

12th History Lesson 2 Notes in English

2] Rise of Extremism and Swadeshi Movement

Introduction

- By the last decade of the nineteenth century, there was conspicuous resentment against moderate politics within the **Indian National Congress**.
- This feeling of resentment eventually evolved into a new trend, referred to as the '**Extremist**' trend.
- The extremist or what we may call radical or militant group was critical of the moderates for their cautious approach and the "**mendicant policy**" of appealing to the British by way of prayers and petitions.
- This form of militancy developed under the leadership of **Bal Gangadhar Tilak** in Maharashtra, **Bipin Chandra Pal** in Bengal and **Lala Lajpat Rai** in the Punjab.
- The primary reasons for the rise of this trend were: **factionalism** in the Congress, frustration with the moderate politics, anger against **Lord Curzon** for dividing Bengal.
- **The partition of Bengal in 1905** – a prime example of the British divide and rule policy – acted as the catalyst for the growth of **anticolonial swadeshi** nationalism.



Swadeshi Movement

- The partition plan was first opposed by moderates but as the movement progressed, different techniques were improvised for the **Swadeshi campaign**.
- Swadeshi constructive programme included boycott of **foreign goods** and **government administered** educational institutions.
- **The Swadeshi movement (1905–1911)** is the most important phase of the **Indian National Movement** in the pre-Gandhian era, as, during the course of the movement, the character of the Indian national movement changed significantly in terms of the stated objectives, methods and in its social base.

- The mass base of the movement was expanded by exposing the problems of various social groups under **the British governance** and the underlying commonality in their lives – that is colonial exploitation.
- For the first time, in the history of Indian national movement, women, workers, peasants, and marginalised groups were exposed to modern nationalist ideas and politics.
- It was a period when the elite made a conscious effort to address the common people, calling upon them to **join politics**.
- The other prominent development during the **Swadeshi period** was the growth of the vernacular press (newspapers published in Indian languages) in various parts of India.
- The nationalistic tone of the vernacular press became more pronounced during this time.
- The role played by **Swadesamitran** in Tamil Nadu, **Kesari** in Maharashtra, **Yugantar** in Bengal are a few examples.
- As the movement gained support among the people, the government passed a series of repressive Acts such as the **Public Meetings Act (1907)**, the **Explosive Substance Act (1908)**, the **Newspaper (Incitement and Offence Act 1908)** and the **Indian Press Act (1910)** to crush the nationalistic activities of any nature.
- One such measure was recording and monitoring of public meetings which were considered a matter of **judicial scrutiny**.
- (**Shorthand** was used by the police for the first time to record political speeches.)
- In this lesson, while discussing **the Bengal** as well as national scenarios, the **Swadeshi Campaigns** conducted in Tamil nadu with particular focus on the role played by V.O. Chidambaram, V.V. Subramaniam, Subramania Siva and Subramania Bharati.

Partition of Bengal

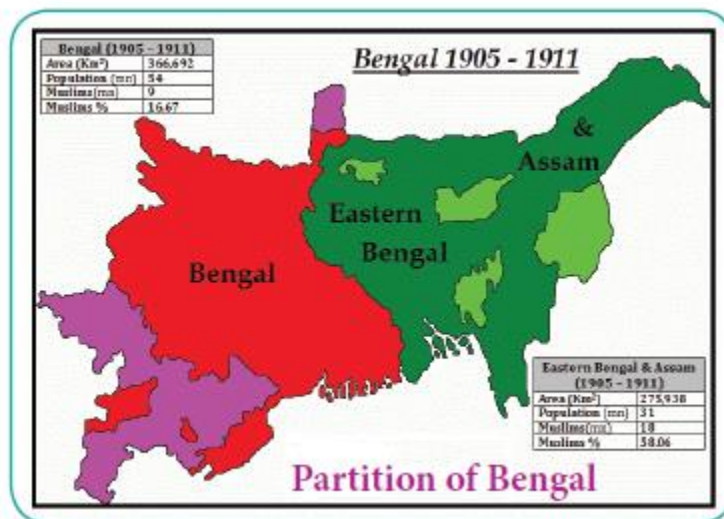
- On January 6, 1899, **Lord Curzon** was appointed the **new Governor General and Viceroy of India**.



Lord Curzon

- This was a time when **British unpopularity** was increasing due to the impact of recurring famine and the plague.
- **Curzon** did little to change the opinion of the educated Indian class.

