

# The Genesis and Growth of the Indian National Congress

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## ABSTRACT

The Indian National Congress (INC) played a pivotal role in shaping the course of India's freedom struggle and emerging national identity. Founded in 1885 by A.O. Hume, the INC initially aimed to create a platform for civic and political dialogue among educated Indians under British rule. Over time, it evolved from a moderate petitioning body into a mass movement that spearheaded India's struggle for independence. Through various phases—Moderate, Extremist, Gandhian, and Revolutionary—the Congress mobilized people across regions, religions, and classes. Leaders like Dadabhai Naoroji, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Subhas Chandra Bose guided the organization through significant movements such as the Non-Cooperation Movement, Civil Disobedience Movement, and Quit India Movement. The INC not only fought against colonial policies but also contributed to the socio-economic awakening of India by promoting secularism, democracy, and self-reliance. Its transformation from a reformist group to the principal architect of Indian independence marks its unique and unparalleled place in Indian history.

**Keywords:** Indian National Congress, Freedom Movement, Colonial Rule, Moderate Phase, Extremist Phase, Gandhian Era, Non-Cooperation Movement, Civil Disobedience, Quit India Movement, Nationalism, Independence.

## Introduction

The Indian National Congress (INC), established on December 28, 1885, in Bombay, marks a turning point in India's political history. Initially formed as a moderate political platform for dialogue between Indians and the British colonial government, the INC gradually evolved into the primary engine of India's struggle for independence. The founding members included a mix of Indian and British reformers, with A.O. Hume, a retired British civil servant, playing a key role in its formation, alongside prominent Indian leaders such as Dadabhai Naoroji, Dinshaw Wacha, and W.C. Bonnerjee (the first president).

The early phase of the INC (1885–1905), also known as the Moderate Phase, was dominated by petitions, speeches, and appeals for administrative reforms and Indian representation in legislative councils. However, dissatisfaction with the British response and rising national consciousness led to the emergence of a more assertive group within the Congress, called the Extremists, led by Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Lala Lajpat Rai, and Bipin Chandra Pal. This ideological shift laid the groundwork for mass political awakening.

A significant transformation occurred under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi after 1919. With the introduction of Satyagraha (non-violent resistance) and mass movements like the Non-Cooperation Movement (1920–22), Civil Disobedience Movement (1930–34), and Quit India Movement (1942), the INC became the undisputed spearhead of the national freedom struggle. It united people across caste, class, religion, and region against colonial rule.

By the time of India's independence in 1947, the INC had established itself as the most powerful political party. It played a vital role in shaping India's Constitution, setting up democratic institutions, and directing early economic planning. Under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel, and others, the Congress laid the foundation for a secular, socialist, and democratic republic.

### BIRTH OF INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS

**“There was no sudden emergence of the Indian National Congress and there was nothing novel in its ideas or methods, for the national Conference held in Calcutta in 1883 forestalled it in all essential aspects.”<sup>1</sup>**

**-R.C. MAJUNDAR**

The foundation of the Indian National Congress in 1885 was not an isolated sudden event or a historical accident. It was the result of the evolution of those political ideas and organizations. The political awakening that had begun in the 1860s and 1870s moved towards maturity in the late 1870s and early 1880s. The politically matured intellectuals broke the shackles of narrow group and regional interests and projected themselves as representatives of national interests. The all-India nationalist organization that eventually emerged served as the platform, the organizer, the headquarters and the symbol of the new national spirit and politics.

It is generally believed that the reactionary measures of Lord Lytton such as the Vernacular Press Act of 1878, the Arms Act and the racial arrogance of the British culminating in their agitation over the Ilbert Bill hastened the process which ultimately led to the foundation of the Indian National Congress. However, it is important to note that the reactionary policy of Lord Lytton and the liberal policy of his successor Lord Ripon acted as catalyst in the formation of the Indian National Congress. There is no doubt that the Indian National Congress was the direct result of the emergence of national awakening. □

Lord Ripon recorded three notes for the benefit of his successor before relinquishing the Viceroyalty. The first of these notes highlight the fact that the government should consult the educated leaders of India in respect of public matters. He had expressed the view that the British administration in India would be shattered if it failed to adapt itself to the newly emerging spirit of progress in the country. He was of the opinion that the legitimate aspirations and ambitions of the English educated Indians should be given a field so they could be won over as the friends and supporters of the British Raj. Thus, Ripon strongly urged that such leaders should be consulted and their opinions should be taken into consideration. He further stressed that the government should meet the just desires and provide satisfaction for the natural ambitions of those leaders of public opinion.

In his second note Lord Ripon turned down the demand of certain Anglo-Indian circles, both official and non-official, for reviving the Vernacular Press Act. He maintained that ‘any attempt to resuscitate the Vernacular Press Act in any shape would be inconsistent with the established policy of the British Government and a violation of fundamental principles of our rule in India, that to deal upon one principle with the Vernacular Press and upon another with the Anglo-Indian Press would be grossly unjust and impolitic.’

In his third point Lord Ripon asserted that ‘the increasing number of Europeans in India constitutes one of the principal difficulties of Indian administration in the present day’, Ripon's Views on the increased difficulties of governing India due to the increasing number of Englishmen in the country and their hostility to the advancement of Indians were supplemented by Hobhouse. In 1883, Hobhouse had written to Ripon expressing his serious concern that a situation might arise in India, similar to that of Ireland

where the small community get the ear of their countrymen to the exclusion of the enormous mass of the real owners of the country. Hobhouse had pointed out that in order to avoid such a catastrophe the educated natives may form a sufficiently compact and intelligent body to exercise political pressure, and to make their views heard, and to advocate reasonable principles of government.

Though Lord Ripon's liberal views manifest his desire to organize the 'educated leaders of public opinion' and consult them on important matters of public question, there is no evidence available to suggest that before he left the shores of India he encouraged Hume to organize the educated Indians into a compact body. However, Ripon's constant endeavours throughout his Viceroyalty 'to strengthen the influence of public opinion in this country', his strong antipathy to the Anglo-Indian party and his extremely friendly relations with Hume suggest the possibility of such an encouragement. But whether or not Ripon was the real inspirer of the Indian National Congress, there can be little doubt that both in its origin and objectives, it reflected the impress of his ideas and of the events of his viceroyalty.

#### Objectives of Indian National Congress

The INC which was organized to focus on the Indian public opinion and to represent the wants and wishes of the Indian people to the government came into existence in 1885. It provided the most organized and the widest possible forum to ventilate the grievances and raise demands. According to S.S. Dikshit, three things are remarkable about the nature of the INC. First, it was a truly national organization; secondly, it was predominantly a political organization; and thirdly, it was purely a non-violent organization. The aims and objects of the Congress can be categorized as the promotion of personal intimacy and friendship amongst all the more earnest workers in the country's cause in the various parts of the Empire. As its name indicated, it was a national organization from the beginning and remains national even today. It was a national, not a sectional, sectarian or communal body, it was formed to represent everyone's interests, communities and reflect the Indian nation as a whole. It represented no particular community, class, and interest. Several factors have contributed to influence this national character on it. Its membership was open to all. People from different communities worked for it. In the beginning it had the support of Pherozshah Mehta and Dadabhai Naoroji, the noble and patriotic Muslims like Badruddin Tyabji, and eminent Christians like W.C. Bannerji. So, one can see that the persons who conceived it and helped it to grow, belonged to different communities and came from different provinces. Also they had an all-India outlook.

The formation of the Indian National Congress was lauded by the Press and was described as an important chapter in the history of British rule in India. Indu Prakash wrote "It (session of the Congress) marks the beginning of a new life and whatever traducers may say, it will greatly help in creating a national feeling and binding together distant people by common sympathies and common ends.... The very fact that such a conference has met and fairly promises to be a success belies the supposition that we are not a nation. It must be conceded that we are wanting in many qualities which make a nation. We are divided by a variety of languages, religions and social customs, separated from each other by long distances and are wanting in homogeneity of race and feeling. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that we are at present politically one nation or at least have the makings of one.

