Chapter 2: Nationalism in India

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Exercise 2.1 — Write in brief

Q1 Explain: (a) Why growth of nationalism in the colonies is linked to an anti-colonial movement. (b) How the First World War helped in the growth of the National Movement in India. (c) Why Indians were outraged by the Rowlatt Act. (d) Why Gandhiji decided to withdraw the Non-Cooperation Movement.

SOLUTION

(a) In India, as in many other colonies, the growth of modern nationalism is intimately connected to the anti-colonial movement. People began discovering their unity in the process of their struggle with colonialism. The sense of being oppressed under colonialism provided a shared bond that tied many different groups together. Each class and group felt the effects of colonialism differently, but the common struggle against a common oppressor forged a national identity.

(b) The war created a new economic and political situation. Defence expenditure increased hugely, financed by war loans and higher taxes; customs duties were raised and income tax introduced. Prices doubled between 1913 and 1918, causing extreme hardship. Villages were forced to supply soldiers, and forced recruitment caused widespread anger. Crops failed in 1918-19 and 1920-21, and an influenza epidemic followed; according to the 1921 census, 12 to 13 million people perished. People hoped their hardships would end after the war but they did not, creating conditions ripe for a national movement.

(c) The Rowlatt Act (1919) was hurriedly passed through the Imperial Legislative Council despite the united opposition of the Indian members. It gave the government enormous powers to repress political activities and allowed detention of political prisoners without trial for two years. Indians were outraged because such a repressive, unjust law was forced on them against their united opposition.

(d) In February 1922, Gandhiji decided to withdraw the Non-Cooperation Movement because it was turning violent in many places (as at Chauri Chaura). He felt that satyagrahis needed to be properly trained before they were ready for

mass struggles.

Answer: Colonial oppression forged unity; WWI's economic hardship and repression fuelled the movement; the Rowlatt Act's detention-without-trial outraged Indians; and Gandhiji withdrew Non-Cooperation because it had turned violent and satyagrahis were untrained.

Q2 What is meant by the idea of satyagraha?

SOLUTION

The idea of satyagraha emphasised the power of truth and the need to search for truth. It suggested that if the cause was true, and the struggle was against injustice, then physical force was not necessary to fight the oppressor.

Without seeking vengeance or being aggressive, a satyagrahi could win the battle through non-violence, by appealing to the conscience of the oppressor. People, including the oppressors, had to be persuaded to see the truth rather than being forced to accept it through violence. Mahatma Gandhi believed that this dharma of non-violence could unite all Indians.

Answer: Satyagraha is a method of mass agitation based on the power of truth and non-violence, in which a just cause is won by persuading the oppressor's conscience rather than by physical force.

Q3 Write a newspaper report on: (a) The Jallianwala Bagh massacre (b) The Simon Commission.

SOLUTION

(a) On 13 April the infamous Jallianwalla Bagh incident took place. A large crowd had gathered in the enclosed ground of Jallianwalla Bagh, some to protest against the government's new repressive measures and others to attend the annual Baisakhi fair. Being from outside the city, many villagers were unaware of the martial law that had been imposed. General Dyer entered the area, blocked the exit points, and opened fire on the crowd, killing hundreds. His declared object was to 'produce a moral effect', to create a feeling of terror and awe in the minds of satyagrahis. As news spread, crowds took to the streets in many north Indian towns, and were met with brutal government repression.

(b) The new Tory government in Britain constituted a Statutory Commission under

Sir John Simon to look into the functioning of the constitutional system in India and suggest changes. The problem was that the commission did not have a single Indian member - they were all British. When the Simon Commission arrived in India in 1928, it was greeted with the slogan 'Go back Simon'. All parties, including the Congress and the Muslim League, participated in the demonstrations. During one such demonstration Lala Lajpat Rai was assaulted by the British police and later succumbed to his injuries.

Answer: Report the 13 April Jallianwala Bagh firing by General Dyer that killed hundreds of an unarmed crowd; and the all-British Simon Commission of 1928, boycotted with 'Go back Simon' by all parties.

Q4 Compare the images of Bharat Mata in this chapter with the image of Germania in Chapter 1.

SOLUTION

Both Bharat Mata and Germania are female allegories used to give a visual form to the nation and to inspire love and sacrifice for it. The image of Bharat Mata was first created by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, who wrote 'Vande Mataram' in the 1870s as a hymn to the motherland. Moved by the Swadeshi movement, Abanindranath Tagore painted his famous image of Bharat Mata, portraying her as an ascetic figure - calm, composed, divine and spiritual, dispensing learning, food and clothing, with a mala in one hand emphasising her ascetic quality.

In subsequent years the image acquired many different forms in popular prints, and devotion to this mother figure came to be seen as evidence of one's nationalism. Like Germania, who symbolised the German nation, Bharat Mata became a symbol that could unite people across regions and inspire a sense of collective belonging to the nation.