- Instead of engaging with the nationalist intelligentsia, he implemented a series of repressive measures.
- For instance, he reduced the number of elected Indian representatives in the **Calcutta Corporation (1899)**.
- **The University Act of 1904** brought the Calcutta University under the direct control of the government.
- **The Official Secrets Act (1904)** was amended to curb the nationalist tone of Indian newspapers. Finally, he ordered partition of Bengal in 1905.



- The partition led to widespread protest all across India, starting a new phase of the Indian national movement.
- **Bengal Presidency** as an administrative unit was indeed of unmanageable in size; the necessity of partition was being discussed since the 1860s.
- **The scheme of partition** was revived in March 1890.
- In Assam, when Curzon went on a tour, he was requested by the European planters to make a maritime outlet closer to **Calcutta** to reduce their dependence on the **Assam– Bengal railways**.
- Following this, in December 1903, Curzon drew up a scheme in his Minutes on **Territorial Redistribution of India**, which was later modified and published as the **Risely Papers**.
- The report gave two reasons in support of partition: **Relief of Bengal** and the **improvement of Assam**.
- The report, however, concealed information on how the plan was originally devised for the convenience of **British officials** and the **European businessmen**.
- From December 1903 and 1905 this initial idea of transferring or reshuffling some areas from Bengal was changed to a full-fledged plan of partition.
- The Bengal was to be divided into **two provinces**.

- The new Eastern Bengal and Assam were to include the divisions of **Chittagong**, **Dhaka**, parts of Rajshahi hills of **Tippura**, Assam province and **Malda**.

Aimed at Hindu Muslim Divide

- The intention of **Curzon** was to suppress the political activities against the **British rule in Bengal** and to create a **Hindu–Muslim divide**.
- The government intentionally ignored alternative proposals presented by the civil servants, particularly the idea of dividing Bengal on linguistic basis.
- Curzon rejected this proposal as this would further consolidate the position of the Bengali politicians.
- Curzon was adamant as he wanted to create a clearly segregated Hindu and Muslim population in the divided Bengal.
- Curzon, like many before him, knew very well that there was a clear geographical divide along the river **Bhagirathi**: **eastern Bengal** dominated by the Muslims, and western Bengal dominated by the Hindus and in the central Bengal and the two communities balancing out each other.
- There was a conscious attempt on **the part of British administration** to woo the **Muslim population in Bengal**.
- In his speech at **Dhaka**, in February 1904, Curzon assured the Muslims that in the new province of East Bengal, Muslims would enjoy a unity, which they had never enjoyed since **the days of old Muslim rule**.
- The partition, instead of dividing the Bengali people along the religious line, united them.
- Perhaps the British administration had underestimated the growing feeling of Bengali identity among the people, which cut across caste, class, religion and regional barriers.
- By the end of the nineteenth century, a strong sense of Bengali unity had developed among large sections in the society.
- **Bengali language** had acquired literary status with **Rabindranath Tagore** as the central figure.
- The growth of regional language newspapers played a role in building the narrative of solidarity.
- Similarly, recurring famines, unemployment, and a slump in the economic growth generated an anticolonial feeling.

Anti-Partition Movement

- Both the **militants** and the **moderates** were critical of the **partition of Bengal** ever since it was announced in **December 1903**.
- But the **antipartition** response by leaders like **Surendranath Banerjee**, **K.K. Mitra**, and **Prithwishchandra Ray** remained restricted to prayers and petitions.
- The objective was limited to influencing public opinion in **England** against the partition.
- However, despite this widespread resentment, partition of Bengal was officially declared on 19 July 1905.

- With the failure to stop the partition of Bengal and the pressure exerted by the radical leaders like **Bipin Chandra Pal**, **Aswini Kumar Dutta**, and **Aurobindo Ghose**, the moderate leaders were forced to rethink their strategy, and look for new techniques of protest.

**Bipin Chandra Pal****Aswini Kumar Dutta**

- **Boycott of British goods** was one such method, which after much debate was accepted by the moderate leadership of the **Indian National Congress**.
- So, for the first time, the moderates went beyond their conventional political methods.
- It was decided, at a meeting in Calcutta on 17 July 1905, to extend the protest to the masses.
- In the same meeting, **Surendranath Banerjee** gave a call for the boycott of British goods and intuitions.
- On 7 August, at another meeting at the **Calcutta Town Hall**, a formal proclamation of **Swadeshi Movement** was made.
- However, the **agenda of Swadeshi movement** was still restricted to securing an annulment of the partition and the moderates were very much against utilizing the campaign to start a full-scale passive resistance.
- **The militant nationalists**, on the other hand, were in favour of extending the movement to other provinces too and to launch a full-fledged mass struggle.