The first president, W.C. Bonney, was that of 'the fuller development and consolidation of those sentiments of national unity.'<sup>2</sup> In second session, the president of the congress, Dadabhai Naoroji, laid down this room and set that "a national congress must confide itself to questions in which the entire nation had a direct participation". Congress was, therefore, not the right place to discuss social reforms. We are met together, he said, 'as the political body to represent two rulers are political aspirations.'<sup>3</sup>

The famous historians Dr. Tara Chand has brought out the importance of the formation of the Indian National Congress thus: "The birth of the Indian National Congress was an unprecedented phenomenon in the political history of India. It proclaimed the advent of a new era, the era of political unity, not imposed from above but the expression of the deliberate will of the people. The Congress was the central organ of the new society which had evolved as a result of economic, social and cultural changes taking place during the hundred years since Plassey. It marked the consummation of a process which affected all Indians, individually and collectively".

### SAFETY VALVE THEORY

There is a theory that Hume formed the Congress with the idea that it would prove to be a 'safety valve' for releasing the growing discontent of the Indians. To this end, he convinced Lord Dufferin not to obstruct the formation of the Congress. The extremist leaders like Lala Lajpat Rai believed in the 'safety valve' theory. Even the Marxist historian's 'conspiracy theory' was an offspring of the 'safety valve' notion. The safety valve theory is, however, a small part of the truth. This theory has been discarded now. Modern Indian historians dispute the idea of 'safety valve'. In their opinion the Indian National Congress represented the urge of the politically conscious Indians to set up a national body to express the political and economic demands of the Indians. Historian Bipin Chandra observes early Congress leaders used Hume as a catalyst to bring together.

#### Role of A.O. Hume

The idea for an all-India Congress is said to have originated in a private meeting of seventeen men following the Theosophical Convention in Madras in December 1884. Hume's Indian union, which he founded after retiring from the Civil Service, is also said to have played a role in convening the Congress. Whatever the origin, and whoever the originator of the idea, we can conclude that there was a need for such an organization, and A.O. Hume took the initiative. In 1849, he joined the East India Company's civil service and served in the Northwestern Provinces. He became involved in projects such as spreading education, combating social evils, and encouraging agricultural progress. Hume even started a newspaper in 1861 to educate the people of Etawah on political and social issues. Hume's pro-Indian stance and efforts to promote Indian welfare did not go down well with his fellow British officers. In 1870, Hume was appointed Secretary to the Government of India. Viceroy Northbrook threatened Hume with dismissal for his opinions. Hume settled in Shimla and became interested in Indian politics. He sympathized with the Bombay and Poona groups more than with Calcutta leaders such as Surendranath Banerjee and Narendra Nath Sen. Hume also met Viceroy Lord Ripon and became interested in the latter's scheme of local self-government.

#### Reaction of Indians to the founding of the Indian National Congress

The founding of the Indian National Congress by and large received favourable response from the Indians. Realising that the government would not look with kindly eyes on any move on the part of the Indians to form an organisation which could fight for reforms in administration and greater share for the Indians in administration, they welcomed the call of A.O. Hume and extended full support to the idea of the formation of Indian National Congress. **Gopal Krishan Gokhale** expressed the feelings of the people when he observed: "No Indian could have started the Indian National Congress. Apart from the fact that any one putting his hand to such a gigantic task had need to have Mr. Hume's commanding personality, even if an Indian had possessed such a personality and had come forward to start such a movement embracing all India, the officials would not have allowed it to come into existence. If the founder of the Congress had

not been a great Englishman and distinguished ex-official, such was the distrust of political agitation in those days that the authorities would have at once found some way or the other of suppressing the movement." *The Indian Mirror* writing about the first session of the Indian National Congress wrote "The first National Congress at Bombay forms an important chapter in the history of the British rule in India. The day on which opened, namely the 28th December, 1885, will form a red-letter day in the annals of the national Congress of the Native races. It is the nucleus of future parliament for our country and will lead to good of inconceivable magnitude for our countrymen. If we were asked what was the proudest day our life, we should unhesitatingly say it was the day on which we, for the first time, met all our brothers of Madras, Bombay, the North-Western Provinces and the Punjab under the roof of the Gokul Das Tejpal Sanskrit College for the purpose of the National Congress. From the date of this Congress we may well count the more rapid development of national progress in India in future."

### AIMS AND PRINCIPLES OF INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS

The Indian National Congress was formed due to the efforts of a number of people. Presence of number of political associations across the country, and spread of the ideals of patriotism and nationalism prepared the foundation of the Indian National Congress. It was formed in the year 1885 but its origin is not known. According to Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, its origin is 'shrouded in mystery'. However, many people believe that A.O. Hume laid its foundation under Lord Dufferin. He formed the Indian National Congress to 'provide a 'safety-valve' to the anticipated or actual discontentment of the Indian intelligentsia and to form a quasi-constitutional party similar to Her Majesty's Opposition in England.' According to W.C. Banerjee, the First Congress President, the Indian National Congress was formed by Lord Dufferin, Viceroy of India. He also believed that Lord Dufferin formed it because he wanted a political organization which can understand the 'real wishes' of the people so that the British government could prevent political outbursts in the country.

On 1 March 1883, in an open letter, Hume had appealed to the students of Calcutta University to set up an organization in India. He officially clarified that his objective was 'to form a constitutional method to prevent the spread of dissatisfaction caused by western ideas, education, inventions, and machines and it was essential to take measures for the security and continuity of the British Government'. Some scholars believe that Ripon advised Hume to form an organization of educated Indians. Recently, some scholars analysed Dufferin's correspondence to Hume as well as the activities of the early nationalists, they concluded that the theory of 'safety valve' is a myth.

The Indian National Congress was founded on 28 December 1885 at Sir Tej Pal Sanskrit Vidyalaya, Bombay. It will not be correct to say that it was a sudden event rather it was as Bipan Chandra states, 'the culmination of a process of political awakening that had its beginnings in the 1860s and 1870s and took a major leap forward in the late 1870s and early 1880s'. Also, a lot of attempts were made by Indian Nationalists for the formation of a political organization on all-India scale. For instance, two National Conferences were organized by Indian Association.

A.O. Hume succeeded in forming an All India Party, which was attended by 72 delegates. Most of the Indian leaders could not attend this session as a National Conference was going on in Calcutta at the same time. The objectives of both these organizations were same. The Indian National Conference was later merged into the National Congress. It would be wrong to believe that he laid the foundation of the Indian National Congress single-handedly as many people were involved in its formation. Most of the leaders



were able to accept Hume because they felt that he would not be biased towards any region or caste. It is because he did not belong to any of these groups and he had a sincere love for India.

Some of the members of the Indian National Congress were Pherozeshah Mehta, W.C. Bannerji, Anandamohan Bose, Badruddin Tyabji, Surendranath Bannerji, and Romesh Chandra Dutt. This association was different from others as none of the earlier associations had complete independence as their agenda.

The Congress made some demands, which can be divided into three categories: political, administrative and economic.

### 1. Political demands

- Greater power to the Supreme Council and local Legislative Council.
- Discussion on budget to be held by the council.
- Representation of the council through local bodies like Universities and Chambers of Commerce.
- Creation of Legislative Assembly in Punjab, Awadh (NWP) and North West Frontier Province (NWFP)

### 2. Economic demands

The Congress sessions, between 1855 and 1905, regularly passed resolutions for:

- Reduction in land revenue
- Establishment of agricultural banks
- Reduction in home charge and military expenditure
- Ending unfair tariffs and excise duties
- Enquiring the causes behind India's poverty and famines
- Providing more funds for technical education
- Development of Indian industries
- Better treatment for Indian coolies in foreign countries
- Change in forest laws so that tribal can use forest

### 3. Administrative demands

- ICS examination in India as well as England
- Increase in Indian volunteer force
- Understanding of Indian needs on the part of administration
- Separation of Judiciary from Executive power and extension of trial by jury
- Higher posts in the army for Indians

## MODERATE NATIONALISTS

[1885-1905]

Since its inception in 1885 till the time India won its Independence in 1947, the Indian National Congress was the largest and most prominent Indian political organization. In its initial stages, the Indian National Congress was a political unit, however, in due course of time it supported the cause of social reform and human development. The Indian National Congress is said to have also provided impetus to the spirit of nationalism. In its early stages, there was unity in the Indian National Congress and it was marked by the learning of democratic methods and techniques.

