

Chapter 3

Nationalism in India

❖ Nationalism

It involves a strong identification of a group of individuals with a political entity defined in national terms, i.e., a nation.

- Modern nationalism was associated with the formation of nation-states.
- In India, as in many other colonies, the growth of nationalism is connected to the anti-colonial movement under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi.

❖ The First World War, Khilafat and Non-Cooperation Movement

The war played an important role in shaping India's freedom struggle.

- Increase in defence expenditure due to the war led to the increase in taxes, custom duties, prices and the introduction of war loans.
- Extreme hardships, poverty and forced recruitments in the army made people hostile to the British rule.
- During 1918–19 and 1920–21, food shortages due to the failure of crops and famines and epidemics, that took a heavy toll of life, created resentment among the people of India against the foreign rule.

❖ Satyagraha

Satyagraha means appeal for truth. Mahatma Gandhi introduced this concept during his stay in South Africa. It is based on the ideals of truth and non-violence.

- **January, 1915:** Mahatma Gandhi returned to India from South Africa.
- **Champaran Satyagraha, 1916:** First Gandhian mass-movement in India against the oppressive plantation system in Champaran (Bihar).
- **Kheda Satyagraha, 1917:** Gandhiji led the movement in Kheda district of Gujarat, demanding relaxation of the revenue tax owing to the poverty experienced by the farmers because of the outbreak of plague and crop failure.
- **Ahmedabad Mill Strike, 1918:** Gandhiji organised a Satyagraha against the cotton mill owners demanding an increase in the workers' wages and bonus.

❖ The Rowlatt Act (1919)

- Passed by the British Government.
- The Act gave the government enormous powers for repressing political activities and allowed detention of political prisoners for two years without any trial.
- **6th April, 1919:** Gandhi started the non-violent civil disobedience movement for opposing the Rowlatt Act with a nation-wide *hartal*.
- Shops were closed down, rallies were organised and rail workshop workers went on strike. Widespread attacks on banks, post offices and railway stations took place.
- Government brutally repressed the nationalists. Martial law was imposed and General Dyer took command.
- **Jallianwala Bagh Massacre, 13th April, 1919**

- A number of people had assembled at Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar for attending the annual *Baisakhi* fair.
- General Dyer surrounded the park and opened fire on the crowd, killing hundreds of people.

- **Aftermath of Jallianwala Bagh Massacre**

- Crowds took to the streets in many north Indian towns. Strikes, clashes with the police and attacks on government buildings were extensively witnessed.
- The British used brutal repression, seeking to humiliate and terrorise people. People were flogged and villages were bombed.
- This violence forced Gandhi to stop the movement.

- **Criticism:** The Rowlatt Satyagraha was limited mostly to cities and towns.

❖ **Non-Cooperation Movement**

Began in January 1921

- **Causes**

- **Khilafat issue:** After the First World War, the British sought to overthrow the Khalifa, the spiritual head of the Islamic world and the Turkish Emperor. This was deeply resented by Muslims all over the world, including the Indian Muslims.
- **Rowlatt Act:** The dissatisfaction from the Rowlatt Act and the failure of the Rowlatt Satyagraha.
- **Jallianwala Bagh:** The atrocious killing of hundreds of innocent people by the British at Jallianwala Bagh had made the Indian masses resentful towards the British rule.
- Gandhiji wanted to launch a mass movement encompassing the entire nation and all communities.

- **Methods:** Surrendering of government titles, boycott of civil services, army, police, courts and legislative councils, school, and foreign goods; and a full civil disobedience campaign.

- **Disagreements**

- Few Congress members were not in support of the idea of boycotting the council elections as they wanted to bring about changes in the system by being in power. C.R. Das and Motilal Nehru formed the Swaraj Party within the Congress to argue for a return to council politics.
- Some leaders feared the movement to turn violent.

- **Events**

- **March, 1919 (Bombay):** Khilafat Committee was formed with leaders such as *Muhammad Ali* and *Shaukat Ali*.
- **September, 1920:** Gandhi, in the Calcutta session of the Congress, convinced other leaders of the need to start a non-cooperation movement in support of Khilafat as well as for *Swaraj*.

