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Mains Practice Questions

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Q. What were the aims and objectives of the Indian National Congress at the time of its inception? Discuss how far was it successful to achieve the targets. (250 words)

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Approach

- Start with the situation prevalent at the time of formation of Indian National Congress (INC).
- Explain the aims and objectives of the INC at the time of its inception.
- Evaluate the success of INC to achieve the targets in its early phase.
- Conclude by emphasizing significance of INC in Indian freedom struggle.

Introduction

In the later 1870s and early 1880s, a solid ground had been prepared for the establishment of an all-India organisation. The final shape to this idea was given by a retired English civil servant, A.O. Hume, who mobilised leading intellectuals of the time and, with their cooperation, organised the first session of the Indian National Congress in December 1885.

Body

The main aims of the Indian National Congress in the initial stage-

- Found a democratic, nationalist movement;
- Politicise and politically educate people;
- Establish the headquarters for a movement;
- Promote friendly relations among nationalist political workers from different parts of the country;
- Develop and propagate an anti-colonial nationalist ideology;
- Formulate and present popular demands before the government with a view to unifying the people over a common economic and political programme;
- Develop and consolidate a feeling of national unity among people irrespective of religion, caste or province;
- Carefully promote and nurture Indian nationhood.

Evaluation of the success of INC in the early phase

Successes

- They represented the most progressive forces of the time.
- They were able to create a wide national awakening of all Indians having common interests and the need to rally around a common programme against a common enemy, and above all, the feeling of belonging to one nation.
- They trained people in political work and popularised modern ideas.
- They exposed the basically exploitative character of colonial rule, thus undermining its moral foundations.
- Their political work was based on hard realities, and not on shallow sentiments, religion, etc.

- They were able to establish the basic political truth that India should be ruled in the interest of Indians.
- They created a solid base for a more vigorous, militant, mass-based national movement in the years that followed.

Issues with functioning in its early phase

- The early nationalists did a great deal to awaken the national sentiment, even though they could not draw the masses to them.

The moderate phase of the national movement had a narrow social base and the masses played a passive role. This was because the early nationalists lacked political faith in the masses; they felt that there were numerous divisions and subdivisions in the Indian society, and the masses were generally ignorant and had conservative ideas and thoughts.

- INC in the early phase failed to widen their democratic base and the scope of their demands.

Conclusion

- Earlier, there was 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. However, INC represented the urge of the politically conscious Indians to set up a national body to express the political and economic demands of the Indians.
- In the circumstances, Historians observe, the early Congress leaders used Hume as a 'lightning conductor' i.e., as a catalyst to bring together the nationalistic forces even if under the guise of a 'safety valve'.