**“Were practical reformers imbued with the spirit, principles and methods of mid- Victorian Liberalism and bent on winning freedom by gradual stages, broadening from step to step.” 4**

- Dr. R.G. Pradhan

The leaders of the INC believed that the British government was responsive to their needs and were willing to make changes accordingly. However, over a period of time, the Indian masses became disillusioned with the concept of nationalism. They suddenly became aware that their petitions were not as fruitful as expected and that the British subtly avoided taking any action. Even in the phase of dissatisfaction, there were some Congress leaders who believed in the methods of the British government and came to be known as moderates. Since these moderate leaders failed to produce desired results, a new stream of leaders came up who were known as the extremists. These extremists disagreed with the traditional methods of moderates that were limited to writing petitions and conducting agitations to get themselves heard. The extremists were not satisfied with a dominion status and demanded complete independence from the British government.

Leaders of moderate phase mainly came from Bombay, Bengal and Madras. For example, Badruddin Tayabji, Dada Bhai Naoroji, Pherozshah Mehta, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, K.T. Telang and Govind Ranade were from Bombay. Wumesh Chander Banerji, Anand Mohan Bose. Surendra Nath Banerji and Ramesh Chandra Dutta were from Bengal. Similarly, Subamanya Ayer, Anand Charlu, and Raghavacharya were from Madras. Very few leaders like Madan Mohan Malaviya and Pundit D. P. Dhar came from north India. These moderate leaders treated British rule as a blessing. They sincerely believed that the British rule would make India a developed democratic and liberal country. They had the illusion that the British would introduce modern institutions and remove superstitious belief. They saw England as a source of inspiration and treated English as their political guru. Many of these nationalist leaders had anglicized lifestyle. All they wanted and expected from the British was a 'reform package' for Indians. The moderates believed in peaceful methods to get their demands across. They believed in writing petitions and peaceful protests. Though the Moderates failed to make the same impact as the extremists, they petitioned a number of reforms during this time. By 1900, the government Congress position was broadly as followers. There was the matter of representations. All congressmen were dissatisfied with the Indian council act of 1892, which was the government's tepid response to their appearance. 5

**1. Constitutional reforms:** The Moderates demanded the expansion and reform of the existing Legislative Councils from 1885 to 1892. They demanded the introduction of the system of direct elections and an increase in the number of members and powers of the Legislative Councils. It is true that their agitation forced the Government to pass the Indian Councils Act of 1892 but the moderates were not satisfied with what was given to the people of India. No wonder, they declared the Act of 1892 as a 'hoax.' They demanded a large share for the Indians in the Legislative Councils. By the beginning of the 20th century, the Moderates put forward the claim for Swarajya or self government within the British Empire on the model of the other self-governing colonies like Australia and Canada. This demand was made from the Congress platform by Gokhale in 1905 and by Dadabhai Naoroji in 1906.

**2. Demand for economic reforms:** The Congress opposed the British attempt to develop in India the basic characteristics of a colonial economy, namely, the transformation of India into a supplier of raw materials, a market for British manufactures and a field of investment for foreign capital. Moderates took note of all the three forms of contemporary colonial economic exploitation, namely through trade, industry and finance. They organized a powerful all-India agitation against the abandonment of tariff-duties on imports and against the imposition of cotton excise duties. Gokhale's speech on the budget in 1901 expanded nationalist economic theory on the floor of the Imperial legislative council for the first time, and as Bipin Chandra has pointed out the chain of wealth. Doctors served as a radicalising force, for at this

crucial level, things were evidently getting worse rather than better.<sup>6</sup> They urged the Government to provide cheap credit to the peasantry through agricultural banks and to make available irrigation facilities on a large scale. They asked for improvement in the conditions of work of the plantation labourers. They demanded a radical change in the existing pattern of taxation and expenditure which put a heavy burden on the poor while leaving the rich, especially the foreigners, with a very light load. They demanded the abolition of salt tax which hit the poor and lower middle classes hard. The moderates complained of India's growing poverty and economic backwardness and put the blame on the politics of the British Government. They blamed the Government for the destruction of the indigenous industries like the traditional handicrafts industries in the country. They demanded the rapid development of the modern industries which would help in the removal of India's poverty. They wanted the Government to give tariff protection to the Indian industries.

**3. Administrative and miscellaneous reforms:** Moderates criticized the individual administrative measures and worked hard to reform the administrative system which was ridden with corruption, inefficiency and oppression. They demanded the Indianization of the higher grades of the administrative services; the demand was put forward on economic, political and moral grounds. Economically, the high salaries paid to the European put a heavy burden on Indian finance, and contributed to the economic drain. Indians of similar qualifications could be employed on lower salaries. Europeans sent a large part of their salaries back to England and also got their pensions in England. That added to the drain of wealth from India. Politically, the European civil servant ignored the needs of the Indians and favoured the European capitalists at the cost of their Indian counterparts. It was hoped that the Indianization of the services would make the administration more responsive to Indian needs. Moderates demanded the separation of the judiciary from the executive so that the people might get some protection from the arbitrary acts of police and bureaucracy. They were opposed to the policy of disarming the people of India by the Government. They opposed the aggressive foreign policy against India's neighbours and protested against the policy of the annexation of Burma, the attack upon Afghanistan and the suppression of the tribal people in North-Western India. They wanted the Government to spend more money on the spread of education in the country. They also took up the cause of the Indians who had been compelled by poverty to migrate to the British colonies in search of employment. In many of these foreign lands they were subjected to severe oppression and racial discrimination.

**4. Defense of Civil Rights:** They opposed the restrictions imposed by the government on the modern civil rights, namely the freedom of speech and the press. As early as 1824, Raja Ram Mohan Roy had protested against a regulation restricting the freedom of the press. In the period from 1870 to 1918, the main political task was that of politicization of nationalist ideology. The press was the chief instrument for carrying out this task. Indian newspapers began to find their feet in 1870's. The Vernacular Press Act of 1878, directed only against Indian language newspapers, was conceived in great secrecy and passed at a single sitting of the Imperial Legislative Council. In 1897, B. G. Tilak and many other leaders were arrested and sentenced to long terms of imprisonment for condemning the government through their speeches and writings. The Natu brothers of Poona were deported without trial. The entire country protested against this attack on the liberties of the people. The arrest of Tilak marked the beginning of new phase of the nationalist movement.

### Failure of the moderates

The failure of the moderates in the Indian National Congress refers to the decline of the moderate faction's influence and effectiveness within the party during the early 20th century. The moderates, led by leaders



such as Gopal Krishna Gokhale and Dinshaw Wacha, emerged in the late 19th century. They advocated for gradual, constitutional reforms through dialogue and cooperation with the British colonial authorities. Their strategy focused on:

- Expanding education and social reform
- Increasing Indian representation in government
- Promoting economic development

However, several factors contributed to the moderates' decline:

- **Limited progress:** Despite repeated petitions and negotiations, the British made minimal concessions, leading to growing frustration among Indians.
- **Rise of extremism:** Radical leaders like Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Lala Lajpat Rai, and Bipin Chandra Pal challenged the moderates' approach, advocating direct action and boycotts.
- **Growing nationalism:** The Swadeshi Movement (1905-1911) and World War I (1914-1918) intensified nationalist sentiment, making moderate tactics seem ineffective.
- **British repression:** The British responded to growing unrest with repression, including censorship, arrests, and force. This eroded trust in moderate methods.
- **Internal divisions:** Personal and ideological differences within the moderate faction weakened their unity and influence.

By the 1920s, the moderates' influence had waned, and the Indian National Congress shifted towards more radical and militant tactics under Gandhi's leadership. The failure of the moderates paved the way for new strategies and leaders that would shape India's struggle for independence.

Key events marking the moderates' decline include:

- **The Surat Session (1907):** Extremists and moderates clashed, leading to a temporary split in the Congress.
- **The Lucknow Pact (1916):** Moderates and extremists reunited, but tensions remained.
- **The Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms (1919):** The British offered limited concessions, disappointing moderates.
- **The Non-Cooperation Movement (1920-1922):** Gandhi's mass movement signaled the end of moderate dominance.

The failure of the moderates reflects the complexities and challenges of India's struggle for independence, highlighting the evolving strategies and ideologies that ultimately led to freedom in 1947.