Spread of the Movement

- Besides the **organized efforts of the leaders**, there were spontaneous reactions against the partition of Bengal.
- Students, in particular, came out in large numbers.
- Reacting to the increased role of the students in the antipartition agitation, British officials threatened to withdraw the scholarships and grants to those who participated in programmes of direct action.
- In response to this, a call was given to **boycott official educational institutions** and it was decided that efforts were to be made to open national schools.
- Thousands of public meetings were organized in towns and villages across Bengal.
- Religious festivals such as the **Durga Pujas** were utilized to invoke the idea of boycott.
- The day **Bengal** was officially partitioned – **16 Oct 1905** – was declared as a day of mourning.

- Thousands of people took bath in the **Ganga** and marched on **the streets of Calcutta** singing **Bande Mataram**.

Boycott and Swadeshi Movements in Bengal (1905–1911)

- Such efforts, both organized and spontaneous, laid the foundation for a sustained campaign against the British.
- The **boycott** and **swadeshi** were always **interlinked** to each other and part of a wider plan to make **India self-sufficient**.
- G. Subramaniam**, a nationalist leader from **Madras**, succinctly explained the aim of the swadeshi movement as '**a revolt against their state of dependence...in all branches of their national life**'.



G. Subramaniam

- In the words of **Gopal Krishna Gokhale**, 'the swadeshi movement is not only for the improvement of our industry but for an all round enhancement of our national life'
- As the movement progressed, different definitions of Swadeshi appeared.
- However, for the larger part, **the movement of Swadeshi** and **Boycott** was practiced as an **anti-colonial political agitation** and not as a viable method to achieve dignity and freedom in life, a definition which would be later infused with the entry of **Mahatma Gandhi**.

Evolution of the idea of Swadeshi

- During the freedom struggle, the idea of Swadeshi movement was conceptualized first during 1905 by a string of Congress leaders and then later in the 1920s under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi.
- Swadeshi means '**of one's own country**'. The origin of the idea can be traced to 1872 when **Mahadev Govind Ranade**, in a series of lectures in Poona, popularised the idea of Swadeshi.
- According to **Ranade**, the goods produced in one's own country should be given preference even if the use of such goods proved to be less satisfactory.
- In the 1920s **Gandhi** gave a new meaning to the idea of Swadeshi by linking it to the fulfilment of a duty that all Indians owed to the land of their birth.

- For Gandhi, Swadeshi did not merely mean the use of what is produced in **one's own country**.
- Gandhi defined Swadeshi in following words "Swadeshi is that spirit in us which restricts us to the use and service of our immediate surroundings to the exclusion of more remote.
- I should use only things that are produced by my immediate neighbours and serve those industries by making them efficient and complete where they may be found wanting."

(a) Constructive Swadeshi

- The constructive **Swadeshi programmes** largely stressed upon self-help.
- It focused on building alternative **institutions** of self governance that would operate entirely free from British control.
- It also laid emphasis on the need for **self strengthening** of the people which would help in creating a worthy citizen before the launch of political agitations.
- **Rabindranath Tagore** was one of the **central figures** who popularised such ideas through his writings.



Rabindranath Tagore

- He outlined the constructive programme of **atmashakti** (self-help).
- Tagore called for **economic self- development** and insisted that **education** should be provided in **swadeshi languages**.
- He also made the call for utilising **melas**, or **fairs**, to spread the message of **atmashakti**.
- This became the **creed** of the whole of **Bengal** and **swadeshi shops** sprang all over the place selling textiles, handlooms, soaps, earthenware, matches and leather goods.
- On 5 November 1905, at the initiative of the Dawn Society, **the National Council of Education** was formed.
- In August 1906, **Bengal National College** and a **School** were founded.
- A passionate appeal was made by **Satish Chandra** to the students to come out of '**institutions of slavery**.'
- Such efforts, however, failed to attract many due to the bleak job prospects.

