

A Nation Begins to Speak

By the 1870s, Indians had experienced colonial rule in every part of life — laws, economy, forests, caste, and education. Different groups were unhappy for different reasons. But gradually, people began to realise they needed to unite and act for a free India. They began asking: “Whose country is India?” The answer that took shape was — India belongs to its people, regardless of caste, class, language, or religion.

Political associations like the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha and the Indian National Congress believed that the people themselves should take decisions about their own country — this idea formed the base of nationalism.



 Fig. 1 – Police using tear gas on protesters during Quit India Movement

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Early Protests and Congress Is Formed

In the late 1800s, educated Indians began organising public meetings and associations. These included:

- Poona Sarvajanik Sabha
- Indian Association
- Madras Mahajan Sabha
- Bombay Presidency Association

In 1885, 72 delegates from across India met in Bombay to form the Indian National Congress. Leaders like Dadabhai Naoroji, Pherozeshah Mehta, W.C. Bonnerji and Badruddin Tyabji helped lead the movement.



 Fig. 2 – Dadabhai Naoroji, author of *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India*

They demanded Indian representation in administration, more power to legislative councils, and civil service exams in India. They also spoke against racial discrimination.

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Economic and Legal Demands

Early Congress leaders — often called Moderates — believed in peaceful methods. They sent petitions and held discussions, trusting British justice. Their demands included:

- Reducing land revenue
- Lowering military spending
- Increasing spending on education and irrigation
- Freedom of speech and the press
- Equality in legal systems

Though they came from elite backgrounds, they also raised concerns about peasants, workers, and forest dwellers.

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Rise of Assertive Nationalism

By the 1890s, leaders like Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal, and Lala Lajpat Rai began questioning the soft approach of the Moderates. They promoted swaraj (self-rule), self-reliance, and boycott of British goods. Tilak famously said, “Freedom is my birthright and I shall have it!”



 Fig. 3 – Bal Gangadhar Tilak with his newspaper Kesari



 Fig. 4 – Swadeshi demonstrations in Bengal

The Partition of Bengal and the Swadeshi Movement

In 1905, the British partitioned Bengal, supposedly for administrative reasons. But Indians believed it was done to weaken the growing national movement. The move divided Bengal into East and West, separating Hindus and Muslims.

This sparked the Swadeshi Movement, where Indians boycotted British goods and promoted local products, language, and education. In Andhra, it was called the Vandemataram Movement.

Muslim League and Congress Split


In 1906, Muslim leaders formed the All India Muslim League, demanding separate electorates. In 1907, the Congress split into two groups – Moderates and Radicals. They reunited in 1915, and in 1916 signed the Lucknow Pact, agreeing to jointly work for representative government.

🌍 Impact of World War I

World War I affected Indians heavily:

- Taxes and prices rose
- Soldiers were forced to fight for the British
- Villages lost young men to war
- Businessmen gained profits but wanted more freedom
- Soldiers returned with ideas of anti-colonial struggle
- Russian Revolution (1917) inspired hope in socialism



 Fig. 5 – Lala Lajpat Rai, key leader from Punjab

👏 Gandhi Enters the Scene

Gandhiji returned to India in 1915 after leading peaceful protests in South Africa. He travelled across India to understand local struggles. His first actions were in:

- Champaran (Bihar) – Against forced indigo farming
- Kheda (Gujarat) – Against high taxes during crop failure
- Ahmedabad – Mill worker strike



⚖️ Rowlatt Satyagraha and Jallianwala Bagh

In 1919, the Rowlatt Act was passed — allowing police to arrest without trial. Gandhiji launched a nationwide satyagraha on 6 April. Peaceful protests were met with brutal repression.

On 13 April 1919, General Dyer fired on a peaceful gathering in Jallianwala Bagh (Amritsar), killing hundreds.



📷 Fig. 7 – Jallianwala Bagh walls with bullet marks

Rabindranath Tagore returned his British title in protest.

🧕 Khilafat and Non-Cooperation Movement (1920–22)

Gandhiji supported the Khilafat Movement (defending the Turkish Caliphate) and combined it with the call for Swaraj.

- Students left schools
- Lawyers gave up jobs
- British clothes and titles were boycotted
- People picketed liquor shops
- Foreign cloth imports dropped sharply

Different regions responded differently — peasants protested high taxes, tribals protested forest laws, and labourers demanded better pay.



 Fig. 8 – Gandhi portrayed as Krishna guiding leaders in a chariot


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Chauri Chaura Incident and Aftermath

In 1922, police killed protestors in Chauri Chaura (UP). In response, protestors burnt a police station. Gandhiji withdrew the Non-Cooperation Movement, believing in non-violence.

Congress then focused on village work. New parties like RSS and CPI also emerged. Bhagat Singh and other revolutionaries also began acting during this period.



 Fig. 9 – Chitta Ranjan Das, active during Non-Cooperation

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Bhagat Singh and the Revolutionaries


Bhagat Singh, Rajguru, and Sukhdev formed HSRA in 1928. They killed a British officer to avenge Lala Lajpat Rai's death. In 1929, Bhagat Singh and Dutt threw a bomb in the Assembly to draw attention.

They were hanged in 1931. Bhagat Singh was only 23.



 Fig. 10 – Protest against Simon Commission




 Fig. 11 – Bhagat Singh: “Inquilab Zindabad!”

Dandi March and Civil Disobedience


In 1930, Gandhi launched the Salt Satyagraha, walking 240 miles from Sabarmati to Dandi to break the British salt law.



 Fig. 12 – Gandhi picking up salt at Dandi, 6 April 1930

Thousands joined the Civil Disobedience Movement. People refused to pay taxes and buy British goods. Women like Ambabai also played active roles.



 Fig. 13 – Sarojini Naidu with Gandhi, Paris, 1931


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Provincial Elections and Quit India

Under the Government of India Act (1935), Congress won in many provinces in 1937. But when WWII started in 1939, Congress resigned to protest British refusal to promise independence.

In 1942, Gandhiji launched the Quit India Movement: “Do or Die.” It spread quickly. The British responded with arrests and shootings.



 Fig. 14 – Quit India protest




 Fig. 15 – Subhas Chandra Bose



 Fig. 16 – Jawaharlal Nehru with Gandhi, 1946

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Towards Freedom and Partition

In 1940, Muslim League demanded “Independent States.” By 1946, communal tensions rose. The League called for “Direct Action Day” in Calcutta – violence spread.

Partition became unavoidable. Millions were displaced. A new nation — Pakistan — was born alongside a free India.