Dr. Ishwari Prasad says, "With all the ridicule to which their methods had been subjected none can withhold the need of praise from its early leaders (Moderates)-men of high intellectual attainments, character and patriotism-for doing pioneer work in the way of India's regeneration and championing the cause of the people against a powerful, alien bureaucracy strongly entrenched in its own citadel of obstinacy and prejudice."<sup>7</sup>

EXTREMIST nationalists

[1905-1919]

The closing decade of the nineteenth century and early years of the twentieth century witnessed the emergence of a new and younger group within the Indian National Congress, which was sharply critical of the ideology and methods of the old leadership. Bal Gangadhar Tilak gave a new slogan to our people, 'FREEDOM IS OUR BIRTH RIGHT AND WE SHALL HAVE IT.'<sup>8</sup> These 'angry young men' advocated the adoption of Swaraj as the goal of the Congress, which was to be achieved by more self-

reliant and independent methods. The new group came to be called the extremists in contrast to the older one which began to be referred to as the moderates.

The militant form of nationalism was first found in the teachings and preaching of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and Swami Dayananda Saraswati. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee was inspired by the Bhagavad Gita and visualized a united India. Swami Vivekananda, who was called the prophet of nationalism by Bipin Chandra Pal, added spiritual dimension to the idea of nationalism. He inspired the youth of his time, more than anyone else. The root of extremism lies in two important factors—the policies of colonial rule, and the failure of moderate leaders to attract younger generation and common people.

Factors that Led to the Rise of Extremism Following are the factors led to the rise of extremists:

- Enlightenment of the true nature of British rule
- Civil Services examinations was disallowed
- Partition of Bengal
- The Indian Council Act, 1892, failed to introduce an elective element in India and provided for selection of some members
- Adoption of the Tariff and Cotton Duties Act of 1894 and 1896 by the Indians
- Curbing freedom of press (1904) and controlling universities through Indian University Act (1904)
- Defeat of Russia (1904-05) by Japan inspired the educated youth
- Circulation of Vernacular newspaper went up from 2,99,000 in 1885 to 8,17,000 in 1905. Some of the popular journals like Kesari (Marathi) and Bangabhasi (Bengali) opposed the moderate Congress
- The famine of Maharashtra in 1896

#### Objectives and Methods of Extremists

The new turn in Indian politics found expression in two forms—the formation of the extremist group within the Congress and the growth of revolutionary movement in the country at large. Four prominent Congress leaders— **Lokamanya Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal, Aurobindo Ghosh and Lala Lajpat Rai**, defined the creed of the new group, gave articulate form to its aspirations and guided its operations. One of the earliest leaders who criticized the moderate politics systematically, in a series of articles titled ‘New Lamps for Old’ was Aurobindo Ghose. He did not like the constitutional method of struggle based on English model and attacked the soft attitude of the Congress. He told them not to take inspiration from England but to take inspiration from French Revolution (1789-99). He also suggested bringing the proletariat (working) class in the national movement. The emerging leaders in the Congress, like Bipin Chandra Pal, Ashwini Kumar Dutta, Lala Lajpat Rai and Bal Gangadhar Tilak, were not happy with the ‘prayers’ and ‘petitions’ methods. They were in favour of self-reliance, constructive work, mass contact through melas, public meetings, use of mother tongue in education and political works. They argued that ‘good government is no substitute for self-government’. The issue of Swadeshi Movement widened the gap between the moderates and the extremists. The extremists wanted to spread the movement in the entire country and complete non-cooperation with the government. Lajpat Rai and Tilak were more aggressive in their ideas and plans.

Lajpat Rai thundered ‘no national is worthy of any political status if it cannot distinguish between begging rights and claiming them’. He further argued that ‘sovereignty rests with the people; the state exists for them and rules in their name’. But the true founder of militant nationalism was Bal Gangadhar Tilak. He criticized the moderates in his unique style— ‘we will not achieve any success in our labours if we croak once a year like a frog’. He was quick to set the political goal of India, i.e., ‘Swaraj’ or self-government instead of reform in administration. He showed greater confidence and ability when he declared ‘Swaraj

is my birth right and I shall have it'. He was a pioneer in many ways. He used religious symbols and festivals, like Ganesh festival since 1894, to mobilize people and he made patriotic-cum-historical cult through Shivaji festival since 1896 to inspire the youth. He even carried out the no-revenue campaign in 1896–97, during severe famine in Maharashtra. He called upon the government to take those measures of relief, which were provided under law in the Famine Relief Code. Through his paper, Kesari, he made an appeal to the people to refuse to pay taxes. He wrote angrily, 'Can you not be bold even in the grip of death'. He also started Boycott Movement on the issue of countervailing Cotton Excise Duty Act of 1896. It should be clearly understood that the extremists' demand for Swaraj was a demand for 'complete freedom from foreign control and full independence to manage national affairs without any foreign restraints'. Morley openly declared in Parliament: 'If it could be said that this chapter of reforms led directly or necessarily up to the establishment of a Parliamentary system on India, I, for one, would have nothing at all to do with it.'<sup>9</sup>

The Swaraj of the moderate leaders was merely a demand for colonial self-government within the Empire. The methods employed by the two groups (moderates and extremists) were different in their tempo and approach. The extremists had no faith in the benevolence of the British public or parliament, nor were they convinced of the efficacy of merely holding conferences. The extremists also affirmed their faith in passive resistance, mass agitation and strong will to suffer or make self-sacrifices. The accession of George 5 gave occasions for the great Delhi Dar of 1911 presided over by the new King and Queen in person. This was made the occasions for the reversal of the open gallery partition and the removal of the capital to Delhi.<sup>10</sup> The new leadership sought to create a passionate love for liberty, accompanied by a spirit of sacrifice and a readiness to suffer for the cause of the country. They strove to root out from the people's mind the omnipotence of the ruler, and instead give them self-reliance and confidence in their own strength. They had deep faith in the strength of the masses and they planned to achieve Swaraj through mass action. They, therefore, pressed for political work among the masses and for direct political action by the masses. The extremists advocated boycott of the foreign goods, use of swadeshi goods, national education and passive resistance.

#### Revolutionary Activities

Even the reactionary activities of the extremists school of leaders could not satisfy the Indian youth. They opposed the British with the use of violence through pistol and bomb. The revolutionary terrorist movement in India strongly affected the Congress and the British government. Revolutionary terrorist groups restricted their strengths only to remain more agile and effective. The movement, however low the number it attracted, had an impact on India: its people, the Congress and the British rulers.

#### Revolutionary activities in Maharashtra

The Chapaker brothers (Deodar and Balkrishana Chapeau) shot dead Lt. Ayerst in 1897 at Poona, although Rand, the president of the Plague Committee was the real target. They were arrested, convicted and hanged. Similarly, Bal Gangadhar Tilak was sentenced to jail for provoking terrorism through his writings.

#### Revolutionary activities in Bengal

Bengal became the hotbed of terrorist activities. In 1908, Prafulla Chaki and Khudiram Bose threw a bomb at Kennedy's carriage assuming it to be that of Kingsford, the judge of Muzaffarpur. Previously, the concerned judge had awarded capital punishment to many youths. Two ladies died in the incident and Prafulla shot himself dead before he could be captured by the police. On the other hand, Khudiram was tried and hanged.

### Revolutionary activities in Madras

The youths of Madras were inspired by the visit of Bipin Chandra Pal to Madras and his inflammatory speech. Chidambaram Pillai demanded total independence for India for which he was arrested. As a protest the crowd turned violent in Tuticorin and Tirunelveli. The police opened fire to disperse the crowd. The officer who had ordered firing was killed by Vanchi Ayer.

The revolutionary activities of extremist groups significantly contributed to India's struggle for independence, shaping the nation's politics, social landscape, and economic reforms, while sparking ongoing debates on extremism, violence, and governance.

