***The growth of Nationalism***

For India, the making of national identity was a long process whose roots can be drawn from the ancient era. India as a whole had been ruled by emperors like Ashoka and Samudragupta in ancient times and Akbar to Aurangzeb in Medieval times. But, it was only in the 19th Century that the concept of a national identity and national consciousness emerged. This growth was intimately connected to the anti-colonial movement. The social, economic and political factors had inspired the people to define and achieve their national identity. People began discovering their unity in the process of their struggle against colonialism.

The sense of being oppressed under colonial rule provided a shared bond that tied different groups together. Each class and group felt the effects of colonialism differently. Their experiences were varied, and their notions of freedom were not always the same. Several other causes also contributed towards the rise and growth of Nationalism. One set of laws of British Government across several regions led to political and administrative unity. This strengthened the concept of citizenship and one nation among Indians. Economic exploitation by the British agitated other people to unite and react against British Government’s control over their lives and resources. The social and religious reform movements of the 19th century also contributed to the feeling of Nationalism. Swami Vivekananda, Annie Besant, Henry Derozio revived the glory of ancient India, created faith among the people in their religion and culture and thus gave the message of love for their motherland. The intellectual and spiritual side of Nationalism was voiced by persons like Bankim Chandra Chatterji, Swami Dayanand Saraswati and Aurobindo Ghosh. Bankim Chandra’s hymn to the Motherland, *‘Vande Matram’*became the rallying cry of patriotic nationalists. It inspired generations to supreme self-sacrifice. Simultaneously, it created a fear in the minds of the British. The impact was so strong that the British had to ban the song. Similarly, Swami Vivekananda’s message to the people, “Arise, awake and stop not till the goal is reached”, appealed to the Indians. It acted as a potent force in the course of Indian Nationalism.

Around this time many organizations were being formed which raised their voices against British rule. Most of these organizations were regional in nature. Some of these organizations were very active such as Bengal Indian Association, Bengal Presidency Association, Pune Public Meeting, etc. However it was felt that if these regional organizations could work jointly it would help the Indian masses to raise their voices against the British Rule. This led to the formation of Indian National Congress in the year 1885.

***The foundation of the INC***

The Indian National Congress was founded by Allan Octavian Hume in 1885. Hume was a retired Civil Service Officer. He saw a growing political consciousness among the Indians and wanted to give it a safe, constitutional outlet so that their resentment would not develop into popular agitation against the British rule in India. He was supported in this scheme by the Viceroy, Lord Dufferin, and by a group of eminent Indians. Womesh Chandra Banerjee of Calcutta was elected as the first President. The Indian National Congress represented an urge of the politically conscious Indians to set up a national organization to work for their betterment. Its leaders had complete faith in the British Government and in its sense of justice. They believed that if they would place their grievances before the government reasonably, the British would certainly try to rectify them. Among the liberal leaders, the most prominent were Firoz Shah Mehta, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Dada Bhai Naoroji, Ras Behari Bose, Badruddin Tayabji, etc. From 1885 to 1905, the Indian National Congress had a very narrow social base. Its influence was confined to the urban educated Indians.

The early aims of this organization were limited only to communicate with British government on behalf of the Indian people and voice their grievances. It was rightly called the era of the Moderates. You will soon find out why?

**Initial stages of Indian National Congress**

The congress placed its demands before the government always in the form of petitions and worked within the framework of law. It was for this reason that the early Congress leaders were referred to as ‘Moderates’. During its first twenty years the Congress made moderate demands. The members placed their demands before the Government always in the form of petitions and worked within the framework of law. It was for this reason that the early Congress leaders were referred to as ‘Moderates’ They asked for: (a) representative legislatures, (b) Indianization of services, (c) reduction of military expenditure, (d) education, employment and holding of the ICS (Indian Civil Services) examination in India, (e) decrease in the burden of the cultivators, (f) defense of civil rights, (g) separation of the judiciary from the executive, (h) change in the tenancy laws, (i) reduction in land revenue and salt duty, (j) policies to help in the growth of Indian industries and handicrafts, (k) introduction of welfare programmes for the people.

