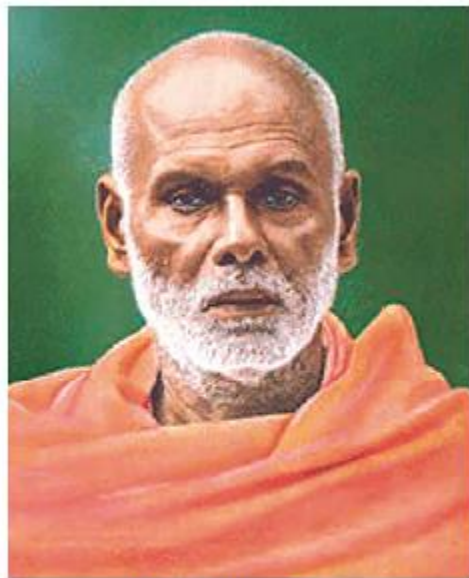


# Freedom Struggle

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## Introduction

The revolt of 1857 had created a new awakening among the Indian people. The people of India wanted to be free from foreign rule. Indian society at that time suffered from a number of social ills. These were coming up in the way of our fighting the British rulers as a united people. The rigid caste system kept the Indian people divided. Illiteracy, specially among women, was another curse. A number of evil social practices would not let people look forward.



Narayana Guru

Many social reformers came forward to liberate Indian people from their own social evils. Some names, that stand out, include Raja Rammohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, Narayan Guru and Swami Dayananda. All of them created institutions for promoting education and removal of social evils. Some scholars, both Indian and foreign, studied in detail the Indian civilisational and cultural achievements in the past. They told the Indian people that there was so much about which Indian people could feel proud. They had no reason to feel inferior just because they had lagged behind in the race for modern scientific knowledge. Many newspapers were started in Indian languages. Through them, ordinary people came to know about the misrule of the British government. The problems faced by Indians were highlighted in these magazines and newspapers.

## Indian National Congress

A.O. Hume, a British Civil Servant set up the Indian National Congress in the year 1885. The first session of the Congress was held in Bombay (now Mumbai). The session was presided by W.C. Banerjee.

Seventy-two delegates from different parts of India attended the first session. Sessions of the Indian National Congress were held every year. In these sessions, demands were made for allowing Indians to manage their own affairs. The Congress Presidents of that period included names like Dadabhai Naoroji, S.N. Banerjee, G. Subramaniya Aiyer, Gopal Krishna Gokhle, Badruddin Tayabji, Pheroz Shah Mehta, and Surendranath Banerjee. These leaders helped in making the Congress a strong organization. It was joined by people from all walks of life drawn from different parts of India.



Lala Lajpat Rai

In the earlier phase, the Congress leaders were very moderate in their demands. They believed that if appeals were made to the British rulers, the rulers would accept the genuine demands. The British response was however different. They felt that the congress was becoming anti-British. The British rulers became hostile to Congress demands and the leaders.

Appeals to British rulers did not show any result. The leaders started becoming restless. Gradually a set of leaders pleaded for more strong action. Three names stand out among those leaders. They were known as the trio–Bal Gangadhar Tilak (Maharashtra) Bipin Chandra Pal (Bengal) and Lala Lajpat Rai (Punjab).

Bal Gangadhar Tilak was the most fiery among the Trio known as BAL-PAL-LAL. He edited a paper of his own named Kesari. He severely criticized British policies in his paper. He is known for his famous saying, 'Freedom is my birthright and I will have it'. Tilak was sent to prison a number of times for his articles in Kesari.



Bipin Chandra Pal

While the earlier leaders were known as Moderates, these people were called 'Extremists'.

As the Congress gained increasing popularity, the British rulers made laws to suppress the freedom of speech and press. But these measures failed to check the growing popularity of the Indian National Congress. The British rulers then thought of a clever plan.

### **Divide and Rule**

The British rulers thought that if the Indian people could be divided on religious lines, the movement against British rule would become weak. The first attempt to divide the Hindus and the Muslims was made in 1905. Bengal was proposed to be divided into two parts. One part would have the Muslims in majority while the other would have the Hindus in majority. But the people of Bengal saw through the British game. They resisted the partition of Bengal.

### **Swadeshi Movement**

The people of India now became more aggressive in their fight. The Congress launched Swadeshi movement. The Plan was to boycott goods made in Britain. British made cloth was burnt in heaps at different places all over the country. People

were asked not to buy goods that were made in Britain. In their place they were to buy goods made in their own country-Swadesh. The Boycott of British made goods would have very adverse effect on British interests. So the rulers took very strong action against the leaders of the Swadeshi movement. The processionists were beaten and hit with police lathis. But the movement spread from Bengal to other parts of India like Bombay (now Mumbai), Pune, Madras (now Chennai) and so on. The plan to partition Bengal had to be finally cancelled in 1911.

### **The Revolutionaries**

The Revolutionaries were people who believed that the violence of British rulers needed to be met with similar violence from Indian freedom fighters. One such revolutionary Khudi Ram Bose was just 15 years of age when he was hanged by the British rulers for his revolutionary activities.



Raja Mehendra

The revolutionaries were successful in assassinating a number of British officers. But the might of British rule at that time was too much for the young patriots. The movement could not last long. Most revolutionary leaders suffered severe punishments including death. A number of Indians settled in foreign countries sympathised with the aspirations of the Indian people. Madam Bhikaji Cama brought out a paper named Vande Mataram in Switzerland. She was the lady who first designed the Congress flag. In Germany, Narendra Nath Chattopadhyya formed an association for liberating India. From Kabul the freedom movement was supported by Raja Mahendra Pratap and Maulana Barkatullah. Indians specially the Punjabis settled in USA, formed the Ghadar Party.

All these people and associations helped Indian revolutionaries in getting money and even armaments to be used against the British rulers. Meanwhile some concessions were offered to the Indian people by way of political reforms. Some Indians were allowed to be a part of the Government. But the British rulers followed their policy of divide and rule. The Hindus and Muslims were to be treated differently and not as one Indian people.

The First World War broke out in 1914. Indian forces fought bravely for the British people. It was hoped that after the war, British rulers would grant freedom to India. Many Indian leaders had pleaded for help to Britain in this hope. They were disappointed. The British response after the War was very different. More strict laws were made for dealing with Indian protestors. Those opposing British rule were treated very harshly, often in a cruel manner.

The British plan to divide and rule had led to the formation of Muslim League in 1906. The League had the support and patronage of British rulers. In the next four decades, the League became the instrument leading to partition of the country on communal lines.

### **Gandhiji's Return to India**

The Independence movement in India took a major turn in 1915. M.K. Gandhi, an Indian lawyer who had been practising in South Africa, returned to India. While in South Africa he had a taste of British misrule and discriminations. He had fought it with some success. As he came to India, he plunged into the Independence Movement. Soon he gave a new direction and leadership to the movement that led to Indian Independence in 1947.