



Mains Practice Question

Q. The onset of the twentieth century marks a shift from middle-class intelligentsia towards masses in the national movement. Comment. (250 words)

05 Mar, 2019 GS Paper 1 History

Approach

- Introduce with overall nature of the national movement.
- Comment on a shift in national movement participation from middle-class intelligentsia towards masses during the onset of the twentieth century

Introduction

- The Indian national movement was undoubtedly one of the biggest mass movements modern societies have ever seen. It was basically the result of a fundamental contradiction between the interest of the Indian people and that of British colonialism. The Indian people were able to see that India was regressing economically and undergoing a process of underdevelopment coupled with exploitation of Indians at the hands of colonisers. This anti-colonial ideology and critique of colonialism was disseminated during the mass phase of the movement.

Body

A shift in the nature of Indian National movement from middle-class intelligentsia towards masses -

- **Apprehensions of the early intelligentsia:** They early leaders, mostly from middle class intelligentsia were not in favour of including masses in the movements, due to their apprehensions regarding educational and political awareness of masses. This made their fight limited with a narrow social base, mostly limited to the urban community.
- **Economic hardships faced by masses:** This laid the foundation for a powerful nationalist agitation against the British colonial rule which started in the 20th century under the leadership of Tilak, Lajpat Rai, Mahatma Gandhi and other leaders. These leaders took the ideas of the 'economic nationalism' to the Indian people and thus mobilized them into the national movement.
- **Bengal partition, Swadeshi and Boycott:** This peculiar form of mass protest of 'swadeshi and boycott' attained popularity among the new members of the Congress and the masses. Attempts were made to achieve mass mobilization and 'samitis' were formed which penetrated deep into the interiors of Bengal spreading the swadeshi message. For the first time in the national movement there was the use of traditional and popular festivals to reach the people. The Ganapati and Shivaji festivals in Maharashtra were employed by Tilak to draw the masses to the movement and educate them about it.
- **Rise of nationalism among masses:**
 - Worldwide upsurge of the concept of nationalism and right of self-determination initiated by French Revolution.
 - Offshoot of modernization initiated by the British in India filtered down to masses from intelligentsia.
 - An attempt was also made by the Indians to oppose the British encroachment in the Indian culture. A feeling of oneness among Indians emerged due to better communication through

printing press, Railways etc.

- **Indian National Congress (INC):** The most important and the foremost objective of this organization was to create the consciousness among the people of belonging to a single nation overcoming the challenges of illiteracy, diverse cultural, linguistic and religious traditions of the land. INC was quite successful in reaching to masses.
- **Appeal of Gandhi ji:** People had faith in his ideas and Satyagraha which attracted them to Gandhian mass movements. Mass mobilization on a wide scale was undertaken during the Gandhian phase of the movement. It was under the leadership of Gandhi that Indian National Movement became a mass movement.
- **The Khilafat and the Non-Cooperation Movement:** The Indian Nationalist movement acquired real mass base for the first time with the participation of peasants, workers, students lawyers, teachers, etc. which further awakened all classes of people exhorting them to participate in Indian national movement in their respective capacities. This carried on through Civil Disobedience movement, Quit India movement, RIN mutiny etc till the independence, playing a crucial role in achieving it.

Conclusion

The Indian national movement acted as a vehicle of social change by redistributing social and economic power within the society. Nationalism, by reducing the hold of traditional way of life and casteism, has been a significant force in bringing social change. It played a liberating role not only against the British government but also against the traditional social structure and provided a feeling of recognition and human dignity among the lowest sections of society.

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