All the Sessions OF INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS

- **First Session:** held at Bombay in 1885. **President:** W.C. Bannerjee
  - Formation of Indian National Congress.
- **Second Session:** held at Calcutta in 1886. **President:** Dadabhai Naoroji
  - Witnesses merger of Indian National Congress and National Conference
- **Third Session:** held at Madras in 1887. **President:** Syed Badruddin Tyabji,
  - First muslim President.
- **Fourth Session:** held at Allahabad in 1888. **President:** George Yule
  - First English President.
- **1889:** Bombay **President:** Sir William Wedderburn
- **1890:** Calcutta **President:** Feroz Shah Mehta
- **1891:** Nagpur **President:** P. Ananda Charlu
- **1892:** Allahabad **President:** W C Bonnerjee
- **1893:** Lahore **President:** Dadabhai Naoroji
- **1894:** Madras **President:** Alfred Webb
- **1895:** Poona **President:** Surendranath Banerjee
- **1896:** Calcutta **President:** Rahimtullah Sayani
  - National Song 'Vande Mataram' sung for the first time by Rabindranath Tagore.
- **1897:** Amravati **President:** C. Sankaran Nair
- **1898:** Madras **President:** Ananda Mohan Bose
- **1899:** Lucknow **President:** Romesh Chandra Dutt.
  - Demand for permanent fixation of Land revenue
- **1900:** Lahore **President:** N G Chandavarkar
- **1901:** Calcutat **President:** Dinshaw E.Wacha
  - First time Gandhiji appeared on the Congress platform
- **1902:** Ahmedabad **President:** Surendranath Banerjee
- **1903:** Madras **President:** Lal Mohan Ghosh
- **1904:** Bombay **President:** Sir Henry Cotton
- **1905:** Benaras **President:** Gopal Krishan Gokhale
  - Formal proclamation of Swadeshi movement against government
- **1906:** Calcutta **President:** Dadabhai Naoroji
  - Adopted four resolutions on: Swaraj (Self Government), Boycott Movement, Swadeshi & National Education
- **1907:** Surat **President:** Rash Bihari Ghosh

- Split in Congress- Moderates & Extremist Adjournment of Session
- **1908: Madras President:** Rash Behari Ghosh
- Previous session continued
- **1909: Lahore President:** Madan Mohan Malaviya
- Indian Councils Act, 1909
- **1910: Allahabad President:** Sir William Wedderburn
- M.A Jinnah decried the separate electorate system introduced by act of 1909
- **1911: Calcutt. President:** B.N. Dhar
- First time recital of Jan-Gan-Man in Congress session
- **1912: Bankipore (Patna) President:** Raghunath Narasinha Mudholkar
- **1913: Karachi President:** Syed Mohammed Bahadur
- **1914: Madras President:** Bhupendra Nath Basu
- **1915: Bombay President:** Sir S.P. Sinha
- Constitution of the Congress was altered to admit the delegates from the extremist section
- **1916: Lucknow President:** A.C. Majumdar
- Unity between two factions-Moderates and Extremists of Congress Lucknow Pact signed between Congress and Muslim League to build political consensus
- **1917: Calcutta President:** Annie Besant, [First Woman President of Congress](#)
- **1918: (Special session): Bombay. President:** Syed Hasan Imam
- The session was convened to deliberate the contentious Montagu Chelmsford Reforms Scheme
- **1919: Amritsa President:** Motilal Nehru
- Congress extended support to Khilafat Movement
- **1920: (Special Session): Calcutta President:** Lala Lajpat Rai
- Mahatma Gandhi moved the Non cooperation resolution
- **1920: Nagpur President:** C. Vijayaraghavachariar
- Reconstitution of Working committees of Congress on Linguistic basis MA Jinnah left the Indian National Congress
- **1921: Ahmedabad President:** Hakim Ajmal Khan (acting President For C R Das)
- **1922: Gaya President:** C.R. Das
- CR Das and other leaders broke away from INC Formation of Swaraj Party
- **1923: Kakinada President:** Maulana Mohammad Ali,
- **1924: Belgau. President:** M.K. Gandhi
- Only Session presided over by Mahatma Gandhi
- **1925: Kanpur President:** Sarojini Naidu, First Indian Woman President
- **1926: Guwahati President:** S Srinivasa Iyengar
- **1927: Madras President:** Dr. M.A. Ansari Passed
- A resolution against the use of Indian troops in China, Iran and Mesopotamia. Passed a resolution against boycott of Simon Commission Adoption of resolution on Purna Swaraj
- **1928: Calcutta President:** Motilal Nehru
- Formation of All India Youth Congress
- **1929: Lahore President:** Jawahar Lal Nehru



- Passed the resolution on 'Poorna Swaraj.' Civil Disobedience movement 26 January for complete independence to be launched to be observed as 'Independence Day'.
- **1931: Karachi President:** Vallabhbhai Patel Resolutions on Fundamental Rights and National Economic Programme Endorsement of Gandhi-Irwin pact Gandhi nominated to represent INC in the Second Round Table Conference to be held in London
- **1932: Delhi President:** Amrit Ranchhoddas Seth
- **1933: Calcutta President:** Mrs Nellie Sengupta
- **1934: Bombay President:** Rajendra Prasad
- Amendment in the Constitution of Congress
- **1936: Lucknow President:** Jawahar Lal Nehru
- Push towards socialist ideas by Jawahar Lal Nehru
- **1937: Faizpur President:** Jawahar Lal Nehru
- First Session to be held in a village
- **1938: Haripura President:** Subhas Chandra Bose
- National Planning Committee set up under Jawahar Lal Nehru.
- **1939: Tripuri President:** Rajendra Prasad
- Subhas Chandra Bose was re-elected but had to resign Rajendra Prasad was appointed in his place Subhash Chandra Bose formed Forward Bloc
- **1940: Ramgarh President:** Abul Kalam Azad
- Civil Disobedience movement to be launched at appropriate time and circumstances.
- **1941–45:** This Period is marked by events i.e. Quit India movement, Mutiny Phase of constitutional negotiations such as Cripps Mission, Wavell Plan and Cabinet Mission. On account of these events during this phase no congress session was held.
- **1946: Meerut President:** J.B Kripalani
- Last session before independence J.B Kriplani was the president of INC at independence.
- **1948: Jaipur President:** Pattabhi Sitaramayya
- First session after independence
- **1950: Nashik President:** Purushottam Das Tandon

## SOME IMPORTANT CONGRESS SESSIONS

### MODERATE PHASE [1885-1905]

#### Bombay Session, 1885

The first session of the Indian National Congress was held from December 28 to 31, 1885, in Bombay (now Mumbai). Womesh Chandra Bonnerjee, a prominent Bengali lawyer, presided over the session. Seventy-two delegates attended, representing various regions of India. This inaugural session aimed to promote Indian rights, discuss social and economic issues, and unite Indians against British colonial rule. Key resolutions included:

- Demands for Indian representation in government
- Economic reforms to benefit Indians
- Promotion of education and social reform

The session marked the beginning of the Indian National Congress's journey, laying the groundwork for India's struggle for independence.

Notable attendees included:

- Dadabhai Naoroji
- Lala Lajpat Rai
- Bipin Chandra Pal
- Surendranath Banerjee

### Calcutta Session, 1896

The Calcutta Session of 1896, held from December 28 to 30, 1896, this session was attended by 884 delegates from across the country. Rahimtulla M. Sayani, a prominent leader, presided over the session, which focused on key issues such as:

- **Constitutional Reforms:** Demands for greater Indian representation in government and legislative bodies.
- **Economic Development:** Protection of native industries and promotion of economic growth.
- **Social Reform:** Emphasis on education, women's rights, and social welfare.

The Calcutta Session demonstrated the growing influence of the Indian National Congress, showcasing its ability to unite Indians from diverse backgrounds. The session's resolutions and discussions paved the way for future Congress sessions and played a significant role in shaping India's struggle for independence.

## NATIONAL MOVEMENT [1905-1918]

### Banaras Session, 1905

The Banaras Session of 1905 was, marking a significant shift towards extremism and radicalization. Held from December 26 to 30, 1905, in Benares (now Varanasi), this session was the 21st annual conference of the Congress. The session was presided over by **Gopal Krishna Gokhale**, a prominent moderate leader. However, the gathering was dominated by extremist voices, led by Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Lala Lajpat Rai, and Bipin Chandra Pal. These leaders advocated for direct action, boycotts, and swadeshi (self-reliance) to challenge British rule.

The session's key resolutions included:

- The condemnation of the British **decision to partition Bengal**, which was seen as an attempt to divide and rule.
- A call for swadeshi and boycott of British goods.
- Support for national education and Indian industries.
- Tilak's inflammatory speech, which ended with the slogan "Swadesh is my birthright, and I shall have it," electrified the audience. This phrase became a rallying cry for the nationalist movement.

The Banaras Session marked the beginning of the **Swadeshi Movement**, which spread across India, particularly in Bengal. The movement's goals included:

- Promoting Indian industries and self-reliance.
- Boycotting British goods and institutions.
- Fostering national unity and pride.

Although the moderates still controlled the Congress, the Banaras Session signaled the rise of extremism. This shift would eventually lead to a split in the Congress at the Surat Session in 1907.

