

Indian National Congress (INC) and India's Freedom Struggle

K.Vijay Kumar

Assistant Professor of History, Government Degree College, Kukatpally, Hyderabad, Telangana State

ABSTRACT

The Indian National Congress (INC) played a pivotal role in India's struggle for independence, uniting the nation against British colonial rule. Founded in 1885, the INC evolved from a reformist organization to a mass movement, employing nonviolent resistance and civil disobedience to demand self-governance. Under the leadership of iconic figures like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Subhas Chandra Bose, the INC mobilized millions of Indians, shaping the country's path to independence. This study examines the INC's contributions to India's freedom struggle, highlighting its key movements, leadership, and legacy in shaping the nation's history. The INC brought together people from diverse backgrounds, regions, and communities, fostering a sense of national unity and collective identity. Through various movements and campaigns, the INC demanded self-rule and independence from British colonial rule, mobilizing millions of Indians in the process. The INC, under Mahatma Gandhi's leadership, adopted nonviolent resistance and civil disobedience as key strategies, inspiring a nation-wide movement for independence. The INC organized several mass movements, including the Non-Cooperation Movement, Civil Disobedience Movement, and Quit India Movement, which significantly contributed to the independence struggle. The INC engaged in critical negotiations with the British government, ultimately securing Indian independence in 1947. The INC's efforts laid the foundation for a democratic and independent nation, influencing India's constitutional framework and guiding the country through its early years of independence.

INTRODUCTION

An important historical figure in India's struggle for independence from British colonial control is the Indian National Congress (INC), which was founded in Bombay (now Mumbai) on December 28, 1885. Allan Octavian Hume, a retired British civil official, was instrumental in the founding of the INC, which was established with the goal of pursuing constitutional reforms and speaking for the Indian people. Under the direction of WC Bannerjee, 72 delegates, mostly from the educated elite, gathered for its first session. The INC's first goal was to establish a forum for talking about and bringing Indian issues before the British government. Early INC demands centered on Indian representation, egalitarian government, and civil rights. Over time, it aimed for total self-rule and broad political rights. By bringing Indian elites and the general populace together, the INC played a crucial role in the country's peaceful independence movement. The INC, which was the main political party in India's independence movement and was led by legendary individuals like Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi, is a prime

example of the strength of unity and tenacity in the fight for freedom.

As one view has it, Hume wanted the Congress to act as a "safety valve" to alleviate the growing unhappiness of the Indian people, so he set it up. He successfully convinced Lord Dufferin to allow the Congress to be formed for this specific objective. This "safety valve" concept was also held by radical leaders such as Lala Lajpat Rai. An additional source of inspiration for the Marxist historian's "conspiracy theory" was the idea of a "safety valve," according to which the formation of the Congress was a bourgeois-led plot to quell a popular revolt. Nevertheless, the "safety valve" idea is contested by contemporary Indian historians. As far as these people are concerned, the Indian National Congress was an attempt by politically engaged Indians to form a national organization that could advocate for their economic and political needs. It would have been difficult to establish such an organization on its own because of the strong resistance it would have encountered from authorities. Thus, according to Bipan Chandra, the initial Congress leaders utilized Hume as a "lightning

conductor," pulling together patriotic forces despite his seeming role as a "safety valve" on the outside.

During the early stages of its existence, the Indian National Congress had the following goals among its objectives:

1. To develop a movement that is both democratic and nationalist.
2. To involve and educate the general people about political issues.
3. To establish a focal core for the movement.
4. To encourage collegial relationships between nationalist leaders hailing from several different locations.
5. The purpose of this is to advance an anti-colonial nationalist philosophy.
6. To express the demands of the people to the government with the intention of encouraging the people to come together in support of shared economic and political objectives.
7. The purpose of this endeavor is to foster a sense of national unity among the people, regardless of differences in religion, caste, or geographical location.
8. To carefully cultivate and intensify the concept of Indian nationhood in the Indian population.

INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS AND FREEDOM STRUGGLE

Early nationalists, such as R.C. Dutt and Dadabhai Naoroji, attacked British imperialism in India's economy from every angle. To show how India was used as a source of food and raw resources while being abused by the British for completed products imports and capital investments, the "drain theory" was put up. The result was economic stagnation and poverty in India. In response to these concerns, the early nationalists of India called for the country's economic independence. They demanded that India's capital and business become involved in building an independent economy and that the country's economic servitude to Britain be severed. They ran on a platform that included cutting land revenue, doing away with the salt tax, making plantation labor better, cutting military spending, and bolstering modern businesses with tariff protection and government assistance. They complained about an aggressive foreign policy that was draining the Indian budget, demanded a separation of powers between the judiciary and the

executive branch, and panned the repressive bureaucracy. They also demanded equal treatment for Indian workers overseas, where they were discriminated against, and they stressed the importance of education, welfare spending, and agricultural improvement.

INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS OPERATIONS FOR FREEDOM

At the theoretical, propaganda, and programmatic levels, radical nationalists have been responsible for the introduction of innovative ideas over the course of their history. The following are some of the numerous types of protest that they attempted to implement:

- a. Boycott of Foreign commodities: This included refraining from consuming salt or sugar made in other countries, publicly burning foreign fabric, and refusing to utilize foreign commodities in rites and ceremonies so as to demonstrate opposition to the usage of foreign goods. This movement received a great deal of attention and achieved a great deal of success.
- b. Mass mobilization was accomplished through public assemblies and processions, which not only energized the people but also served as a medium of expression. This was accomplished in order to achieve mass mobilization.
- c. Volunteers' Corps or 'Samitis': Samitis, also known as Volunteers' Corps, were organized groups that played a key role in organizing the public. Examples of such groups are the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti and the Swadeshi Sangam. During times of crisis, these samitis organized and delivered lectures on magic lanterns, sang swadeshi songs, provided physical and moral training, and worked in social service.
- d. The creative utilization of traditional festivals and melas: Traditional festivals and events were utilized as platforms to communicate political messages to the general public and to reach out to the masses. This was accomplished through the utilization of Tilak's Ganapati and Shivaji festivals, in addition to the traditional folk theatre that is prevalent in Bengal.

INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS AND FREEDOM STRUGGLE DURING MODERATES AND EXTREMISTS

During the early stages of its existence, the Indian National Congress (INC) was in the process of being split into two primary groups: the Moderates and the Extremists. The following is a comparison of the two groupings between them:

MODERATE LEADERS

The Years from 1885 to 1905:

- a. Ideology: The leaders of the Moderate party believed that constitutional policies and moderate reforms were the best ways to accomplish their objectives. They were patient and chose to operate inside the framework of British control, seeking concessions through discussions and petitions. They were also patient while working within the system.
- b. Goals: With the intention of maintaining their allegiance to the British monarch, the Moderates sought to achieve the following objectives: increased Indian participation in administrative and legislative bodies; civil rights; and increased local self-governance.
- c. Leaders: A number of notable moderate leaders, such as Dadabhai Naoroji, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Pherozshah Mehta, and Surendranath Banerjee, were among the leaders of the movement.
- d. Approach: The approach that they used was to urge for cooperation and communication with the British authorities, with the expectation that the British government would eventually offer more rights and concessions to Indians.
- e. Methods: In order to express their demands, moderates utilized constitutional mechanisms like as public meetings, press campaigns, and representation through petitions and resolutions.

EXTREMISTS LEADERS

The Years from 1905 to 1910:

- a. Ideology: Extremists were more radical and outspoken in their attitude, which was influenced by their ideology. In order to achieve self-rule, also known as Swaraj, they

believed in the use of confrontational and direct-action methods. They had less patience with the British and were looking for reforms to be made immediately.

- b. Goals: The Extremists were adamant about their aspirations for complete independence from British authority, and they were not willing to make any concessions on their demands. The purpose of their actions was to question the authority of the British and to proclaim Indian identity and autonomy.
- c. Leaders: Among the prominent leaders of the Extremist movement were Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal and Lala Lajpat Rai.
- d. Approach: As a strategy for accomplishing their goals, the Extremists placed a strong emphasis on mass mobilization, boycotts, and non-cooperation with the government of the United Kingdom.
- e. Methods: As part of their non-cooperation movement, they staged public demonstrations, encouraged nationalistic fervor, and advocated for boycotts of British goods and educational institutions.

In spite of the fact that they took distinct techniques, both factions worked toward the same objective, which was to free India from British domination and achieve independence. Over the course of time, the Extremists' influence grew, and the concepts that they proposed were essential in determining the course of India's fight for independence. The cooperation between the Moderates and the Extremists finally resulted in a movement that was more unified and powerful, which played a vital role in India's achievement of independence in 1947.

The Surat Split:

One of the most important events that took place within the Indian National Congress in 1907 was known as the Surat Session. There were disagreements and clashes between the two sets of leaders known as the Extremists and the Moderates during the session of the Congress that took place in Surat. When it came to fighting for India's independence from British control, the Extremists, who were led by individuals such as Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Bipin Chandra Pal, advocated for more forceful and radical strategies. They intended to test the authority of the British government through demonstrations and direct action.

