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Historiography of national movement of India

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Abstract

The Indian National Congress was initially focused on moderate reform under the British raj in India. However, some early 20th century activists began to boycott British imports and promote Indian goods, garnering the support of a wide swath of social classes. In the 1920s and '30s party leader Mahatma Gandhi supported nonviolent acts of civil disobedience. Although tensions between the Congress Party and the raj escalated during World War II, by 1947 these tactics had secured independence for India. Modern Indian historians have focused most of its attention on writing history of British India and discourses on the princely states or 'Indian India' was left to the margins. The Princely states which consisted of at least half of population and region in the pre-independent times did not experience the strength of national movement. There were two contradictory responses from the states. On the one hand the rulers were believed to be in cahoots with the colonial government and on the other people of some of the princely states went against their own rulers and supported the Indian national movement. This paper highlights various national movements.

Keywords: Indian National Congress, British, Mahatma Gandhi, Modern Indian historians

Introduction

Despite that in Indian historical writings, these states largely remained neglected and overshadowed by developments in the British provinces. Whatever little attention was paid to them remained restricted to the ruling elites i.e. the Rajas and the Nawabs. The descriptions remained restricted to them acting as puppets of their imperial masters. However in the past few decades more attention began to be paid to understand the other half of Indian region.

The attempt made in this paper is to trace the Historiographical developments in the historical writings on various aspects of princely states. The special focus or emphasis is laid on national movement in the princely states. The attempt indeed has been made to pay attention to historical writings on both these dimensions.

The party began to endorse a policy of swadeshi which called on Indians to boycott of imported British goods and promoted Indian-made goods. By 1917 the group's "extremist" Home Rule wing, which was formed by Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Annie Besant the Previous Year, had begun to exert significant by appealing to India's diverse social classes. The Indian National Congress represents the progressive soul of India. These soul denes who we are a Nation. Gandhi and Congress in the 1920s and '30s the Congress Party, led by Mohandas Gandhi, began advocating nonviolent noncooperation. The new change in tactics was precipitated by the protest over the perceived by the protest over the perceived feebleness of the constitutional reforms enacted in early 1919 (Rowlatt Acts) and Britain's manner of carrying them out, as well as by the widespread outrage among Indians in response to the massacre of civilians in Amritsar (Punjab) that April. Many of the acts of civil disobedience that followed were implemented through the All India Congress Committed, formed in 1929, which advocated avoiding taxes as a protest against British rule. Notable in that regard was the Salt March in 1930 led by Gandhi.

Rise of Nationalism in India

For India, the making of national identity was a long process whose roots can be drawn from the ancient era. India as a whole had been ruled by emperors like Ashoka and Samudragupta in ancient times and Akbar to Aurangzeb in Medieval times. But, it was only in the 19th Century that the concept of a national identity and national consciousness emerged.

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The social, economic and political factors had inspired the people to define and achieve their national identity. The sense of being oppressed under colonial rule provided a shared bond that tied different groups together. Their experiences were varied, and their notions of freedom were not always the same. Several other causes also contributed towards the rise and growth of Nationalism. One set of laws of British Government across several regions led to political and administrative unity. Do you remember the way the peasants and the tribals rebelled when their lands and their right to livelihood was taken away? Similarly this economic exploitation by the British agitated other people to unite and react against British Government's control over their lives and resources. The intellectual and spiritual side of Nationalism was voiced by persons like Bankim Chandra Chatterji, Swami Dayanand Saraswati and Aurobindo Ghosh. Bankim Chandra's hymn to the Motherland, 'Vande Matram' became the rallying cry of patriotic nationalists. It inspired generations to supreme self-sacrifice. Simultaneously, it created a fear in the minds of the British.