The Banaras Session's significance lies in its:

- Radicalization of the Congress: Marking a shift from moderate, constitutional methods to more radical and direct action.

- Emergence of extremist leaders: Tilak, Lajpat Rai, and Pal gained prominence.
- Launch of the Swadeshi Movement: A nationwide movement promoting self-reliance and boycotts.

### Calcutta Session, 1906

The Calcutta session of the Indian National Congress in 1906 was held on December 26, 1906. This session was held under the presidency of Dadabhai Naoroji, a prominent leader of the Indian independence movement. During the session, the Congress party adopted "**Swaraj**" or self-rule as its goal, marking a significant shift in its agenda. The session also saw heated debates between the moderates and extremists within the party, reflecting the growing divisions within the movement.

Some key resolutions passed during the session included:

- **Demand for Self-Rule:** The Congress party demanded self-rule or "Swaraj" for India, marking a significant shift in its agenda.
- **Economic Reforms:** The session passed resolutions calling for economic reforms, including protection of native industries and promotion of economic growth.
- **Social Reforms:** The Congress party also emphasized the need for social reforms, including education and women's rights.

### Surat Session, 1907

The Surat session of the Indian National Congress in 1907 was also known as **Surat Split**. This session marked the division of the Indian National Congress into two factions: **the Moderates and the Extremists, also known as Radicals**. The Moderates, led by Gopal Krishna Gokhale, believed in a peaceful and constitutional approach to achieve reforms and self-governance within the framework of the British Empire. On the other hand, the Extremists, led by Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Lala Lajpat Rai, and Bipin Chandra Pal, advocated for more radical methods, such as boycott and swadeshi.

The split occurred due to ideological differences between the two factions. The Extremists wanted Tilak or Lala Lajpat Rai to be the president, while the Moderates supported Rash Behari Ghosh. The venue of the session was changed from Nagpur to Surat, which was Tilak's hometown, making him ineligible to be president according to Congress convention. During the session, the Extremists protested when Tilak was not allowed to speak, leading to chaos and violence. The Moderates held a secret meeting and decided to expel the Radicals, resulting in a permanent split between the two groups.

The aftermath of the Surat Split saw the government taking repressive measures against the Extremists, including the passage of laws such as the Seditious Meetings Act 1907 and the Indian Press Act 1910. Tilak was imprisoned for six years, and other leaders like Lala Lajpat Rai and Aurobindo Ghosh went into exile or retirement.

### Lahore Session, 1909

The Lahore Session of 1909, held from December 30, 1908, to January 1, 1909. Presided over by Madan Mohan Malvya, this session marked a crucial period in India's struggle for independence. The session took place amidst the backdrop of the Morley-Minto Reforms, which aimed to introduce limited constitutional reforms in India. The Congress expressed its disappointment with the reforms, deeming them inadequate and not addressing Indian aspirations for self-governance. The session emphasized the need for greater autonomy, constitutional reforms, and protection of Indian rights. Leaders like Lala Lajpat Rai, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, and Gopal Krishna Gokhale played key roles in shaping the session's agenda. The Lahore Session saw a shift towards extremism within the Congress, with Tilak's advocacy for direct action and boycotts gaining traction. This marked a departure from the moderate approach of Gokhale and others. The session's outcome reflected the growing divide between moderates and extremists,

foreshadowing future conflicts within the Congress. Prominent leaders attending the session included Rashbihari Ghosh, Lala Lajpat Rai, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, and Madan Mohan Malaviya. The Lahore Session demonstrated the Congress's continued push for Indian self-governance and its evolving strategies to achieve independence.

This session occurred amidst significant global and national developments, including the rise of nationalism in India, the impact of the Russo-Japanese War, and growing international criticism of British colonial policies. The Lahore Session's emphasis on autonomy and constitutional reforms laid groundwork for future movements, ultimately contributing to India's journey towards independence.

### **Lucknow Session, 1916**

The Lucknow Session of 1916, held from December 26 to 30, 1916, presided over by Ambica Charan Mazumdar, this session marked a significant turning point in India's struggle for independence. The session saw the reunion of the Moderate and Extremist factions within the Congress, bridging the divide that had emerged in the early 20th century.

The Lucknow Pact, signed during the session, brought together the Indian National Congress and the All-India Muslim League, fostering Hindu-Muslim unity and cooperation. This pact, negotiated by Jinnah and Tilak, aimed to present a united front against British colonial rule. The session emphasized the need for constitutional reforms, greater autonomy, and protection of Indian rights. Leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Lala Lajpat Rai, and Muhammad Ali Jinnah played pivotal roles in shaping the session's agenda. The Lucknow Session demonstrated the Congress's growing strength and unity, setting the stage for future movements. The session occurred amidst significant global and national developments, including World War I, the rise of nationalism in India, and growing international pressure on British colonial policies.

The Lucknow Session is considered a crucial milestone in India's struggle for independence, as it:

- Reunited Moderate and Extremist factions within the Congress
- Fostered Hindu-Muslim unity through the Lucknow Pact
- Emphasized constitutional reforms and autonomy
- Marked the emergence of Mahatma Gandhi as a national leader

## **ERA OF MASS NATIONALISM [1918-1927]**

### **Calcutta Session, 1917**

The Calcutta Session of 1917, held from December 26 to 30, 1917, was the 33rd session of the Indian National Congress. Dr. Annie Besant, a prominent leader and advocate for Home Rule, presided over this significant gathering. Building upon the unity and momentum established at the previous year's Lucknow Session, the Congress reiterated its demand for constitutional reforms and Home Rule, seeking greater autonomy from British colonial rule.

The session saw the continued emergence of Mahatma Gandhi as a national leader, although he was still in the early stages of his involvement with the Congress. Gandhi's presence reflected the growing influence of his ideas on non-violent resistance and self-governance. Other prominent leaders, such as Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Lala Lajpat Rai, played key roles in shaping the Congress's agenda. This Session demonstrated the Congress's growing strength and resolve, as it pressed for greater autonomy and self-governance. The session's emphasis on **Home Rule and constitutional reforms** was influenced by the wartime context, with India's contribution to World War I efforts fueling demands for greater political representation.

Dr. Annie Besant's presidency symbolized the increasing involvement of women in India's freedom struggle. Her advocacy for Home Rule and social reform resonated with the Congress's broader goals. The session's outcome reflected the Congress's commitment to peaceful, constitutional methods for achieving self-governance. The Calcutta Session occurred amidst significant global developments, including World War I and growing international pressure on British colonial policies. The session's demands for Home Rule and constitutional reforms contributed to India's ongoing struggle for independence, laying groundwork for future movements and eventual independence in 1947.

### Amritsar Session, 1919

The Amritsar Session of the Indian National Congress in 1919, held from December 27, 1919, to January 1, 1920, this 34th session was presided over by Pandit Motilal Nehru. The session took place in the aftermath of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, where British troops fired on unarmed Indian civilians, killing hundreds.

Key Resolutions:

- **Condemnation of Jallianwala Bagh Massacre:** The session strongly condemned the massacre and mourned the loss of lives.
- **Rejection of Montague-Chelmsford Reforms:** The Congress rejected the reforms as "inadequate and disappointing".
- **Demand for Withdrawal of Viceroy Lord Chelmsford:** The session demanded the withdrawal of Viceroy Lord Chelmsford from India.
- **Boycott of Hunter Commission:** The Congress boycotted the Hunter Commission, which failed to take action against General Dyer, responsible for the Jallianwala Bagh massacre.
- **Repeal of Rowlatt Act and Press Act:** The session demanded the repeal of the Rowlatt Act, 1919, and the Press Act, 1910.
- **Support for Khilafat Issue:** The Congress protested against British Ministers' hostility to the Khilafat issue.
- **Promotion of Swadeshi and Labour Unions:** The session passed resolutions to promote Swadeshi and support the formation of Labour Unions.

This session marked the emergence of Mahatma Gandhi as a national leader and witnessed significant participation from women.

### Special Calcutta Session, 1920

The Special Session of the Indian National Congress in Calcutta, 1920, held from September 4 to 9, 1920, this session was led by Lala Lajpat Rai, a prominent leader in the fight for freedom. The session was called in response to the British government's attitude towards the Khilafat movement and the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, which had sparked widespread outrage across India.