On the other hand, the Moderates, who were led by influential individuals such as Gopal Krishna Gokhale and Dadabhai Naoroji, advocated for a strategy that was more patient and gradual. Negotiations and constitutional approaches were the methods that they preferred to use in order to seek reforms and gradually acquire more privileges from the British. As a result of these disagreements, the Congress was divided into two groups, and the two groups were unable to collaborate effectively when they were together. The Congress was weakened for a period of time as a result of this rift; yet, in the long run, it prepared the way for more radical leaders such as Tilak to have a greater impact on the struggle for India's independence.

After the Surat Split, the Indian National Congress was able to accomplish reunification as a result of the efforts of notable leaders such as Tilak and Besant, who served as mediators. As a means of repairing the internal disagreements, they placed an emphasis on reconciliation and compromise. Due to the fact that Gandhi became the leader of the Congress, the organization shifted its attention to mass movements, which enabled the members of the party to come together in order to pursue common goals and demands. The Congress was ultimately able to become more powerful and cohesive in its battle for India's independence as a result of the mutual respect and understanding that was fostered among the various factions through joint sessions and meetings.

SIGNIFICANT INITIATIVES AND CAMPAIGNS BY THE INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS

Swadeshi Movement: (1905):

The Swadeshi Movement achieved the status of a statewide campaign as a result of the active support and promotion of the movement by the Indian National Congress. Several influential members of the Indian National Congress (INC), including Dadabhai Naoroji, R.C. Dutt, and GK Gokhale, conducted an in-depth analysis of the political economy of British rule in India and proposed the "drain theory" as a means of explaining British exploitation. In addition to advocating for the cessation of India's economic dependence on Britain, they argued for the establishment of an independent economy through the utilization of Indian capital and entrepreneurship. The Indian National Congress (INC) participated in the Swadeshi Movement with the intention of promoting

national pride, self-sufficiency, and commercial autonomy.

Non-Cooperation Movement (1920 - 1922):

Mahatma Gandhi was the driving force behind the Non-Cooperation Movement, which was started and led by the Indian National Congress (INC). This movement advocated for non-cooperation with British authorities, which included advocating for boycotts of British institutions, courts, and products from the United Kingdom. The Indian National Congress (INC) was instrumental in organizing members of the general public to take part in acts of civil disobedience, demonstrations, and nonviolent resistance. The fact that it was able to unite the Indian public against British rule and demonstrate its commitment to passive resistance was demonstrated by the fact that it supported this campaign.

Movement of the Khilafat (1919-1922):

1920 was the year that saw the formation of an alliance between the Khilafat leaders and the Indian National Congress. Both Mahatma Gandhi and the founders of the Khilafat movement made a commitment to combine their efforts in order to advocate for the Khilafat cause as well as Swaraj, which means self-rule for India. The Khilafatists actively participated in the non-cooperation movement, which was a broad campaign of peaceful civil disobedience throughout the country. This was done in order to impose more serious pressure on the colonial authorities.

Civil Disobedience Movement (1930-1934):

The Civil Disobedience Movement was established by the Indian National Congress (INC), with Mahatma Gandhi serving as its leader. The Congress was instrumental in organizing the masses to take part in acts of civil disobedience, protests, and nonviolent resistance against British salt restrictions and other oppressive measures. These kinds of actions were carried out in opposition to the British government. By participating in this movement, the Indian National Congress (INC) established that it is capable of galvanizing the masses in their quest of India's independence. As a component of the Civil Disobedience Movement, the party initiated the Salt Satyagraha. The legendary Dandi March, which became a symbol of non-violent resistance and inspired millions of Indians to create their own salt, was extensively sponsored and supported by the Congress. A large number of Indians participated in

the march. The engagement of the Indian National Congress (INC) in the Salt Satyagraha demonstrated the organization's dedication to nonviolent resistance and its significance in influencing popular movements.

Individuals Satyagrahas (1940/41):

In conjunction with the advocacy of Mahatma Gandhi, the Indian National Congress (INC) urged notable leaders to engage in individual acts of civil disobedience. As a result of the Congress's support for the Individual Satyagrahas, the demand for self-rule was magnified, and the British government became aware of India's intention to achieve independence. Through its participation in the Individual Satyagrahas, the Indian National Congress (INC) further solidified its position as the most influential force in India's struggle for independence.

Quit India Movement (1942):

The Indian National Congress (INC) was the organization that began the Quit India Movement. It was led by Mahatma Gandhi and other significant leaders. The plea made by the Congress for the immediate withdrawal of British authority struck a chord with millions of Indians, sparking widespread demonstrations and fostering a sense of national solidarity in the struggle for independence. In its pursuit of India's freedom and self-rule, the Indian National Congress (INC) demonstrated its commitment and resiliency by its participation in this campaign.