(b) Samitis

- The other successful method of **mass mobilization** was the formation of **samitis** (corps of volunteers).
- The samitis were engaged in a range of activities such as **physical** and **moral training** of members, **philanthropic work** during the famines, epidemics, propagation of Swadeshi message during festivals, and organization of indigenous arbitration courts, and schools.
- By its very nature boycott was **passive action** and its aim was to refuse to cooperate with the **British administration**.
- But these mass mobilization efforts failed to flourish as they could not extend their base among the **Muslim peasantry** and the “**Depressed Classes**”.
- Most of the samitis recruited from the **educated middle class** and other **upper caste Hindus**.
- Besides this, the swadeshi campaigners often applied coercive methods, both **social** and **physical**.
- For instance, social boycott of those purchasing **foreign goods** was common and taken up through **caste associations** and other **nationalist organisations**.

Passive Resistance

- From 1906, when the abrogation of partition was no longer in sight, the **Swadeshi Movement** took a different turn.
- For many leaders, the movement was to be utilized for propagating the idea of the **political independence** or **Swaraj across India**.
- The constructive programmes came under heavy criticism from **Aurobindo Ghose, Bipin Chandra Pal**, and other **militant leaders**.
- Under their **new direction**, the **swadeshi agenda** included boycott of foreign goods; boycott of government schools and colleges; boycott of courts; renouncing the titles and relinquishing government services; and recourse to armed struggle if British repression went beyond the limits of endurance.
- The programme of this nature required **mass mobilization**.
- Using religion, combined with the invocation of a **glorious past**, became the essential features of their programmes.

Militant Nationalism

- As pointed out earlier, thanks to the campaigns conducted by **Bal Gangadhar Tilak Bipin Chandra Pal** and **Lala Lajpat Rai**, often referred to as **the Lal–Bal–Pal triumvirate**, Maharashtra, Bengal, Punjab, emerged as the epicentres of militant nationalism during **the Swadeshi phase**.
- **Aurobindo Ghose** was another influential figure in the **militant leadership**.



Aurobindo Ghose

- The nationalism of this form was more assertive compared to **the early Indian nationalism**.
- Both the groups, moderate and militant, were well aware of the evils or the wrong doings of **the British rule**.



Triumvirate : Lal-Bal-Pal

- The moderates, however, worked under the belief that **the British rule** in India could be **reformed** by convincing the rulers through representation and petitioning.
- **The militant nationalist**, on the other hand, was of the opinion that the colonial rulers would never be amenable to reason, as they would not like to give up the advantages of an empire.
- Sometime around 1905, **Aurobindo Ghose** was asked by a man as to how to become a patriot.
- In response Aurobindo pointed to a **wall map of India**, and said "Do you see this map
- It is not a map but the portrait of **Bharat Mata**: its cities and mountains rivers and jungles form her **physical body**.
- All her children are her nerves, large and small.... Concentrate on Bharat as a living mother, worship her with **nine-fold bhakti**."
- **Militant nationalism** also changed the nature of political pressure from the earlier force of public opinion of educated Indians to the protesting masses.
- Despite these changes, the militant nationalism phase retained a continuity from the moderate phase.

- This continuity was evident in the inability to transcend the peaceful method of struggle and for the most parts militant nationalism remained tied to the idea of non-violence.
- However, they appealed to the **patriotic sentiments of the people** using the religious symbols.

Swaraj or Political Independence

- One of the common goals of the militant leaders was to achieve **Swaraj or Self Rule**. However, the leaders differed on the meaning of Swaraj.
- For **Tilak**, Swaraj was restricted to the Indian control over the administration or rule by the natives, but not total severance of relation with Britain.
- In **Bipin Chandra Pal's** view, Swaraj was the attainment of complete freedom from any foreign rule.
- The other point of **departure of the militants** from the moderates was over the rising extremism in **Bengal, Punjab, and Maharashtra**.
- Unlike the moderates, who were critical of the reckless **revolutionaries**, **militant nationalists** were sympathetic towards them.
- However, the political murders and individual acts of terrorism were not approved of by the militant leaders and they were cautious of associating themselves with the cause of revolutionaries.
- The patriotism glued with the assertion of **Hindu beliefs** was not acceptable to the **Muslims**.
- Also much like their predecessors the leaders of the swadeshi movement failed to penetrate the **larger section of the society**.
- By **1908 militant nationalism** was on the **decline**.
- The **Surat split of 1907** was another contributing factor to this decline.

Surat Split

- The tension between the militants and the moderates became more pronounced with the appointment of **Lord Minto** as the **new Secretary of State** to India in 1906.