Partition of Bengal (1905)

The reason for partition was given as an attempt to improve administration. But the real aim was to 'Divide and Rule'. The partition was done in order to create a separate State for Muslims and so introduce the poison of communalism in the country. However the Indians viewed the partition as an attempt by the British to disrupt the growing national movement in Bengal and divide the Hindus and Muslims of the region. Widespread agitation ensued in the streets and in the press. People of different parts of India opposed the partition of Bengal all over the country. This opposition was carried on by organized meetings, processions and demonstrations etc.

Initial stages of Indian National Congress

It was for this reason that the early Congress leaders were referred to as 'Moderates'. During its first twenty years the Congress made moderate demands. The members placed their demands before the Government always in the form of petitions and worked within the framework of law. It was for this reason that the early Congress leaders were referred to as 'Moderates' They asked for: (a) representative legislatures, (b) Indianization of services, (c) reduction of military expenditure, (d) education, employment and holding of the ICS (Indian Civil Services) examination in India, (e) decrease in the burden of the cultivators, to help in the growth of Indian industries and handicrafts, (k) introduction of welfare programmes for the people.

The Rise of Radical Nationalists

Thus the first phase of the nationalist movement came to an end with government reaction against the Congress on the one hand and a split in the Congress in 1907 on the other. That is why the period after 1905 till 1918 can be referred to as the 'Era of Passionate Nationalists or Garam Dal'. Lala Lajpat Rai, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Bipin Chandra Pal (Lal-Bal-Pal) were important leaders of this Radical group. When the Moderates were in the forefront of the action, they had maintained a low profile but now they swung into action. Their entry marked the beginning of a new trend and a new face in India's struggle for freedom.

Formation of the Muslim League (1906)

They motivated Muslims to form a permanent political association of their own. In December, 1906, during the Muhammadan Educational conference in Dacca, Nawab Salim Ullah Khan raised the idea of establishing a Central Muhammadan Association to take care of Muslim interests. Accordingly, on 30th December, 1906, the All India Muslim League was founded. Another prominent person, Aga Khan was chosen as its president. The main objective of the league was to protect and advance the rights of Muslims in India and represent their needs to the government. By encouraging the issue of separate electorates, the government sowed the seed of communalism and separatism among Indians.

The National Movement during the First World War

This War was fought among the nations of Europe to get colonial monopoly. During war time, the British Government made an appeal to the Indian leaders to join hands with them in their time of crisis. Indian leaders agreed but they put their own terms and conditions i.e. after the war was over, the British government would give Constitutional (legislative and administrative) powers to the Indian People. They forcefully recruited Indians in the British Army. They increased the price of necessary goods and imposed taxes on personal and professional income. As a result, they had to face protest from the Indian society. Farmers and workers of Champaran, Bardoli, Kheda and Ahmedabad actively protested against the exploitative policies of British government. The boycott of foreign cloth became a mass movement, with thousands of bonfires of foreign cloth lighting the Indian sky.

The Non-Cooperation Movement (1920-22)

He was also emboldened by his earlier success in Bihar in the light of the past events and the actions of British government; he decided to launch a nationwide Satyagrah against the proposed Rowlatt Act in 1919. He threatened to start the non-cooperation movement in case the government failed to accept his demands.

Dandi March

They imposed taxes on the use of salt. This was opposed by the people, as salt was the basic need of the people. But, no attention was paid to demands of the people. During March-April, 1930, Gandhi marched from his Sabarmati Ashram to Dandi on the Gujarat coast for the purpose of raiding the Government Salt. The violation of salt law was his first challenge to the government. It was a peaceful march.

Conclusion

In a larger context, the founding of the Indian National Congress was a response to the then existing political and socio-economics conditions which has resulted from long subjection to the alien rule. Indian leaders agreed but they put their own terms and conditions i.e. after the war was over, the British government would give Constitutional (legislative and administrative) powers to the Indian People. Gandhi and Congress in the 1920s and '30s the Congress Party, led by Mohandas Gandhi, began advocating nonviolent noncooperation. The Second Indian National Conference, convened by the Indian Association, met at Calcutta. But he expressed his inability to do so at that stage. It merged with the Indian National Congress in 1886.

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