

- The inaugural session of the Indian National Congress held on Monday, 28 December 1885 attended by seventy-two persons in the hall of Gokuldas Tejpal Sanskrit College in Bombay.
- After establishment of British rule in India the lower strata of social & economic hierarchy expressed their resentment by sporadic uprisings – against the zamindars, moneylenders & tax collectors.
- But, broadly speaking, these were protests against the system built by the British.
- The failure of this Revolt revealed the inadequacy of the traditional method of protest.
- It also showed that the old aristocratic classes could not be the saviours of Indian society.
- The English educated middle class seemed to be the hope of the future.
- The agitation carried on by this class was of a completely different character.
- It was also familiar with European liberal ideas of that period.
- It had a sense of pride in the country's glorious past & gradually developed the conviction that foreign domination was inherently opposed to the fulfilment of legitimate hopes & aspirations of the Indian people.
- A perception of identity in the interests of people inhabiting different parts of the Indian subcontinent was also growing.
- The educated Indians believed that their grievances would be redressed by the benevolent rulers if they could draw their attention to them.
- In the beginning, the middle class agitation was confined to ventilation of some specific political & economic grievances and demands.

ART & LITERATURE

- During this period, ideas of nationalism & patriotism were given popular form in songs, poems & plays.
- Many of the songs were composed for the Hindu Mela which was organised for some years from 1867 onwards by a group of Bengali leaders.
- The purpose was to spread nationalist ideas & promote indigenous arts and crafts.
- In the process British policies were blamed for deteriorating the economic conditions of the people
- The need to use swadeshi goods was also emphasised
- In a play that became popular around 1860s entitled Neel Darpan (Dinabandhu Mitra) atrocities committed by indigo planters were highlighted.

- The most important name in this context is that of Bankim Chandra Chatterji who wrote a historical novels highlighting the tyranny of the rulers.
- His most well known work is Anandmath (1882) which also contains his immortal song 'Vande Matram' composed a few years earlier (1875).
- Bhartendu Harishchandra, who is regarded as the father of modern Hindi, in his plays, poems & journalistic writings, put forward a plea for using swadeshi things.

NEWSPAPERS & JOURNAL

- Some well-known English language papers of this period were Amrita Bazar Patrika, Hindoo Patriot & Sorn Prakash, published from Calcutta — Indu Prakash & Native Opinion from Bombay & The Hindu from Madras.
- Some important papers published in Hindi were Hindustan, Bharat Mitra & Jagat Mitra.
- Jam-e-Jahan Numa & Khushdil Akhbar were well known Urdu newspapers.
- Signs of growing political awakening & feeling of oneness

POLITICAL ASSOCIATIONS BEFORE 1885

- The beginning of organized political activity in India generally dates back to the establishment of landholders' society in 1837 - an association of landholders of Bengal, Bihar & Orissa & its principal objective was to guard its class interests
- In 1843 – 'Bengal British India society' was formed. Its objective was wider, i.e. to protect & promote general public interests.
- The landholders' society represented the aristocracy of wealth.
- The Bengal British India society represented the aristocracy of intelligence.
- In 1851 the two associations were merged, giving rise to a new one, named the British Indian Association.
- At this time the Charter of the British East India Company was due for renewal & a need was felt to make the views of Indians known to the authorities in London.
- Associations were also formed in Bombay and Madras – called the Bombay Association & the Madras Native Association respectively and were established in 1852.
- All these associations were dominated by wealthy landed gentry.
- Similar, but lesser known associations were established in other parts of India too. For example Deccan Association.
- The three Presidency associations sent petitions suggesting changes in East India Company's Charter.

- These suggestions gives a good idea of the attitude of the publically conscious classes in India at that time

