

Growth of Nationalism

Factors Promoting the Growth of Nationalism in India

The birth of nationalism was one of the most important phenomena which took place in nineteenth century India. Many factors contributed to the rise of nationalism in India. These were

Economic Exploitation

The main aim of British policies in India was to promote their own trade interests. They exploited the Indian economy to such an extent that India became one of the poorest countries within two centuries of British rule. The following sections of Indian society were impacted by British policies:

Peasants: The government levied high taxes on land. The revenues were generally not reduced even during droughts and floods. This deteriorated the conditions of the Indian peasantry.

Artisans and Craftsmen: By following the policy of 'Free Trade', the British destroyed the Indian textile and handicraft industries. While no import duties were levied on British goods entering India, high duties were imposed on Indian goods entering Britain. This policy ruined the income for artisans and craftsmen.

Working Class: The establishment of industries gave rise to the working class in India. The working class was exploited by factory owners who were generally Englishmen. Extremely low salaries were paid to factory workers.

Educated Indians: The educated Indians were not appointed to high posts. High posts in civil and military services were only reserved for the British. Their chances of promotion were also weak. As a result, the educated Indians began to feel alienated by the British.



Due to the unjust economic policies of the British, many people including peasants and artisans suffered during British rule

Repressive Colonial Policies

Repressive policies followed by the British fuelled nationalism among the Indians. These were

- A grand durbar was organised by Lord Lytton in Delhi in 1877 to proclaim Queen Victoria as the Empress of India. A great famine also broke out in Bengal at this time. While million of rupees were spent on the grand durbar, nothing was done to help Indians suffering from famine.
- The Vernacular Press Act which was passed in 1878 by Lord Lytton empowered the government to confiscate newspapers if they print anything against the British government. This Act was later repealed by Lord Ripon.
- In 1878, the Arms Act was passed by the British government. According to this Act, no Indian could possess weapons without a valid licence. However, the Europeans and Anglo Indians were allowed to keep arms without a licence. This caused resentment among the Indians.
- The maximum age limit for appearing for the Indian Civil Service Examination was reduced from 21 years to 19 years, making it difficult for Indians to compete in the exams.
- The removal of import duties on British goods harmed the interests of Indian industries.
- The Ilbert Bill was passed in 1883 by Lord Ripon. This Bill sought to create political equality by vesting Indian judges with the power to try European or British citizens residing in India. However, because of vehement protests by the Europeans, the Bill was withdrawn. This enraged the Indians who began to feel the need for organising themselves.

Socio-Religious Reform Movements

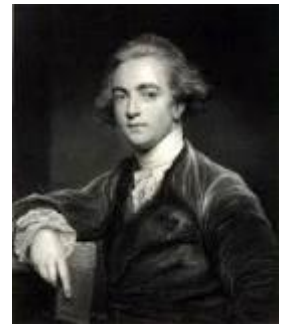
The socio-religious reform movements which began in the nineteenth century also instilled the feeling of nationalism among Indians.

- The introduction of Western education made the educated Indians realise the need to reform society. As a result, socio-religious reform movements started in India.
- The abolition of sati and the Widow Remarriage Act were important legislations passed during this period. Efforts were also made by the educated and enlightened Indians to reduce caste inequalities and to end the dowry system, purdah system, female infanticide and child marriages.
- Raja Ram Mohan Roy was a great social and religious reformer. He advocated female education and it was largely due to his efforts that the practice of sati was declared illegal. Jyotirao Phule challenged the caste system and advocated the education of lower caste girls.
- The reformers criticised untouchability and caste system. They urged people of every caste and class to work together to achieve the independence of the nation.
- Many reformers such as Swami Dayanand and Swami Vivekananda proclaimed the superiority of the Indian culture and protested against the domination of the British in India. Swami Dayanand Saraswati raised the slogan 'India for the Indians'.
- These reform movements highlighted the importance of women by encouraging them to participate in the national movement.

Rediscovery of India's Past

Many Indian and European scholars discovered the ancient glory of Indian history which filled the hearts of the Indians with the feeling of nationalism. Some of these discoveries were

- Many Indian Sanskrit texts were translated into English and other languages which established great technological and cultural advancement made by India in the past.
- Sir William Jones founded the Asiatic Society of Bengal to encourage Oriental studies. He translated the plays of Kalidasa and the Manu Smriti. Sir Charles Wilkinson was the first European to translate the Bhagavad Gita into English in 1785.
- James Prince deciphered the edicts of the ancient Indian emperor Ashoka. He along with Alexander Cunningham rediscovered the greatness of the Mauryas, imperial Guptas, Chalukyas and Pallavas. This instilled a feeling of pride among the Indians. People now became aware of the political achievements under the Mauryas and the Guptas, thus promoting the feeling of nationalism.
- The excavations at Harappa and Mohenjodaro took place under the supervision of the Indian Archaeological Survey (with Sir John Marshall as its President). This revealed the existence of ancient civilisation in India in about 2300 BC.
- The restoration of India's glorious past helped in restoring self-confidence and self-respect among Indians. It also busted the western propaganda that the Indians were never able to rule themselves.