Key Resolutions:

- **Non-Cooperation Movement:** The session passed a resolution launching the Non-Cooperation Movement, which aimed to challenge British rule through peaceful means.
- **Swaraj Demand:** The movement demanded Swaraj, or self-rule, within a year if the movement was successful, as predicted by Mahatma Gandhi.
- **Boycott of British Goods:** The resolution also called for a boycott of British goods, courts, and educational institutions.

The Special Session marked a significant shift in the Indian National Congress's strategy, embracing non-violent resistance and mass mobilization. This session laid the groundwork for future movements,



including the Civil Disobedience Movement and the Quit India Movement . **Nagpur Session, 1920**

The Nagpur Session of 1920, held from December 26 to 31, 1920, presided over by C. Vijayaraghavachariar, this session marked a significant shift in the Indian National Congress's approach to achieving self-governance. The session saw Mahatma Gandhi's emergence as the undisputed leader of the Congress, as he introduced his program of non-violent non-cooperation. Gandhi's plan, adopted by the Congress, aimed to withdraw cooperation from the British government, boycotting British goods, law courts, and educational institutions. This strategic shift from constitutional methods to mass-based civil disobedience energized the independence movement. The session also saw the introduction of the concept of "Swaraj" (self-rule), emphasizing decentralized governance and village-level empowerment. Jawaharlal Nehru, then a rising leader, attended the session, as did other prominent figures like Lala Lajpat Rai and Motilal Nehru. The Nagpur Session demonstrated the Congress's growing strength and unity under Gandhi's leadership. The session's resolutions emphasized social and economic reforms, including the removal of untouchability and promotion of khadi (handloom textiles).

The Nagpur Session occurred amidst significant global and national developments, including the aftermath of World War I, the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms, and growing international criticism of British colonial policies.

## **TOWARDS FREEDON [PURNASWARAJ]**

### **Madras Session, 1927**

The Madras Session of 1927, held from December 26 to 30, 1927, was the 42nd session of the Indian National Congress. Presided over by Dr. M.A. Ansari, this session marked a significant moment in India's struggle for independence. The session took place amidst growing discontent with the British government's '**Simon Commission**', established to report on India's constitutional reforms. The Congress demanded greater autonomy and self-governance, rejecting the Simon Commission's limited proposals. Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and other prominent leaders attended the session, which emphasized the need for constitutional reforms, social justice, and economic development. This session saw the emergence of younger leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhash Chandra Bose, who would play pivotal roles in India's future struggles. The session's resolutions also focused on labor rights, women's empowerment, and the removal of untouchability. It occurred amidst significant global and national developments, including the rise of nationalist movements worldwide and growing international pressure on British colonial policies.

### **Calcutta Session, 1928**

The Calcutta Session of 1928, held from December 26 to 30, 1928, was the 43rd session of the Indian National Congress. Presided over by Motilal Nehru, this session marked a significant moment in India's struggle for independence. The session took place amidst growing unrest over the Simon Commission's recommendations, which Indians saw as inadequate and insulting.

The Congress demanded immediate Dominion Status for India, with full autonomy and self-governance. Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and other prominent leaders attended the session, which emphasized the need for constitutional reforms, social justice, and economic development. This session also saw the formation of the All India Youth Congress occurred, engaging of younger leaders like Subhas Chandra Bose, who advocated for more radical action. It was notable for the Congress's adoption of the Nehru Report, drafted by Motilal Nehru. The report outlined a constitutional framework for India, including

federal structure, universal suffrage, and protection of minority rights. Although the report was not fully implemented, it served as a precursor to India's future constitution.

The session occurred amidst significant global and national developments, including the rise of nationalist movements worldwide and growing international pressure on British colonial policies. The Calcutta Session's demands for Dominion Status and constitutional reforms contributed to India's ongoing struggle for independence, ultimately achieved in 1947.

### **Lahore Session, 1929**

The Lahore Session of 1929, held from December 29 to 31, 1929, presided over by Jawaharlal Nehru, the 44th session of the Indian National Congress marked a significant shift in the movement's trajectory. On the same date he unfurled the Indian tricolor flag on the banks of the Ravi river. The Congress adopted the **"Purna Swaraj"** (Complete Independence) resolution, declaring January 26, 1930, as Independence Day. Mahatma Gandhi, Subhas Chandra Bose, and other prominent leaders attended the session, which emphasized the need for complete independence from British rule. The session saw the emergence of younger leaders and the radicalization of the independence movement. Nehru's presidency symbolized the passing of the torch to a new generation of leaders. The Lahore Session's resolutions also focused on social and economic issues, including land reform, labor rights, and women's empowerment. The session's declaration of Complete Independence electrified the nation, inspiring widespread protests and demonstrations. The British government responded with repression, leading to the **Civil Disobedience Movement**. The Round Table Conference was to be boycotted.

### **Karachi Session, 1931**

The Karachi Session of 1931, held from March 26 to 31, 1931, presided over by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, this 45th session of the Indian National Congress built upon the momentum generated by the Gandhi-Irwin Pact. The pact, signed earlier that year, temporarily suspended civil disobedience movements, allowing Congress leaders to engage in negotiations with the British. During the session, the Congress adopted a resolution on Fundamental Rights, ensuring equality, freedom, and social justice for all citizens and the National Economic Programme. This resolution served as a precursor to India's future constitution. The session also emphasized economic development through industrialization, agricultural growth, and labor rights. Nationalization of key industries, such as textiles and steel, was discussed.

This Session reaffirmed the Congress's commitment to achieving complete independence, or Purna Swaraj, as declared in the Lahore Session of 1929. Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Subhas Chandra Bose were among the prominent leaders attending the session. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar also played a significant role, advocating for social and economic reforms. The outcome had far-reaching implications, shaping India's future constitutional reforms and social policies. The Karachi Session demonstrated the Congress's ability to balance negotiation and agitation, setting the stage for future movements and eventually, India's independence. This session was significant amidst the global economic crisis of the Great Depression and the ongoing Round Table Conferences between British and Indian leaders.

### **Bombay Session, 1934**

The Bombay Session of 1934, held from August 25 to 29, 1934, was the 48th session of the Indian National Congress. Dr. Nellie Sengupta presided over this significant gathering. The session marked a shift in the Congress's focus after the Civil Disobedience Movement (1930-1934). Mahatma Gandhi temporarily withdrew from active politics, paving the way for new leadership. The session emphasized constitutional reforms, demanding greater autonomy and self-governance. It also stressed economic development through industrialization and agricultural growth, alongside labor rights and social welfare. Women's

rights, education, and social reform were prominent on the agenda. The session strongly condemned British imperialism, reaffirming the Congress's commitment to achieving independence. It saw the rise of left-wing ideologies within the Congress, with influential leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhash Chandra Bose playing key roles. Jayaprakash Narayan's presence also highlighted the growing socialist influence.

Prominent leaders attending the session included Dr. Nellie Sengupta, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhash Chandra Bose, and Jayaprakash Narayan. The session's outcome laid groundwork for future movements and negotiations with the British. The Government of India Act (1935) and subsequent constitutional reforms were influenced by the Congress's persistent demands. This Session was the beginning of a new phase for the Indian National Congress. Though Congress continued to look up Gandhi for leadership, it became more moral than political.

### **Haripura Session, 1938**

The Haripura Session of 1938, held from February 19 to 22, 1938, presided over by Subhash Chandra Bose, this 51st session of the Indian National Congress marked a significant shift towards radical nationalism. Bose's presidency symbolized the growing influence of left-wing ideologies within the Congress, with leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru and Jayaprakash Narayan playing key roles.

The session focused on national planning, rapid industrialization, and agricultural reforms. The Congress established a National Planning Committee to develop a comprehensive plan for India's economic development. Resolutions emphasized land reforms, agricultural labor rights, and social welfare. The session also discussed defense and foreign policy, opposing British involvement in global conflicts. Subhash Chandra Bose's presidency and the session's radical tone reflected the Congress's growing assertiveness. The Haripura Session set the stage for India's eventual independence, showcasing the Congress's ability to adapt and evolve in response to changing global circumstances.

### **Meerut Session, 1946**

The Meerut Session of 1946, held from November 25 to 29, 1946, was a crucial gathering of the Indian National Congress. Presided over by Jawaharlal Nehru, this 55th session marked a significant milestone in India's journey to independence. The session followed the British Cabinet Mission's failed attempt to establish a united Indian government earlier that year.