DEMANDS OF THE ASSOCIATIONS

- Indians should be appointed to the legislative bodies.
- Company's monopoly of salt & indigo should be abolished & the state should give aid to indigenous industry.
- Bigger share for Indians in the administration , preservation of existing interests in land , improve the condition of peasants.
- British Indian Association , acknowledged 'the blessings of an improved form of govt ' & they had 'not profited by their connection with Great Britain to the extent which they had a right to look for'.
- Many of their demands were later taken up by the Congress.
- The Poona Sarvajanik Sabha, established by – M.G. Ranade, G.V. Joshi, S.H. Chiplankar & his associates in 1870, proved to be the most important.
- This Sabha brought out a journal from 1878 which did much for arousing political consciousness.
- To carry on political propaganda in England, some Indian students like Pherozeshah Mehta, Badruddin Tyabji, Dadabhai Naoroji & Manmohan Ghose founded the 'East India Association' in December, 1866.
- The half century from the establishment of 'Landholders society' in 1837 was more a period of aspirations than of achievements.
- The need for a national platform began to be keenly felt.
- In calcutta, dissatisfaction with the 'British Indian Association' had been growing
- Its subscription was Rs. 50 per annum which was too high for the middle class.
- According to Lord Curzon's estimate per capita income in British India in 1898 was Rs. 30 per annum.
- In 1876 the 'Indian Association' was founded in Calcutta — membership fee was kept at five rupees, per annum.
- It soon became very popular amongst the educated people and became a major force in Bengal and subsequently in Indian politics
- Surendranath Banerjea, a young member of the middle class , ejected from the Indian Civil Service on what appeared to be insufficient grounds was mainly responsible for its establishment
- The aims of the Indian Association included — developing a strong public opinion, promoting Hindu-Muslim friendship, establishing contact with masses and generating wider awareness amongst the Indian people.
- According to, Surendranath Banerjea, the new association was based on the conception of United

India derived from the inspiration of Mazzini' – the main architect of the Italian Unification.

- Madras Mahajan Sabha, the Bombay Presidency Association, the Allahabad People's Association, the Indian Association of Lahore etc.
- After 1885 these became the regional arms of the Congress.

BRITISH RESPONSE LYTTON

- The British Govt took a note of the growing political discontact . This was reflected in the policies pursued by Lord Lytton — came to India in 1876.
- Lytton followed openly reactionary & anti-Indian policies.
- These afforded opportunities to the Indian Association to organize a number of all-India political agitations.
- Lytton sent an expensive expedition of Afghanistan which was financed out of Indian revenues.
- He removed import duties on cotton textiles to benefit British cloth industry at the cost of the nascent Indian textile industry
- He viewed the aspirations of educated Indians with contempt.
- The maximum age for appearing in the Indian Civil Service examination was reduced from 21 to 19 years.
- Since the examination was held only in London, it was in any case difficult for the Indians to take this examination.
- Surendranath undertook a tour of different parts of the country in 1877-78 and acquired all India fame.
- The Association also sent a popular barrister, Lal Mohan Ghose, to England to present a memorial.
- Public meetings were organised to protest against the passing of the Vernacular Press Act (1878) & the Arms Act(1878)
- Amrita Bazar Patrika – published in Bengali till then, changed overnight into an English medium Formation so as to escape the restrictions imposed under this Act.
- Under the Arms Act, Indians were made to pay a license fee in order to possess a weapon but Europeans and Eurasians were exempted from doing so
- Special concessions were also given to landholders

RIPON

- In 1880.
- His approach was different.
- He held that the educated Indians possessed legitimate aspirations in keeping with their education & the pledges given by the British Parliament from time to time in this regard should be honoured
- According to Ripon, Lytton's administration, had given the impression 'rightly or wrongly' that the interests of the natives of India were in all ways to be sacrificed to those of England.

- He wanted to harness the talents of the educated classes for strengthening British Rule.
- He repealed the Vernacular Press Act, promoted local self-government institutions, encouraged the spread of education & brought the Afghan War to an end
- His policy, however, could not proceed beyond certain limits
- The Criminal Procedure amendment Bill, or the Ilbert Bill as it came to be called after the name of the Law Member in Viceroy's Council was in essence a measure putting Indian Judges on the same footing as Europeans in dealing with all cases in the Bengal Presidency.
- It involved the possibility of trial of Europeans by Indian judges for criminal offences without a jury. It also gave right to Europeans to appeal to the High Court if they were not satisfied
- Government had to bow before this hostile opinion and the Ilbert Bill was amended in such a manner that its very purpose was defeated
- During the early 1880s the idea of a national organisation had become an important topic for discussion in the Indian press. The Ilbert Bill controversy seemed to reinforce this need.
- In July 1883, the Indian Association held a meeting – attended by some 10,000 persons. Here it was decided that 'a national fund' with the aim of securing the political advancement of the country
- The drive for national fund yielded only Rs. 20,000.
- But it sparked off widespread debate in the press that coordinated political action was called for & representatives of different political associations should meet annually in big cities of the country
- In December 1883 an International Exhibition was scheduled to be held in Calcutta.
- The Indian Association decided to take advantage of this event and invited prominent public men and associations in different parts of the country to meet and discuss
- Such a Conference was held from 28 to 31 December 1883 & was called the National Conference.
- It was not a very representative or influential gathering. But it is significant that the programme adopted here was very similar to the one adopted by the Indian National Congress later
- It provided an opportunity to educated Indians from about forty -five different places to meet and exchange views.
- It has been described as the precursor of the Indian National Congress of 'the dress rehearsal' for it.