- **December, 1920 (Nagpur):** Non-cooperation programme adopted by the Congress.
- **The Movement in the Towns:** The students left government schools and colleges, headmasters and teachers resigned, lawyers gave up their legal practices and the council elections were boycotted in most provinces except Madras. Foreign goods were boycotted, liquor shops picketed and foreign cloth burnt in huge bonfires.
- **1921 and 1922:** The import of foreign cloth dropped. Merchants and traders refused to trade in foreign goods or finance foreign trade. Production of Indian textile mills and handlooms went up.
- **Rebellion in the Countryside:** The peasants had to do *begar* and work without pay in the farms of oppressive landlords. The peasant movement demanded reduction of revenue, abolition of *begar* and social boycott of oppressive landlords. In Awadh, the peasants were led by Baba Ramchandra. The houses of *talukdars* and merchants were attacked, bazaars were looted and grain hoards were taken over in many places. Local leaders told the peasants that Gandhiji had declared that no taxes were to be paid and land was to be redistributed among the poor.
- *Nai-dhobi* bands were organised by the *panchayats* for depriving landlords of the services of even barbers and washer men.
- **October, 1920:** The ***Oudh Kisan Sabha*** was set up headed by Jawaharlal Nehru, Baba Ramchandra and few others.
- **Revolt by Tribals:** The government had closed large forest areas, preventing people from entering the forest to graze their cattle or to collect fuel wood and fruits. Alluri Sitaram Raju led the guerrilla warfare in the Gudem Hills of Andhra Pradesh. The rebels attacked police stations, attempted to kill British officials and carried on guerrilla warfare for achieving *swaraj*.
- **Swaraj in the Plantations:** Under the ***Inland Emigration Act of 1859***, the plantation workers were not allowed to leave the tea gardens without permission. Thousands of workers defied the authorities, left the plantations and headed home. They believed that Gandhi raj was coming and everyone would be given land in their own villages.
- **Impediments**
 - Movement slowed because *khadi* cloth was often more expensive than mass-produced mill cloth and therefore, expensive for the poor people.
 - Indian educational institutions were slow to come in place of the boycotted British ones.
- **February, 1922:** Mahatma Gandhi decided to withdraw the Non-Cooperation Movement because of its violent face in many places.

❖ Simon Commission

- Constituted by the Tory government of Britain under pressure of mass movements in India.
- Sir John Simon was the Chairman.
- Sought to look into the demands of the nationalists and suggest changes in the constitutional structure of India.
- Arrived in India in 1928. Congress and the Muslim League along with the other parties received the commission with black flags and slogans such as “Go back Simon”.
- **October, 1929:** The Commission recommended a ‘*dominion status*’ for India in coming future and a Round Table Conference for discussing a future constitution for India.

❖ Effects of Simon Commission

- **December, 1929:** Under the presidency of Jawaharlal Nehru, the Lahore session of Congress formalized the demand of “*Purna Swaraj*”. 26th January, 1930 was celebrated as the Independence Day.
- **1930:** Dr. B. R. Ambedkar established the Depressed Classes Association.

❖ Civil Disobedience Movement

- **Medium:** Gandhiji chose salt as the medium for protesting against the British rule.
- **31st January, 1930:** Gandhi sent a letter to Viceroy Irwin stating eleven demands ranging from industrialists to peasants. The most important of the demands was the abolition of salt tax as salt was the most essential commodity for the common man.
- The government was asked to accept the demands by 11th march, failing which a civil disobedience movement would be started.
- **Salt March**
 - Marked the beginning of the Civil Disobedience Movement.
 - Started from Gandhi’s ashram in Sabarmati to the Gujarati coastal town of Dandi, spanning a distance of 240 miles.
 - **6th April, 1930:** Gandhi reached Dandi with thousands of followers and ceremonially violated the law by manufacturing salt from sea water.
- **Spread**
 - Soon, the movement spread to the entire nation.
 - Colonial laws were violated, salt was manufactured in numerous places, foreign clothes were burnt and liquor shops were picketed.
 - Peasants refused to pay revenue and *chaukidari* taxes.
 - Village officials resigned and at many places people violated forest laws by going into reserved forests for collecting wood.
- **Government’s Response**
 - **April, 1930:** Abdul Ghaffar Khan was arrested
 - **May, 1930:** Gandhiji was arrested