Congress Split at Surat

- As the tension was rising between the two groups, a split was avoided, in the 1906 **Calcutta session**, by accepting demands of moderate leaders and electing **Dadabhai Naoroji** as president.
- Most of the moderates, led by **Pherozeshah Mehta**, were defeated in the election.
- The militants managed to pass four resolutions on Swadeshi, Boycott, National Education, and Self-Government.
- **The next session of Congress** was originally planned to be held in **Poona**, considered to be a stronghold of the militants.
- Fearing a repeat of the Calcutta session, the moderates shifted the venue to Surat. The militants proposed **Lala Lajpat Rai's** name for the next Congress presidency opposing the moderate's candidate **Rash Behari Ghosh**.
- Lala Lajpat Rai, however, turned down the offer to avoid the split.
- The matter finally boiled down to the question of retaining the four resolutions that were passed in the **Calcutta session in 1906**.



Pherozeshah Mehta

- **The Pherozeshah Mehta** group sought removal of those items from the agenda. In order to counter Mehta's manoeuvring, the militants decided to oppose the election of **Rash Behari Gosh** as president.
- The session ended in chaos.
- **The Indian National Congress**, born in December 1885, was now split into two groups – militant and moderate.
- **The Congress** which emerged after **the Surat split** was more loyal to the British than they were before.
- **The new Congress**, minus the militants, came to be known as **Mehta Congress** and the **1908 session of the Congress** was attended only by the moderates who reiterated their loyalty to the Raj.
- The politics of militants, on the other hand, could not crystallize into a new political organization.
- The primary reason was the repressive measures of the government by putting all **the prominent leaders in jail**.

Revolutionary Extremism

- Around 1908, the decline of the militant nationalists and the **rise of revolutionary activities** marked an important shift from **non-violent methods to violent action**.
- It also meant a shift from mass-based action to elite response to the British rule.
- In Bengal, **revolutionary terrorism** had developed even earlier; around the 1870s, when the **akharas or gymnasiums** were setup in various places to develop what **Swami Vivekananda** had described as strong muscles and nerves of steel.
- **Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's novel, Anandmath** also had a significant impact. **Anandmath** was widely read by the revolutionaries in Bengal.



Bankim Chandra
Chatterjee

- **The Bande Mataram song**, which is part of the novel, became the **anthem** of the **swadeshi movement**.
- During the Swadeshi movement three factors contributed to the upsurge in the individual acts of violence:
- **The apolitical constructive programmes** had little acceptance among the youth who was growing impatient under the repressive foreign rule.
- **The failure of the militant nationalists** to lead the young people into a long-term mass movement also contributed to the growth of individual action.
- The revolutionary action was part of an effort towards **the symbolic recovery of Indian manhood**, which the revolutionaries believed was often challenged and looked down upon by the British.
- Such actions, however, did not lead to any organised revolutionary movement as was the case in **Russia**.
- The revolutionary actions were mostly attempts to assassinate **specific oppressive British officers**.

(a) Alipore Bomb Case

- In Bengal, the **story of revolutionary terrorism** begins in 1902 with the formation of many secret societies.

- Most notable among them all was the **Anushilan Samity of Calcutta**, founded by **Jatindernath Banerjee** and **Barindarkumar Ghose**, brother of **Aurobindo Ghose**.
- Similarly, the **Dhaka Anushilan Samity** was born in 1906 through the initiative of **Pulin Behari Das**.
- This was followed by the launch of the revolutionary weekly **Yugantar**.
- The Calcutta Anushilan Samity soon started its activities and **the first swadeshi dacoity**, to raise funds, was organised in **Rangpur** in August 1906.
- In the same year, **Hemchandra Kanungo** went abroad to get military training in **Paris**.
- After his return to India in 1908, he established a bomb factory along with a religious school at a garden house in **Maniktala**.
- In the same garden house, young inmates underwent various forms of physical training, reading **classic Hindu text**, and reading literature on revolutionary movement across the world.
- A conspiracy was hatched there to kill **Douglas Kingsford**, notorious for his cruel ways of dealing with the swadeshi agitators.
- Two young revolutionaries - 18-year-old **Khudiram Bose** and 19-year-old **Prafulla Chaki** – were entrusted with the task of carrying out the killing.