Answer: Both are female personifications of the nation meant to inspire devotion; Bharat Mata (created by Bankim Chandra, painted by Abanindranath Tagore) appears ascetic, calm and spiritual, just as Germania symbolised the German nation.

Exercise 2.2 — Discuss

Q1 List all the different social groups which joined the Non-Cooperation Movement of 1921. Then choose any three and write about their hopes and struggles to show why they joined the movement.

SOLUTION

Different social groups that joined the Non-Cooperation Movement of 1921 included: the urban middle classes - students, teachers, headmasters and lawyers; merchants and traders; peasants (as in Awadh); tribals (as in the Gudem Hills of Andhra Pradesh); and plantation workers (as in Assam).

Three groups and their hopes and struggles:

1. The urban middle classes: Thousands of students left government-controlled schools and colleges, headmasters and teachers resigned, and lawyers gave up their legal practices; merchants and traders refused to trade in foreign goods. They hoped that boycotting British institutions and foreign goods would weaken colonial rule and bring swaraj. The movement slowed, however, as khadi was costlier than mill cloth and alternative Indian institutions were slow to come up.

2. Peasants of Awadh: Led by Baba Ramchandra, they struggled against talukdars and landlords who charged exorbitantly high rents and cesses and forced peasants to do begar. They demanded reduction of revenue, abolition of begar, and social boycott of oppressive landlords. For them swaraj meant freedom from this oppression.

3. Tribals of the Gudem Hills: Led by Alluri Sitaram Raju, they revolted because the colonial government had closed forest areas, preventing them from grazing cattle and collecting fuelwood and fruits, and forced them to do begar for road building. Inspired by the movement, they hoped swaraj would restore their traditional rights over the forests, though they resorted to guerrilla warfare rather than non-violence.

Answer: Groups included the urban middle classes (students, teachers, lawyers), merchants, peasants (Awadh), tribals (Gudem Hills) and plantation workers (Assam) - each joining with its own hopes of swaraj and its own struggle against colonial or local oppression.

Q2 Discuss the Salt March to make clear why it was an effective symbol of resistance against colonialism.

SOLUTION

Mahatma Gandhi found in salt a powerful symbol that could unite the nation. On 31 January 1930 he sent a letter to Viceroy Irwin stating eleven demands, the most stirring being the demand to abolish the salt tax. Salt was consumed by the rich and the poor alike and was one of the most essential items of food, so a campaign around it could bring all classes together.

The tax on salt and the government monopoly over its production, Gandhiji declared, revealed the most oppressive face of British rule. When his ultimatum was not met by 11 March, he began the famous salt march with 78 trusted volunteers, walking over 240 miles from his ashram in Sabarmati to the coastal town of Dandi, about 10 miles a day for 24 days. Thousands came to hear him and joined along the way. On 6 April he reached Dandi and ceremonially violated the law by manufacturing salt from sea water.

It was an effective symbol because salt was a daily necessity shared by all, so people of every class could identify with the protest; breaking the salt law was a simple, non-violent act anyone could copy; and it directly defied an unjust British monopoly. It marked the beginning of the Civil Disobedience Movement, in which people not only refused cooperation with the British but also broke colonial laws.

Answer: Salt, a daily necessity taxed and monopolised by the British, let people of every class identify with the protest; the 240-mile march and ceremonial law-breaking at Dandi made it a simple, unifying, non-violent act of defiance that launched Civil Disobedience.

Q3 Why did political leaders differ sharply over the question of separate electorates?

SOLUTION

Political leaders differed sharply because separate electorates raised the conflicting concerns of protecting minorities and depressed groups on one side, and preserving national unity and integration on the other.

Dr B.R. Ambedkar, who organised the dalits into the Depressed Classes Association in 1930, demanded separate electorates for dalits at the second Round Table Conference, believing political empowerment through their own

representatives would resolve their social disabilities. Gandhiji opposed this, believing separate electorates for dalits would slow down their integration into society, and he began a fast unto death when the British government conceded Ambedkar's demand. Ambedkar ultimately accepted Gandhiji's position, resulting in the Poona Pact of September 1932, which gave the Depressed Classes reserved seats voted in by the general electorate.

Among Muslims, many leaders feared that as a minority their culture and identity would be submerged under a Hindu majority. Muhammad Ali Jinnah was willing to give up the demand for separate electorates if Muslims were assured reserved seats in the Central Assembly and representation in proportion to population in the Muslim-dominated provinces of Bengal and Punjab, but negotiations collapsed at the 1928 All Parties Conference when M.R. Jayakar of the Hindu Mahasabha strongly opposed compromise. In 1930 Sir Muhammad Iqbal, as president of the Muslim League, reiterated that separate electorates were an important safeguard for Muslim minority interests, while others held that they were contrary to the spirit of true nationalism.

Answer: Leaders differed because minority and dalit leaders (Ambedkar, Jinnah, Iqbal) saw separate electorates as vital safeguards for their political interests, while Gandhiji and others opposed them as harmful to social integration and national unity - a clash resolved for dalits by the Poona Pact (1932).