EDUCATED PEOPLE

- The 'educated middle classes', the 'professional classes', the 'English educated elite' or the 'intelligentsia' — took part in political organisation

- Inspired by national consciousness & a pride in the glory of the past, the middle class started constitutional agitation for political rights.
- Its growth was so gradual that it was hardly noticed at the initial stages.
- Its social & economic roots did not lie in industry or commerce, instead this class had its roots in tenurial landholding, govt service or professions.
- This section took pride in calling itself the middle class, i.e. a section of society which was below the zamindars but above the toilers.
- It looked forward to playing the same role which the middle class had played in the west
- The members of the middle class belonged to that section of society which could not be called poor and they were normally from higher castes.
- It should however, be noted that all high caste people did not enjoy a high economic status in society
- In Bengal & many other parts of India it was customary for well-to-do families to employ Brahmins as cooks.
- Similarly in Bombay, according to figures collected in 1864, 10,000 beggars were listed as Chitpavan or Saraswat Brahmins.
- The ideology of this class was not one of defending its own privileges either in terms of education or in terms of social status.
- In the Indian context, the term 'educated middle class' stood for groups which acquired western education and began to assert some kind of regional or national leadership.
- Lord Dufferin, the Viceroy, once remarked that it was 'a microscopic minority'.
- It was a minority that had common ideals and used similar idiom and could take a broad all-India view.

FOUNDATION OF CONGRESS

FIRST MEETING

- The credit for organizing the first meeting of the Indian National Congress goes to A.O. Hume.
- He was a retired Civil servant who had chosen to stay back in India after retirement.
- He was on very good terms with Lord Ripon & shared his view that the emergence of the educated class should be accepted as a political reality & that timely steps should be taken to provide legitimate outlets to the grievances of this class
- Early in December 1884 he reached Bombay to bid farewell to Ripon.
- He stayed on there for three months & during this period he discussed with the leaders who were influential in the Presidency, the programme of political action to be adopted by the educated Indians.
- In March 1885 it was decided that a conference of the Indian National Union would be convened at Poona during the Christmas week.

- Poona decided, because it was centrally located & the Executive Committee of the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha expressed readiness to make arrangements for the conference & provide necessary funds
- The venue had to be shifted to Bombay because of the outbreak of cholera in Poona
- The first meeting was held on Monday, 28 December 1885 in Gokuldas Tejpal Sanskrit College, Bombay.
- It was attended by 100 men of whom 72 were non-officials & were recognized as members
- The honour of being the first ever Congress President belonged to W.C. Bonnerjee of Bengal.
- He was one of the first four Indian Barristers & one of the foremost legal luminaries in his day.
- His election established the healthy precedent that the President should be chosen from a province other than the one in which the Congress was being held.

PRESIDENTIAL SPEECH

- Speech of the first Congress President was aimed at stating explicitly the scope, character and objectives of the Congress.
- He described the objectives as:
 - Promotion of personal intimacy & friendship amongst the countrymen,
 - Eradication of all possible prejudices relating to race, creed or provinces, consolidation of sentiments of national unity
 - Recording of the opinions of educated classes on pressing problems of the day, & laying down lines for future course of action in public interest.
- President enumerated the blessings conferred by 'the British on India.
- He assured that the educated Indians were thoroughly loyal & consistent well-wishers of the Govt.
- He clarified that their purpose in organizing the Congress was to represent their views to the ruling authorities & it was wrong to condemn them as a nest of conspirators & disloyalties.
- They accepted Hume's leadership because most of the members of the British community in India distrusted educated Indians.
- The Congress leaders had tremendous faith in the British sense of justice.
- They were not thinking in terms of expelling the British.
- All they wanted was that the policies adopted by the Govt of India should aim at the welfare & good of Indians.

PARTICIPATION

- It is often argued that the lawyers predominated in the Congress.
- Historian Anil Seal points out that – 39 out of 72 — were lawyers & in future more than one-third of the delegates to every Congress session belonged to the legal professions.

