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The Swadeshi and Nationalist Movement: Growth of Education and Unemployment

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Chapter 10: The Swadeshi Movement: 1903 - 1908, Nationalist Movement 1905 - 1918

Reasons for the growth of militant nationalism (this is different from revolutionary terrorism)

Disillusionment of the Nationalists with Moderate Policies

- The moderates thought that the British could be reformed from within
- Politically conscious Indians were convinced that the purpose of the British rule was to exploit India economically
- The nationalists realized that Indian industries could not flourish except under an Indian government
- Disastrous famines from 1896 to 1900 took a toll of over 90 lakh lives
- The Indian Councils Act of 1892 was a disappointment
- The Natu brothers were deported in 1897 without trial
- In 1897 B G Tilak was sentenced to long term imprisonment for arousing the people against the government
- In 1904, the Indian Official Secrets Act was passed restricting the freedom of the Press
- Primary and technical education was not making any progress
- Thus, increasing number of Indians were getting convinced that self-government was essential for the sake of economic, political and cultural progress of the country

Growth of Self-Respect and Self-Confidence

- Tilak, Aurobindo and Pal preached the message of self-respect
- They said to the people that remedy to their condition lay in their own hand and they should therefore become strong
- Swami Vivekananda's messages

Growth of Education and Unemployment

International Influences

- Rise of modern Japan after 1868
- Defeat of the Italian army by the Ethiopians in 1896 and of Russia by Japan in 1905 exploded the myth of European superiority
- Existence of a Militant Nationalist School of Thought

Partition of Bengal

- With the partition of Bengal, Indian National Movement entered its second stage
- On 20 July 1905, Lord Curzon issued an order dividing the province of Bengal into two parts: Eastern Bengal and Assam with a population of 31 mn and the rest of Bengal with a population of 54 mn.
- Reason given: the existing province of Bengal was too big to be efficiently administered by a single provincial government
- The partition expected to weaken the nerve center of Indian Nationalism, Bengal.
- The partition of the state intended to curb Bengali influence by not only placing Bengalis under two administrations but by reducing them to a minority in Bengal itself as in the new proposed Bengal proper was to have seventeen million Bengali and thirty seven million Oriya and Hindi speaking people.
- The partition was also meant to foster division on the basis of religion.
- Riley, Home Secretary to the GoI, said on December 6,1904 – ‘one of our main objects is to split up and thereby weaken a solid body of opponents to our rule.’
- the nationalists saw it as a deliberate attempt to divide the Bengalis territorially and on religious grounds

The Swadeshi Movement

- The Swadeshi movement had its genesis in the anti-partition movement which was started to oppose the British decision to partition Bengal.
- Mass protests were organized in opposition to the proposed partition.
- Despite the protests, the decision to partition Bengal was announced on July 19,1905
- It became obvious to the nationalists that their moderate methods were not working and that a different kind of strategy was needed.
- Several meetings were held in towns such as Dinajpur Pabna, Faridpur etc. It was in these meetings that the pledge to boycott foreign goods was first taken.

- The formal proclamation of the Swadeshi movement was made on 7 August 1905 in a meeting held in the Calcutta town hall. The famous boycott resolution was passed.
- The leaders like SN Banerjee toured the country urging the boycott of Manchester cloth and Liverpool salt.
- The value of British cloth sold in some of the districts fell by five to fifteen times between September 1904 and September 1905.
- The day the partition took effect – 16 October 1905 – was declared a day of mourning throughout Bengal.
- The movement soon spread to the entire country.

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