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Mains Practice Questions

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Q. "Though Swadeshi movement failed in achieving its immediate objective, yet it played a significant role in the Indian freedom struggle". Discuss (250 words)

30 Mar, 2020 GS Paper 1 History

Approach

- Briefly discuss the Swadeshi Movement.
- Reason for failure of the Swadeshi Movement.
- Impact of Swadeshi Movement on Indian National Movement.
- Conclusion

Introduction

Indian National Congress initiated the Swadeshi movement in Bengal against the announcement of the partition of Bengal in July 1905 by Lord Curzon. It was launched as a protest movement which also gave a lead to the Boycott movement in the country. It led to the use of goods produced in India and burning British-made goods.

Body

Reasons for Failure

- The movement threw up an entire gamut of techniques that later came to be associated with Gandhian politics—noncooperation, passive resistance, filling of British jails, social reform and constructive work.
 - However, the movement failed to create these techniques with a disciplined focus and it lacked an effective organisation or a party structure.
 - The movement aroused the people but did not know how to tap the newly released energy or how to find new forms to give expression to popular resentment.
- **Surat split:** internal squabbles among leaders, magnified by the Surat split (1907), did much harm to the movement.
- **Leaderless movement:** the movement was rendered leaderless with most of the leaders either arrested or deported by 1908 and with Aurobindo Ghosh and Bipin Chandra Pal retiring from active politics.
- **Limited participation:** the movement largely remained confined to the upper and middle classes and zamindars, and failed to reach the masses—especially the peasantry.

Impact of Swadeshi Movement

- **Change in strategy:** the movement was a turning point in modern Indian history. It proved to be a “leap forward” in more ways than one.
 - The previously untouched sections like students, women, workers, some sections of the urban and rural population participated.
 - The trend of the national movement moved from conservative moderation to political extremism, from revolutionary activities to incipient socialism, from petitions and prayers to passive resistance and non-cooperation, emerged during the Swadeshi Movement.
- **Growth of indigenous industries:** the anti-partition agitation paved the way for the development of indigenous industries, for example, Acharya PC Ray’s Bengal Chemical Stores. This inculcated a feeling of self-reliance by reducing the dependence on foreign goods.
- **Growth of national education:** the movement also increased the demand for national education and numerous national schools and colleges came up in various parts.
 - In 1906, a **National Council of Education** was set up. A National College with Aurobindo Ghose as Principal was opened in Kolkata.
 - The movement led to the flourishing of the Bengali literature under Rabindranath Tagore, Rajani Kanta Sen etc.
- **Attainment of swaraj:** Swadeshi, as a strategy, was a key focus of Mahatma Gandhi, who described it as the soul of Swaraj (self-rule). It became an important tool for Gandhian movements in Indian National Movement.

Conclusion

The Swadeshi Movement was not successful in reaching its immediate goals but it provided a platform for the national freedom struggle. Later it showed the way to nationalist leaders to prepare the masses for the next phase of struggle under Gandhiji’s leadership.