- The old aristocracy- people like rajas, maharajas, big zamindars and very wealthy merchants were conspicuous by their absence.
- Nor did the peasants or artisans feel attracted towards it.
- The fact that the lawyers predominated cannot be denied.
- But this is more or less true of political organisations & legislatures everywhere.
- In India the problem became compounded by the fact that very few careers were open to educated Indians.
- Therefore, a very big number adopted the legal profession.
- The old aristocratic class did not participate in the Congress proceedings because it felt threatened by new liberal and nationalist ideas

PROCEEDINGS & RESOLUTIONS

- When the Congress came to discuss the condition of the people, it resolved that the first step should be the granting of representative institutions.
- The resolutions were moved discussed & passed in accordance with strict parliamentary procedure.
- Each resolution was proposed by a member belonging to one province, then seconded by a member belonging to another province and was supported by members from other provinces.
- The speeches were marked by moderation, earnestness and expressions of loyalty to the Crown.
- Historian Briton Martin (New India: 1885) comments that the first Congress was 'a distinctly professional affair, which would have been comparable political meeting held in England or the United States
- The first congress adopted nine resolutions:
 - 1) Appointment of a Royal Commission for enquiring into Indian affairs on which Indians would be adequately represented.
 - 2) Abolition of the Indian Council of the Secretary of State for India. Secretary should be responsible directly to the British Parliament.
 - 3) Condemned the annexation of Upper Burma
 - 4) Liberalising the Constitution & functions of the Legislative Councils,
 - 5) Holding of simultaneous examination for the Civil Service in Britain and India and the need to reduce expenditure on the army, etc.
- The Congress took two more decisions:
 - i. An attempt should be made to get the resolutions passed at the Congress session ratified by 'political associations throughout the country.
 - ii. Congress would meet at Calcutta on 28 December, 1886

CONTROVERSIES RELATING TO ITS ORIGIN

- As congress have earned a very popular name in the history of India, it was natural that contemporary opinion as well as subsequent historians should

have speculated about the reasons which led to its establishment.

- The foundation of the INC can be explained in terms of the alternative positions of:
 - 1) Official conspiracy theory
 - 2) Ambitions & rivalries of Indian elites
 - 3) Growth of feeling that there should be an all-India political body
- An all-India political organization was given concrete & final shape by an Englishman – A.O. Hume - has given rise to many speculations.
- Moreover, Hume was not just any Englishman: he belonged to the Indian Civil Service.
- The memories of the great revolt of 1857 were still fresh.

OFFICIAL CONSPIRACY THEORY

- Hume himself had said that his aim was to provide, to use his own expression, a safety valve' providing control to the "great & growing forces generated by" the British themselves.
- This has been juxtaposed with W.C. Bonnerjee's statement that Hume was acting under the direct advice of Dufferin.
- The aim of which was to provide a peaceful & constitutional outlet to the discontent amongst the educated Indians & thus provide against the threat to the Raj.
- Private papers to Lord Dufferin, show that Hume's views were not taken very seriously by British officials.
- Hume's motives were nobler than just creation of a 'safety valve' with a view to provide safe outlets to educated Indians discontent.

- From 1885 to 1906 he was the general secretary of the Congress & helped in guiding, shaping, coordinating & recording its activities
- Hume was by no means responsible for bringing about changes in the social & political milieu, which, in a broader sense, made the foundation & survival of a national organisation possible
- Hume was only a strong means for the realisation of the aspirations of the fairly large, & articulate middle class that was clamouring for sharing positions of responsibility with the British.
- One reason could be that being an Englishman he was free from regional prejudices.
- But it seems that the more important reason was that Indian leaders wanted to proceed cautiously lest their efforts invite official wrath.

AMBITION & RIVALRIES OF ELITES

- According to Cambridge historians, INC in some ways, not really national, that it was a movement of self-interested individuals & that it functioned as a vehicle for the pursuit of their material interests and parochial rivalries.
- But this argument totally ignores the feeling of hurt caused by racial discrimination, feeling of pride in the achievements of fellow-countrymen & also the slowly growing perception that interests of their countrymen would be better served if relations between Britain & India were restructured
- Identity in aspirations and frustrations under an alien rule had strengthened these bonds.
- The first generation Congress leaders were conscious of that British brought to India many liberal values & a complete break with them might not be in the interest of their countrymen