The Congress demanded immediate transfer of power from British to Indian hands and the convening of a Constituent Assembly to **frame India's constitution**. Emphasis was placed on rapid industrialization, agricultural development, and social justice. Resolutions focused on protecting minority rights, promoting social equality, and ensuring economic development.

Mahatma Gandhi, though not attending, continued to guide the Congress. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Subhas Chandra Bose (declared missing), and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar were among the prominent leaders influencing the session's outcome. The Meerut Session demonstrated the Congress's unwavering commitment to achieving independence, shaping India's future constitution, and securing social and economic progress. The session occurred amidst rising communal tensions, the Indian National Army trials, and post-World War II global politics. The Congress positioned itself for impending independence, navigating complex negotiations with the British. The Meerut Session's resolutions and declarations paved the way for India's transition to independence on August 15, 1947.

The session's significance extended beyond India's borders, as it reflected the global shift towards decolonization and nationalism. The Meerut Session showcased the Congress's resilience, adaptability,

and unwavering dedication to India's freedom, setting the stage for the country's emergence as a sovereign nation.

## IMPORTANT LEADERS OF INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS

### 1. Dadabhai Naoroji – The Grand Old Man of India

Dadabhai Naoroji was among the earliest nationalist leaders and the most respected voices within the Congress during its moderate phase. A scholar and economist, Naoroji was the first Indian elected to the British Parliament. He is best known for formulating the Drain Theory, which argued that Britain was draining India's wealth without any economic return. He believed in constitutional methods and appealed to the moral conscience of the British rulers. In the 1906 INC session at Calcutta, he for the first time officially articulated the goal of Swaraj (self-rule), making him one of the ideological pioneers of Indian nationalism.

### 2. Gopal Krishna Gokhale – Moderate Leader and Social Reformer

Gopal Krishna Gokhale was a moderate nationalist who emphasized the need for gradual reforms through legislative means. He was elected president of the INC in 1905 and consistently advocated constitutional methods like petitions and debates. He founded the Servants of India Society to train young Indians for public service and nation-building. Gokhale was deeply invested in social reforms, especially education, and promoted communal harmony. He was also the political guru of Mahatma Gandhi, who admired Gokhale's wisdom, moderation, and commitment to service.

### 3. Bal Gangadhar Tilak – Father of Indian Unrest

Tilak represented the assertive nationalist wing of the INC. He criticized the moderates for being too soft and slow. A powerful orator and journalist, he mobilized the masses through his newspapers Kesari and The Mahratta. He used religion as a unifying force, organizing public celebrations like Ganesh Utsav and Shivaji Jayanti to inspire collective pride. His famous declaration, "Swaraj is my birthright, and I shall have it," energized Indian youth and brought mass appeal to the freedom struggle. He was one of the key figures in the Surat Split of 1907, which divided Congress into moderates and extremists.

### 4. Annie Besant – The First Woman President of INC

Annie Besant was an Irish-born theosophist, educationist, and political activist who became the first woman president of the INC in 1917. She launched the Home Rule Movement in 1916, demanding self-government for India on the model of dominions like Canada. Through her journal New India, she advocated Indian self-rule and inspired many Indians to join politics. Though she initially aligned with both moderates and extremists, her influence waned after Gandhi's rise. Nonetheless, she was critical in bridging Western and Indian ideologies and promoting early nationalist consciousness.

### 5. Mahatma Gandhi – The Soul of the Freedom Movement

Mahatma Gandhi was the most influential leader of the INC and transformed it from an elite organization into a mass movement. Trained in law and experienced in civil rights activism in South Africa, Gandhi returned to India in 1915 and introduced the philosophy of Satyagraha (non-violent resistance). Under his leadership, Congress launched major mass movements like the Non-Cooperation Movement (1920–22), Civil Disobedience Movement (1930–34), and Quit India Movement (1942). Gandhi emphasized Swadeshi, rural upliftment, Hindu-Muslim unity, and uplift of the "Harijans" (Dalits). His strategy of non-violence and truth became the moral foundation of the freedom struggle.

### 6. Jawaharlal Nehru – Visionary and First Prime Minister

Jawaharlal Nehru was the most prominent leader of the Congress after Gandhi. A modernist with socialist

leanings, he brought global perspectives into the Indian movement. He presided over the 1929 Lahore Session, where Purna Swaraj (complete independence) was declared. Nehru represented the younger generation and championed scientific progress, industrialization, and secularism. He played a key role in shaping India's Constitution and served as the first Prime Minister of independent India, laying the foundation of democratic governance, planning, and non-alignment in foreign policy.

#### **7. Motilal Nehru – Father of Constitutional Politics**

Motilal Nehru, a leading lawyer and the father of Jawaharlal Nehru, was an important Congress figure during the 1920s. He co-founded the Swaraj Party with C.R. Das to enter the legislative councils after Gandhi's suspension of the Non-Cooperation Movement. He chaired the committee that drafted the Nehru Report (1928), the first constitutional proposal by Indians for dominion status. He believed in fighting British policy both inside and outside the councils.

#### **8. C.R. Das – Advocate of Council Entry and Hindu-Muslim Unity**

Chittaranjan Das, known as Deshbandhu, was a lawyer, poet, and nationalist leader from Bengal. He supported council entry as a method of protest and founded the Swaraj Party with Motilal Nehru. Das worked for Hindu-Muslim unity and was elected Mayor of Calcutta in 1924. His early death in 1925 was a blow to the nationalist movement. He represented a blend of idealism and practical politics.

#### **9. Dr. Rajendra Prasad – Constitutionalist and First President of India**

Rajendra Prasad was a devoted follower of Gandhi and one of the senior-most Congress leaders. He served as Congress President during key phases like 1934, 1939, and in 1947 when India was about to gain independence. A respected scholar and statesman, he later became the first President of India (1950–1962). He was known for his humility, legal knowledge, and balanced judgment during the drafting of the Constitution.

#### **10. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad – Intellectual and Unifier**

Maulana Azad was a prominent Muslim leader in the Congress. He was a strong voice for Hindu-Muslim unity and opposed the partition of India. He became Congress President in 1923 (youngest ever) and served again during the crucial years of 1940 to 1946. Azad also edited *Al-Hilal*, a powerful journal that spread nationalist ideas. After independence, as India's first Education Minister, he laid the foundation for modern Indian education and institutions like the IITs, UGC, and Sangeet Natak Akademi.

#### **11. C. Rajagopalachari (Rajaji) – Last Governor-General and Rationalist**

Rajaji was a senior Congress leader, legal scholar, and close associate of Gandhi. He was the first Indian Governor-General of India after Lord Mountbatten. He also proposed the CR Formula in 1944 to negotiate between Congress and the Muslim League. After independence, he opposed Nehru's socialism and formed the Swatantra Party advocating free enterprise. He was also a writer, statesman, and moral philosopher who played a key role in both the freedom struggle and the early republic.

### **Conclusion**

The Indian National Congress played a pivotal role in India's struggle for independence and has been a dominant force in Indian politics since its inception in 1885. Founded by Allan Octavian Hume, a retired British Civil Servant, the party's initial goal was to obtain a greater share in government for educated Indians and create a platform for civic and political dialogue between Indians and the British Raj. The first session of the Indian National Congress was held in Bombay from December 28 to 31, 1885, with 72 delegates attending, including notable figures such as Dadabhai Naoroji, Badruddin Tyabji, and Pherozeshah Mehta.



Over the years, the party underwent significant transformations, with two factions emerging by 1905 - the Moderates, led by Gopal Krishna Gokhale, who advocated for peaceful and constitutional approaches to achieve reforms, and the Extremists, led by Bal Gangadhar Tilak, who favored more radical and direct action. The party's transformation into a mass movement was facilitated by Mahatma Gandhi's return from South Africa in 1915 and his alliance with the Khilafat Movement in 1920. Under Gandhi's leadership, the party declared Purna Swaraj (complete independence) as its goal in 1929, with Jawaharlal Nehru as president. The party played a crucial role in India's independence movement, with its leaders participating in the Quit India Movement and the INA trials. Post-independence, the party dominated Indian politics, with Nehru as its paramount leader until his death in 1964. The party has since undergone various splits and transformations, with its current president being Mallikarjun Kharge.

Throughout its history, the Indian National Congress has been shaped by its sessions, which have reflected the party's evolving ideology and its response to changing national and international circumstances. Today, the party remains a significant force in Indian politics, advocating for secular policies, social justice, and economic development.

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