



# Swadeshi and Boycott Movement

## Introduction

### ▪ Emergence of Nationalism:

- It was only in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century that the concept of a national identity and national consciousness emerged.
- The social, economic and political factors had inspired the people to define and achieve their national identity.

### ▪ Causes of Growing Nationalism:

- **Recognising True British Intentions:** The British government was not conceding any of the important demands of the Indians.
  - The economic miseries of the 1890s further exposed the exploitative character of colonial rule.
- **Growth of Confidence:** A feeling started gaining currency that the masses had to be involved in the battle against the colonial government to gain freedom.
- **Increasing Awareness:** The spread of education led to an increased awareness among the masses about the British policies.
  - Rise in unemployment and underemployment and resultant poverty further aggravated the discontent among the radical nationalists.
- **International Influences:** The Indian nationalists were inspired by the nationalist movements worldwide in Ireland, Japan, Egypt, Turkey, Persia and China which demolished the myths of European invincibility.
- **Conservative Policies of Lord Curzon:** Administrative measures adopted during [Lord Curzon's](#) rule such as the Indian Universities Act, the Calcutta Corporation Act and primarily the [Partition of Bengal](#) led to nationwide protests.
  - The Swadeshi Movement; one of the most successful movements of the Pre-Gandhian era, was an outcome of the Partition of Bengal.

## Swadeshi Movement

### ▪ Background:

- The movement had its roots in the **anti-partition movement** which was started to oppose Lord Curzon's decision of dividing the province of Bengal.
- The **Anti-Partition Campaign** was **launched by Moderates** to exert pressure on the government to prevent the unjust partition of Bengal from being implemented.
  - The petitions were written to the government, public meetings were held and the ideas were spread through newspapers such as **Hitabadi**, **Sanjibani** and **Bengalee**.
- The partition led to protest meetings in Bengal under which the pledge to boycott foreign goods was first taken.

### ▪ Swadeshi Movement Proclamation:

- In August 1905, at Calcutta Townhall, a massive meeting was held and the **formal**

**proclamation of the Swadeshi Movement was made.**

- The message was propagated to boycott goods such as **Manchester cloth and Liverpool salt**.
- After the partition came into force, widespread opposition was shown by the people of Bengal by singing **Vande Mataram**.
  - Rabindranath Tagore also composed **Amar Sonar Bangla**.
  - People tied **Rakhis** on each other's hands as a symbol of unity.
- Although the movement was confined majorly to Bengal, it spread to a few different parts of India:
  - In Poona and Bombay under **Bal Gangadhar Tilak**
  - In Punjab under **Lala Lajpat Rai and Ajit Singh**
  - In Delhi under **Syed Haider Raza**
  - In Madras under **Chidambaram Pillai**.

▪ **Congress Reaction:**

- The Indian National Congress (INC) in a meeting in 1905 resolved to **condemn the partition of Bengal** and support the anti-partition and Swadeshi Movement.
- The radical nationalists wanted the movement to be taken outside Bengal and go beyond just the boycott of foreign goods.
  - However, the moderates, dominating the Congress, were unwilling to go that far.
- In the 1906 **Congress Session held at Calcutta**, the INC under the presidency of **Dadabhai Naoroji declared self-government or Swaraj as the goal of INC**.

▪ **Rise of the Radical Nationalists:**

- The Extremists (or the **Garam Dal**) gained a dominant influence over the Swadeshi Movement in Bengal after 1905 till 1908; it is also known as the **"Era of Passionate Nationalists"**.
- [Lala Lajpat Rai](#), [Bal Gangadhar Tilak](#) and Bipin Chandra Pal (**Lal-Bal-Pal**) were important leaders of this Radical group.
- The reasons for the same were:
  - Failure of the Moderate-led Swadeshi movement.
  - Divisive tactics of the governments of East Bengal and Western Bengal.
  - Violent measures of the British to suppress the movement.
- In addition to boycotting the Extremists gave a call for boycotting government schools and colleges, government service, courts, legislative councils, municipalities, government titles, etc.
- Tilak gave the slogan **"Freedom is my birthright and I shall have it"**.

▪ **Participation of People:**

- **Students:** School and college students were the **most active participants of the movement**.
  - Student participation was visible in Bengal, Poona (Maharashtra), Guntur (Andhra Pradesh), Madras and Salem (Tamil Nadu).
  - The police adopted a repressive attitude towards the students. The students found guilty were fined, expelled, beaten, arrested and disqualified for government jobs and scholarships.
- **Women:** Traditionally home-centered women too took active part in the movement.
- **Stand of Muslims:** Some of the muslims participated, however, most of the upper and middle class muslims stayed away.
  - They **supported the partition** on the belief that it would provide them a Muslim-majority East Bengal.

## Impact of Swadeshi Movement

- **Decline in Imports:** It resulted in significant decline in the foreign imports during 1905-1908.
- **Growth of Extremism:** Movement resulted in growth of extreme nationalism amongst youth which took to violence and wanted to bring an instant end to British dominance.
- **Morley-Minto Reforms:** It forced British dispensation to offer some concessions to Indians in forms of [Morley-Minto reforms](#) in 1909.
  - [Gopal Krishna Gokhale](#) played an important role in framing these reforms.
- **Establishment of Swadeshi Institutions:** Inspired by Rabindranath Tagore's **Shantiniketan**, the Bengal National College and a number of national schools and colleges in various parts of the

country were set up.

- In August 1906, the **National Council of Education** was set up to organise the national education system.
- A **Bengal Institute of Technology** was set up for technical education.
- **Growth in Swadeshi Industries:** It led to establishments of swadeshi textile mills, soap and match factories, tanneries, banks, insurance companies, shops, etc.
  - It also revived the Indian Cottage Industry.
  - Indian industries saw regeneration with reawakening of use of indigenous goods.
- **Boycott of Buyers and Sellers:** The foreign goods including clothing, sugar, salt and various other luxury items were not only boycotted, but they were also burned.
  - The Swadeshi movement also led to social boycott of not only buyers but also sellers of foreign goods.

### The Gradual Suppression of the Swadeshi Movement

- **Government Repression:** By 1908, the Swadeshi Movement was almost over in an open phase due to government's violent repression.
- **Absence of Leaders and Organisation:** The movement failed to create an effective organisation. It was rendered leaderless as most of the leaders were either arrested or deported by the time.
  - Maintaining the high intensity of such a mass movement was a difficult task in absence of effective leaders.
- **Internal Conflicts:** The internal conflicts and difference in ideologies among the leaders did more harm to the movement than good.
- **Limited Extent:** The movement failed to reach the peasantry and was confined to the upper and middle classes only.

### Annulment of Partition of Bengal

- The partition of Bengal was annulled in 1911 by **Lord Hardinge** primarily to curb the revolutionary terrorism.
- Bihar and Orissa were taken out of Bengal and Assam was made a separate province.
- The annulment was not taken well by the Muslims, consequently, the British **shifted the administrative capital from Calcutta to Delhi**, as the place was associated with Muslim glory.