



Mains Practice Question

Q. What was the reason behind Swadeshi movement? Discuss the agitational methods adopted during the movement and impact of the movement. (250 words)

11 Jan, 2019 GS Paper 1 History

Approach

- Introduce the topic by giving background of the movement
- Mention the agitational methods used during the movement
- Discuss the impact that the movement had during and after it took place

Answer

Introduction

- Swadeshi movement was one of the most successful movements of Pre-Gandhian era.
- Movement finds itself in the backdrop of the mendicant policies of the early nationalist leaders who resisted the Un-British like rule in India but believed in the English monarchy per se.
- Major cause of Swadeshi movement can be attributed to the partition of Bengal in 1905 which was seen by the Indian nationalist as a divisionary tactics of Britishers to weaken the Bengali (Bhadralok) intelligentsia class which was seen as a cradle of Indian resistance.

Other Reasons

- There were however multiple other reasons that led to discontent amongst Indians like:-
- Growing awareness about the economic exploitation by Britishers of Indian masses through drain of wealth theory.
- Diverting fund for railways and police instead of education and famines.
- Passing of Indian university commission Act 1904 which increased the official control over universities by increasing the nominated elements over the elected ones.
- Punjab land alienation Act of 1900 which prohibited any sale or purchase of land for 15 years by non-peasants.
- Calcutta Corporation Act of 1899 through through which strength of the elected members was reduced, thereby giving a majority to the European members. Thus the Calcutta Corporation came to be known as Anglo Indian house.
- Britishers also underestimated the unity of Bengali people and thought that there would not be much resistance.

Agitational methods

- The movement saw variety of methods and instruments which were unheard in Indian national resistance.
- Initially movement adopted passive resistance such as filling petitions, organising prayers, meetings, peaceful strikes, distributing propaganda pamphlets etc.
- Hindu-Muslims tied threads to each other hands to show unity between both the religions, many people fasted to show resistance.

- However as the movement gained momentum more active form of resistance started to take place in form of organized and relentless boycott of English cloth, products, picketing of shops, workers refusing to work for Europeans, labor's strike particularly in Bengal.
- Giving up of Anglo-education and promoting vernacular literature through opening of schools, colleges such as Bengal national college.
- Promotion of indigenous industries such as PC Ray's Bengal chemicals, VO Chidambaram Pillai's Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company etc.
- Imaginative use of religion for invoking spirit of righteousness by calling Britishers as evil and opening resistance against them through celebration of Shivaji Mahotsav, Ganesh Utsav.
- Various samitis came up in many parts of Bengal such as Swadesh Bandhab Samiti, Dacca Anushilan Samitis etc which mobilized people at mass level by engaging in various types of activities such as social work during famines, festivals; preaching swadeshi message, organizing crafts, setting up arbitration courts etc.
- The resistance could also be seen in cultural sphere in literature and songs of Rabindranath Tagore, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's vande matram; Abindranath Tagore broke the dominance of Victorian art form and took to Indian styles of painting; JC Bose's study in the field of biology filled Indians with sense of pride and achievement.

Impact of the movement

- People from all walks of life participated in the movement with the greatest contribution coming from students and women.
- It resulted in significant decline in the foreign imports during 1905-1908.
- It led to building of self-reliance or Atma Shakti asserting on national dignity, honor and confidence.
- The Swadeshi movement led the people to learn to challenge and disobey the British government explicitly without fearing the atrocities of the police and imprisonment.
- Movement received wide coverage through newspapers and got attention at national level highlighting the true nature of British rule.
- The movement however also set the undertones for communal disharmony by invoking religious sentiments, setting foundation for Muslim League.
- Movement resulted in growth of extreme nationalism amongst youth which took to violence and wanted to bring an instant end to British dominance.
- It forced British dispensation to offer some concession to Indians in forms of Morley-Minto reforms in 1909.
- Most of all its concept of constructive swadeshi and boycott was actively used by Gandhi in later nationalist movements.