Sir William Jones founded the Asiatic Society of Bengal to encourage Oriental studies

Influence of Western Education

- The introduction of Western education filled the hearts of the Indians with the ideas of liberty, equality and justice.
- The educated Indians also became acquainted with the concept of self-rule and democracy. They started to demand independence from the British rule to establish a democratic rule in India.

Role of the Press

- Many newspapers and magazines started in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Some of them were Amrit Bazar Patrika, The Bengali, The Tribune, The Pioneer and The Hindu.
- It was through the press that the message of liberty, freedom, equality, home rule and independence spread among the people.
- The newspapers criticised the unjust policies of the British and exposed the true nature of British rule in India.
- It encouraged various communities and groups to organise political movements in the country.

Development of Transport and Communication System

- The development of the means of transport such as the railways facilitated the growth of nationalism in India. The railways helped the people to travel to different parts of the country and fostered the spirit of unity among them.
- The development of the post and telegraph also unified the people across all the regions in the country.

Growth of Political Associations

Many political associations and organisations sprang up in the nineteenth century. The first association to be started was the Landholders' Society in Kolkata in 1838. Many associations such as the Bengal British Indian Society, British India Association and East India Association started in India.

The East India Association: It was founded in London in 1866 by Dadabhai Naoroji. It voiced the grievances of the Indians to the British Parliament and suggested remedial measures.

The Indian Association: The Indian Association was headed by Surendranath Banerjee. Lawyers, professionals and educated middle class Indians were its members. Its objectives were

- Integration of Indian people on the basis of common political interests
- Promotion of friendship and harmony between the Hindus and the Muslims
- To ensure mass participation of people in movements

The association agitated against the Vernacular Press Act and opposed the lowering of the age limit for appearing for the Indian Civil Service Examinations. It also took up the cause of Indian workers working on British-owned plantations.

The Indian National Conference: It was founded in 1883 at Kolkata. Its first meeting was convened by Surendranath Banerjee. It offered a model for the Indian National Congress which was formed two years later.

Formation of the Indian National Congress

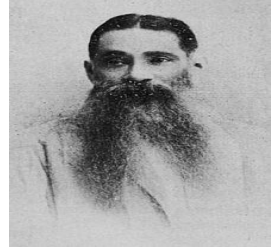
- Many leaders such as Surendranath Banerjee, Dadabhai Naoroji, Pheroz Shah Mehta and Justice Ranade were looking forward to establish an all India organisation. At this time, A. O. Hume, a retired British civil servant, wanted to set up an organisation forum for the government to draw the attention of the government towards its drawbacks. He did this to avoid the outbreak of any revolt similar to the magnitude of the revolt of 1857.
- The Indian National Congress was thus founded by A. O. Hume in 1885 in consultation with the other Indian leaders. Its first meeting was supposed to be held at Pune, but as plague broke out in the city, the venue was shifted to Mumbai.
- Lord Dufferin favoured the formation of the Indian National Congress to keep the government informed of the aspirations of the people.



A. O. Hume

- The first session of the Indian National Congress was held in December 1885 under the presidentship of W. C. Bonnerjee. Its demands in the early years were
 - To develop and consolidate the feelings of national unity irrespective of caste, class and religion
 - Greater representation of Indians in legislative bodies
 - To form legislative councils in the provinces which had no such political body
 - To appoint Indians on higher position in government offices
 - To hold Civil Service Examinations in India and not just in London

The first session of the Indian National Congress was attended by 72 delegates from all over India. It included renowned personalities such as Dadabhai Naoroji, Pherozeshah Mehta, Badruddin Tyabji, Justice Ranade and G. Subramania Iyer. The second session of the Indian National Congress was held at Kolkata.



W. C. Bonnerjee was the first President of the Indian National Congress

An important development took place in the Congress session held in 1907 under the Presidentship of Rashbehari Ghosh. The Congress was split into moderates and extremists. These two wings of the Congress were united at the Lucknow session held in 1916.