Unfortunately, their efforts did not bring many changes in the policies and administration of the British in India. In the beginning, the Britishers had a favourable attitude towards the Congress. But, by 1887, this attitude began to change. They did not fulfill the demands of the Moderates. The only achievement of the Congress was the enactment of the Indian Councils Act, 1892 that enlarged the legislature by adding a few non- official members and passing of a resolution for holding Indian Civil Services Examination simultaneously in London and in India. Many leaders gradually lost faith in the Constitutional process. Even though the Congress failed to achieve its goal, it succeeded in creating national awakening and instilling in the minds of the Indian people a sense of belonging to one Nation. They provided a forum for the Indians to discuss major national issues. By criticizing the government policies, they gave the people valuable political training. Though, They were not ready to take aggressive steps which would bring them in direct conflict with the Government. The most significant achievement was the foundation of a strong national movement.

The Britishers who were earlier supporting the Moderates soon realized that the movement could turn into a National force that would drive them out of the country. This totally changed their attitude. They passed strict laws to control education and curb the press. Minor concessions were given so as to win over some Congress leaders. The British Viceroy, Lord Curzon was a staunch imperialist and believed in the superiority of the English people. He passed an Act in 1898, making it an offence to provoke people against the British rulers. He passed the Indian Universities Act in 1904, imposing stiff control over Indian Universities. Curzon was out to suppress the rising Nationalism in India.

***The Muslim League***

As the radical movement grew stronger the British began to look for ways and means to break the unity among Indian. They tried to do this through the partition of Bengal and by sowing the seed of communalism among Indian people. They motivated Muslims to form a permanent political association of their own. In December, 1906, during the Muhammadan Educational conference in Dacca, Nawab Salim Ullah Khan raised the idea of establishing a Central Muhammadan Association to take care of Muslim interests. Accordingly, on 30th December, 1906, the All India Muslim League was founded. Another prominent person, Aga Khan was chosen as its president. The main objective of the league was to protect and advance the rights of Muslims in India and represent their needs to the government. By encouraging the issue of separate electorates, the government sowed the seed of communalism and separatism among Indians. The formation of the Muslim League is considered to be the first fruit of the British master strategy of ‘Divide and Rule’. Mohammad Ali Jinnah later joined the League.

***The separation of Bengal***

Curzon announced the partition of Bengal. The reason for partition was given as an attempt to improve administration. But the real aim was to ‘Divide and Rule’. The partition was done in order to create a separate State for Muslims and so introduce the poison of communalism in the country. However the Indians viewed the partition as an attempt by the British to disrupt the growing national movement in Bengal and divide the Hindus and Muslims of the region. Widespread agitation ensued in the streets and in the press. People of different parts of India opposed the partition of Bengal all over the country. This opposition was carried on by organized meetings, processions and demonstrations etc. Hindus and Muslims tied *‘rakhi’*on each other’s hands to show their unity and their protest.

The use of Swadeshi (made in our own country by our own people) goods, business, national education and Indian languages were encouraged. The new nationalist spirit of self reliance- shed the fear of repression including imprisonment and painful torture by the British rule. It was Bal Gangadhar Tilak who realized the importance of boycott as a weapon that could be used to paralyze the whole British administrative machinery in India. The boycott and Swadeshi movements were instrumental in the establishment of swadeshi enterprises - textile mills, banks, hosiery, tanneries, chemical works and insurance companies. Swadeshi stores were opened. Volunteers supplied goods at the doorstep of every household. The movement spread to all classes and groups of people. Everyone, including women and children, came forward to take part. The most active were school and college students. This made the British reverse the partition of Bengal and unite it in 1911. During this time, the role of Radical Nationalists in the Indian National Congress, who were called the *‘Garam Dal’,*came to be appreciated. They tried to involve people from all classes and groups including peasants, worker, students as well as women. They succeeded in uniting the Indian people against the common enemy - the British. The young people were roused to the highest level of patriotism and zeal to free their country. They helped in making people self confident and self reliant. They also revived the Indian Cottage industry.

***The Morley – Minto Reforms***

Do you remember reading about the Indian Councils Act 1892, which enlarged the legislature by adding members to the Central Legislative Assembly? The Council Act of 1909 was an extension of the 1892 reforms, also known as the Morley-Minto Reforms after the names of the then Secretary of State (Lord Morley) and the then Viceroy (Lord Minto). It increased the members of the Legislative Assembly from sixteen to sixty. A few non-elected members were also added. Though the members of the Legislative Council were increased, they had no real powers. They remained mainly advisory in character. They could not stop any bills from being passed. Nor did they have any power over the budget.

The British made another calculated move to sow the seed of communalism in Indian politics by introducing separate electorates for the Muslims. This meant that from the constituencies dominated by Muslims only Muslim candidates could be elected. Hindus could only vote for Hindus, and Muslims could only vote for Muslims. Many leaders protested against this communal electorate policy of the British to ‘Divide and Rule’.