Khudiram Bose

- On 30 April 1908, they mistakenly threw a bomb on a carriage, that instead of killing Kingsford, **killed two English women**.
- Prafulla Chaki **committed suicide** and Khudiram Bose was arrested and **hanged** for the murder.
- Aurobindo Ghose, along with his brother Barinder Kumar Ghose and, thirty-five other **comrades**, **were arrested**.
- **Chittaranjan Das** took up the case. It came to be known as the **Alipore Bomb case**.
- The judgement observed that there was no evidence to show that Aurobindo Ghose was involved in any conspiracy against the British rule.
- **Ghose** was **acquitted** of all the charges.



Prafulla Chaki

- **Barindra Ghose** and **Ullaskar Dutt** were given the **death penalty** (later commuted to the transportation of life), with the rest being condemned to transportation for life.
- **The year-long hearing of Alipore Bomb case** made a great impact and portrayed the nationalist revolutionaries as heroes to the general public.

Trial and the Aftermath

- After his acquittal, **Aurobindo Ghose** took to a spiritual path and shifted his base to **Pondicherry**, where he stayed until his **death in 1950**.
- The idea of bringing an **armed revolution**, envisaged by Aurobindo Ghose, never materialized.
- The reason for the **gradual decline in the revolutionary activities** in Bengal was a combination of government repression and alienation from the people.
- Beside this, revolutionary terrorism suffered from certain social limitations too as **most of the revolutionaries** were drawn from the three upper castes – **Brahmin, Kayastha, and Vaishya**.

(b) British Repression

- In December 1908 the **Morley-Minto constitutional reforms** were announced. The moderates welcomed the reforms.
- However, they soon realised that there was hardly any shift of power.
- In fact, measures taken by Minto were highly divisive as it institutionalised communal electorates creating **Hindu-Muslim divide**.
- Beside this, **the colonial government** also introduced certain repressive laws such as: **The Newspapers** (Incitement to Offence) Act, 1908.
- This act empowered the **magistrate to confiscate press property** which published objectionable material making it difficult to publish anything critical of British rule.
- **Indian Press Act 1910** made it mandatory for publishers and the printers to deposit a security that could be seized in case they printed '**obnoxious material**'.
- **The Indian Criminal Law Amendment Act** allowed summary trials and also imposed the prohibition of 'association dangerous to the public peace'.

- Even with the widespread repression, **the charm of revolutionary** action never disappeared from the Indian national movement.
- The centre of activities moved from **Bengal to Uttar Pradesh and Punjab**.

Swadeshi Campaign in Tamil Nadu

- Swadeshi movement in Tamil Nadu, notably in **Tirunelveli** district, generated a lot of attention and support.
- While the **Swadeshi movement** in Tamil Nadu had an all India flavour, with collective anger against the **British rule** remaining the common thread, it was also underpinned by **Tamil - pride and consciousness**.
- There was a deep divide in the **Tamilnadu congress** between the moderates and the extremists.

(a) Development of Vernacular Oratory

- Initially, the movement was more of a reaction to the **partition of Bengal** and **regular** meetings were held to protest the partition.
- The speakers, in such meetings, spoke mostly in the **vernacular language** to an audience that included students, lawyers, and labourers at that time.
- The shift from **English oratory to vernacular oratory** was a significant development of this time, which had a huge impact on the **mass politics in Tamil Nadu**.
- Swadeshi meetings at the **Marina beach in Madras** were a regular sight.
- **The Moore Market** complex in Madras was another venue utilised for such gatherings.
- During the period (1905- 1907) there are police reports calling students dangerous and their activities as seditious.
- **Europeans** in public places were greeted by the students with shouts of **Vande Mataram**.
- In 1907, **Bipin Chandra Pal** came to Madras and his speeches on the Madras Beach electrified the **audience** and **won new converts** to the nationalist cause.
- The visit had a **profound impact** all over **Tamil Nadu**.
- The public speeches in the **Tamil language** created an audience which was absent during the formative years of the **political activities in Tamil Nadu**.

(b) V.O.C. and Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company (SSNC)

- The Swadeshi movement in Tamil Nadu came to national attention in 1906 when **V.O. Chidambaram** mooted the idea of launching a **swadeshi shipping venture** in **opposition** to the monopoly of the British in navigation through the coast.



