important role in framing these reforms.

- **Establishment of Swadeshi Institutions:** Inspired by Rabindranath Tagore's *Shantiniketan*, the Bengal National College and a number of national schools and colleges in various parts of the country were set up.
 - In August 1906, the **National Council of Education** was set up to organise the national education system.
 - A **Bengal Institute of Technology** was set up for technical education.
- **Growth in Swadeshi Industries:** It led to establishments of swadeshi textile mills, soap and match factories, tanneries, banks, insurance companies, shops, etc.
 - It also revived the Indian Cottage Industry.
 - Indian industries saw regeneration with reawakening of use of indigenous goods.
- **Boycott of Buyers and Sellers:** The foreign goods including clothing, sugar, salt and various other luxury items were not only boycotted, but they were also burned.

The Swadeshi movement also led to social boycott of not only buyers but also sellers of foreign goods.

The Gradual Suppression of the Swadeshi Movement

- **Government Repression:** By 1908, the Swadeshi Movement was almost over in an open phase due to government's violent repression.
- **Absence of Leaders and Organisation:** The movement failed to create an effective organisation. It was rendered leaderless as most of the leaders were either arrested or deported by the time.

Maintaining the high intensity of such a mass movement was a difficult task in absence of effective leaders.
- **Internal Conflicts:** The internal conflicts and difference in ideologies among the leaders did more harm to the movement than good.
- **Limited Extent:** The movement failed to reach the peasantry and was confined to the upper and middle classes only.

Annulment of Partition of Bengal

- The partition of Bengal was annulled in 1911 by **Lord Hardinge** primarily to curb the revolutionary terrorism.
- Bihar and Orissa were taken out of Bengal and Assam was made a separate province.
- The annulment was not taken well by the Muslims, consequently, the British **shifted the administrative capital from Calcutta to Delhi**, as the place was associated with Muslim glory.