- Women and children were beaten by the government and peaceful *satyagrahis* were attacked.
- About 100,000 people were arrested.
- **Gandhi-Irwin Pact and End of Movement**
 - **5th March, 1931:** Gandhiji called off the movement entering into a pact with Viceroy Lord Irwin. He consented to participate in the Round Table Conference and the government agreed to release the political prisoners.
 - **December, 1931:** Gandhiji went to London for the Second Round Table Conference. The conference was a futile exercise as nothing fruitful came out of it for India.
- The Civil disobedience movement was re-launched but by 1934 it lost momentum.
- **Participation by People**
 - Rich peasant communities such as the *Patidars* of Gujarat and the *Jats* of Uttar Pradesh took part in the movement. Trade depression and falling prices caused a decrease in the cash income of these rich peasant communities. They decided to oppose the high revenue demands of the government through their participation in the Civil Disobedience Movement.
 - The poorer peasantry found difficulties in paying their rent due to the depression and the decrease in the cash income. They wanted the unpaid rent to the landlord to be remitted.
 - The business class wanted protection against imports of foreign goods and a rupee-sterling foreign exchange ratio that would discourage imports. They also opposed the colonial policies that restricted business activities.
 - The business class, under the leadership of prominent industrialists such as Purshottamdas Thakurdas and G.D. Birla, attacked colonial control over the Indian economy, gave financial assistance and refused to buy or sell imported goods.
- **Causes of Failure**
 - The Civil Disobedience Movement was called off without the fulfilment of the demand of the rich peasant communities.
 - Many rich peasant communities decided not to join the restarted Civil Disobedience Movement.
 - The Congress was unwilling to support the 'no rent' campaigns due to the fear of upsetting the rich peasants and landlords.
 - The spread of militant activities, worries of prolonged business disruptions, growing influences of socialism amongst the young Congress members and the failure of the Round Table Conference led to the withdrawal of support to the movement by the business class.
 - Industrial workers did not participate in the Civil Disobedience Movement except in Nagpur.

- The *dalits* (untouchables) did not participate as the Congress sided with the conservative high-caste Hindus.
- Muslim organizations and communities also sparsely participated in the movement. The Muslims alienated from the movement due to the fear of the dominance of the Hindu majority
- ❖ **1920:** Formation of the Indian Industrial and Commercial Congress
- ❖ **1927:** Formation of the Federation of the Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industries (FICCI).
- ❖ **Demands of *Dalits***
 - During the course of the civil- disobedience movement, many *dalit* leaders separately demanded reservation of seats in the educational institutions and separate electorate for the legislative council elections.
 - **1930:** Dr B.R. Ambedkar organised the *dalits* into the Depressed Classes Association
 - Gandhiji began a fast unto death for opposing the demand of separate electorates for *dalits* because he believed that this would disunite the Indian masses.
 - **Poona Pact (September, 1932)**
 - Signed between Ambedkar and Gandhiji.
 - It gave the depressed classes reserved seats in provincial and central legislative councils, which were to be voted in by the general electorate.
- ❖ **Upsurge of Nationalism**
 - A sense of unity and nationalism was inspired by history and fiction, folklore and songs, popular prints and symbols.
 - Abanindranath Tagore's image of *Bharat Mata* and Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's song *Vande Mataram* united many people and communities.
 - During the Swadeshi Movement, a tri-colour (red, green and yellow) flag was designed. It had eight lotuses representing eight provinces of British India and a crescent moon, representing Hindus and Muslims.
 - **1921:** Gandhiji had designed the tri-colour Swaraj flag (red, green and yellow) with the spinning wheel at the centre. This flag represented the Gandhian ideal of self-help.
 - The glorious developments in the ancient times when art and architecture, science and mathematics, religion and culture, law and philosophy, and crafts and trade flourished were discovered with the help of history. This instilled pride and united the Indians.

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