V.O. Chidambaranar

- In 1906, V.O.C. registered a joint stock company called **The Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company (SSNC)** with a capital of Rs 10 Lakh, divided into 40,000 shares of Rs. 25 each.
- Shares were open only to **Indians, Ceylonese** and other **Asian nationals**.
- V.O.C. purchased two steamships, **S.S. Gallia** and **S.S. Lawoe**.
- When in the other parts of India, the response to Swadeshi was limited to **symbolic gestures** of making **candles** and **bangles**, the idea of forging a Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company was really spectacular.
- V.O.C invoked the rich **history of the region** and the **maritime glory of India's past** and used it as a reference point to galvanize the public opinion in favour of a Swadeshi venture in the sea.



V.O.C. Ship

- The initiative of V.O.C. was lauded by **the national leaders**.
- **Lokmanya Tilak** wrote about the success of the **Swadeshi Navigation Company** in his papers **Kesari** and **Mahratta**.
- Aurobindo Ghose also lauded the Swadeshi efforts and helped to promote **the sale of shares of the company**.
- The major shareholders included **Pandithurai Thevar** and **Haji Fakir Mohamed**.
- The initial response of the **British administration** was to ignore the Swadeshi company.
- As patronage for Swadeshi Company increased, the European officials exhibited **blatant bias** and **racial partiality** against the Swadeshi steamship.

(c) The Coral Mill Strike

- After attending the session of the **Indian National Congress** at **Surat**, V.O.C. on his return decided to work on building a political organisation.
- While looking for an able orator, he came across **Subramania Siva**, a swadeshi preacher.
- From February to March 1907, both the leaders addressed meetings almost on a daily basis at the beach in **Tuticorin**, educating the people about **swadeshi** and the **boycott campaign**.
- The meetings were attended by thousands of people.
- These public gatherings were closely monitored by the administration.
- In 1908, the abject working and living conditions of the **Coral Mill workers** attracted the attention of **V.O.C and Siva**.
- In the next few days, both the leaders addressed the mill workers.
- In March 1908, the workers of the **Coral Cotton Mills**, inspired by the address went on strike.
- It was one of the earliest organised labour agitations in India. The strike of the mill workers was fully backed by **the nationalist newspapers**.
- The mill owners, however, did not budge and was supported by the government which had decided to suppress the strike.
- To further increase the pressure on the workers, the leaders were prohibited from holding any meetings in **Tuticorin**.
- Finally, **the mill owners** decided to negotiate with the workers and concede their demands.
- This victory of the workers generated excitement among the **militants in Bengal** and it was hailed by the **newspapers in Bengal**.
- For instance, **Aurobindo Ghosh's Bande Matram** hailed the strike as "forging a bond between educated class and the masses, which is the first great step towards swaraj.... Every victory of Indian labour is a victory for the nation...."

(d) Subramania Bharati: Poet and Nationalist

- **The growth of newspapers**, both in **English** and **Tamil language**, aided the swadeshi movement in Tamil Nadu.



Subramania Bharati

- **G. Subramaniam** was one of the first among the leaders to use newspapers to spread the nationalist message across a larger audience.
- Subramaniam, along with five others, founded **The Hindu** (in English) and **Swadesamitran** (which was the first ever Tamil daily).
- In 1906 a book was published by Subramaniam to condemn the British actions during the **Congress Conference in Barsal**.
- **Swadesamitran** extensively reported nationalist activities, particularly the news regarding V.O.C. and his speeches in Tuticorin.
- **Subramania Bharati** became the subeditor of Swadesamitran around the time (1904) when Indian nationalism was looking for a fresh direction.
- **Bharati** was also editing **Chakravartini**, a Tamil monthly devoted to the cause of **Indian women**.
- Two events had a significant impact on Subramania Bharati. A meeting in 1905 with **Sister Nivedita**, an Irish woman and a disciple of Vivekananda, whom he referred to as **Gurumani** (teacher), greatly inspired his nationalist ideals.
- The churning within **the Congress** on the nature of engagement with the **British rule** was also a contributory factor.
- As discussed earlier in this lesson, the militants ridiculed the mendicancy of the moderates who wanted to follow the constitutional methods.
- Bharati had little doubt, in his mind, that the British rule had to be challenged with a fresh approach and methods applied by the militant nationalists appealed to him more.
- For instance, his fascination with Tilak grew after **the Surat session of the Congress** in 1907.
- He translated into **Tamil Tilak's Tenets of the New Party** and a booklet on the **Madras militants' trip to the Surat Congress** in 1907.
- Bharati edited a **Tamil weekly India**, which became the **voice of the radicals**.