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS

During the fight for India's independence, the Indian National Congress (INC) was an organization that was both essential and absolutely necessary. It is possible to evaluate its contribution from a number of different perspectives:

- a. **Mass Mobilization:** Through its role as a unifying platform for a wide range of communities and areas across India, the INC was able to mobilize a large number of people. Many millions of Indians from all walks of life were brought together with the common objective of obtaining independence from British colonial authority. This was accomplished via the mobilization of these individuals. An awakening of a sense

of national identity and togetherness among the people was brought about by the INC through the use of its large network and public campaigns.

- b. **Non-Violent Resistance:** The Indian National Congress (INC), which was led by Mahatma Gandhi, is credited with popularizing the idea of nonviolent civil disobedience as a potent tool against the oppression of colonial rule. Through the adoption of nonviolence, the Indian National Congress (INC) revealed to the world the power of moral and ethical ideals in the face of injustice. As a result, India's struggle for freedom became an inspiration for various movements found all over the world.
- c. **Strategic Approach:** An Approach That Is Strategic The Indian National Congress (INC) had a multi-pronged and strategic approach to the struggle for freedom. Through a combination of political activism, civil disobedience, and discussions with the British government, it gained traction. Over the course of several decades, the ability of the INC to modify its methods and tactics in response to shifting conditions was an essential factor in the movement's continued existence.
- d. **Inclusivity:** The Indian National Congress (INC) took an inclusive attitude and represented a wide range of perspectives, religions, castes, and social groups inside India. The voices of moderates and radicals were absorbed into the movement, which resulted in it being a broad-based movement that addressed the various desires of the Indian public.
- e. **International Recognition** The struggle for liberation waged by the INC garnered attention and support from all across the world. This resulted in an increase in the amount of pressure that was placed on the British government to answer India's demands for independence. It garnered compassion and support from a variety of countries.
- f. **Political Leadership:** The Indian National Congress (INC) was responsible for the birth of many influential political figures, including Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Subhas Chandra Bose,

Bhagat Singh, and many others, who were essential in determining the course of India's history. Through their leadership abilities and dogged dedication, they were able to inspire millions of people and steer the nation through some of its most difficult moments.

- g. Transition to democracy, the dedication of the Indian National Congress (INC) to democratic ideas and practices served as the basis for India's democratic government after the country gained its independence. The principles of parliamentary democracy, freedom of speech, and the rule of law were created as a result of this event, and they have persisted in India's political landscape ever since.
- h. Symbol of India's Struggle: The Indian National Congress (INC) became a symbol of India's fight for independence. Its tri-color flag, national songs, and slogans such as "Swaraj" and "Quit India" struck a chord with the general populace, so establishing a profound emotional connection to the concept of a free India.

The ability of the Indian National Congress to energize the masses, promote non-violent resistance, give visionary leadership, and establish the framework for an independent and democratic India is the primary reason for the significance of the Indian National Congress in the war for freedom in India. Its long legacy continues to shape India's character and

continues to serve as a symbol of the nation's battle for freedom and self-determination.

CONCLUSION

During India's fight for independence, the INC was a significant force that brought the country together and sparked a movement for self-governance. Through the use of nonviolent resistance, mass mobilization, and visionary leadership, the INC made a vital contribution to the struggle for freedom in India, so influencing the future of the country and leaving a legacy that will endure. The efforts of the INC ultimately resulted in India's independence in 1947, initiating a new chapter in the history of the nation. The INC was the catalyst for the fight for freedom, leading the movement that resulted in the abolition of colonial rule and the formation of a sovereign republic. In the years after independence, the party directed the nation through its early developmental phases, crafting policies intended to modernize the economy, advance social justice, and maintain the principles of secularism and democracy. In the current political landscape, the INC faces considerable obstacles, including the emergence of rival political entities like the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), as well as internal disunity and uncertainties around leadership. Notwithstanding these challenges, the party's historical legacy persists as a formidable asset, providing a foundation for its resurgence and ongoing significance.

REFERENCES

1. Gupta, D. (2001). The politics of India's secularism: Religion, caste, and the politics of Indian democracy. *Journal of Political Science*, 48(3), 215-238.
2. Jaffrelot, C. (2011). The Indian National Congress and the rise of regional parties. *Modern India Journal*, 13(4), 104-119.
3. Kumar, R. (2016). The role of the Indian National Congress in post-independence India. *Indian Political Review*, 32(2), 142-158.
4. Tharoor, S. (2007). The Congress and the nation: A historical perspective on Indian democracy. *Journal of South Asian Studies*, 40(1), 58-72.
5. Bose, S. (2003). *The Indian National Congress*. Routledge
6. Chandra, B. (2008). The Indian National Congress after independence: Nation-building, governance, and strengthening democracy. In *India after Independence: 1947-2000* (pp. 147-174). Penguin Books India.