(e) Arrest and imprisonment of V.O.C. and Subramania Siva

- On March 9, 1907, Bipin Chandra Pal was released from prison after serving a **six month jail sentence**.
- The swadeshi leaders in Tamil Nadu planned to celebrate the day of his release as '**Swarajya Day**' in Tirunelveli.
- The local administration refused permission.
- **V.O.C., Subramania Siva and Padmanabha Iyengar** defied the ban and went ahead.
- They were arrested on March 12, 1908, on charges of sedition.



Subramania Siva

- The local public, angered over the arrest of the **prominent swadeshi leaders**, reacted violently.
- **Shops** were closed in a **general show** of defiance. The municipality building and the police station in Tirunelveli were set on fire.
- More importantly, the mill workers came out in large numbers to protest the arrest of swadeshi leaders.
- After a few incidents of confrontation with the protesting crowd, the police open fired, and four people were killed.
- On 7 July 1908, V.O.C. and **Subramania Siva** were found guilty and imprisoned on charges of sedition.
- **Siva** was awarded a **sentence of 10 years** of transportation for his seditious speech whereas V.O.C. **got a life term (20 years)** for abetting him. V.O.C. was given another life sentence for his **own seditious speech**.
- This draconian sentence reveals how seriously the Tirunelveli agitation was viewed by the government.
- In the aftermath of this incident, the repression of the British administration was not limited to **the arrest of a few leaders**.
- In fact, people who had actively participated in the protest were also punished and a punitive tax was imposed on the people of **Tirunelveli** and **Tuticorin**.
- Excerpts from the Judgment in the case of **King Emperor versus V.O.C. and Subramania Siva** (4 November 1908).
- "It seems to me that **sedition at any time** is a most serious offense.
- It is true that the case is the first of its kind in the Presidency, but the present condition of other **Presidencies** where the **crime** seems to have secured a foothold would seem to indicate that **light sentences** of imprisonment of a few months or maybe a year or two are instances of **misplaced leniency**. ...
- The first object of a sentence is that it shall be deterrent not to the **criminal alone** but to others who feel any inclination to follow his example.
- Here we have to deal with a campaign of sedition which nearly ended in revolt.

- The accused are morally responsible for all the lives lost in quelling the riots that ensued on their arrest”.

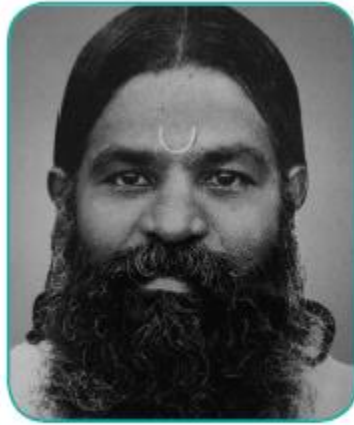
(f) Ashe Murder

- Repression of the **Swadeshi efforts in Tuticorin** and the subsequent arrest and humiliation of the swadeshi leaders generated anger among the youth.
- A plan was hatched to avenge the Tirunelveli event.
- A sustained campaign in the newspapers about the repressive measures of the **British administration** also played a decisive role in building people’s anger against the administration.
- In June 1911, the collector of Tirunelveli, **Robert Ashe**, was shot dead at **Maniyachi Railway station by Vanchinathan**.
- Born in the **Travancore state** in 1880, he was employed as a **forest guard** at **Punalur** in the then Travancore state.
- He was one of the members of a radical group called **Bharata Mata Association**.
- The aim of the association was to kill the **European officers** and inspire Indians to revolt, which they believed would eventually lead to **Swaraj**.
- Vanchinathan was trained in the use of a revolver, as part of the mission, by **V.V. Subramanianar** in **Pondicherry**.



Vanchinathan

- After shooting Ashe at the Maniyachi Junction, Vanchinathan shot himself with the same pistol.



V.V. Subramanianar

- A letter was found in his pocket which helps to understand the strands of inspiration for the revolutionaries like Vanchinathan.

The aftermath of the Assassination

- During the course of the trial, the **British government** was able to establish that **V.V.S** and other political exiles in **Pondicherry** were in close and active association with the accused in the **Ashe murder conspiracy**.
- The colonial administration grew more suspicious with the **Pondicherry groups** and their activities.
- Such an atmosphere further scuttled the possibility of nationalistic propaganda and their activities in **Tamil Nadu**.
- As a fall-out of the repressive measure taken by the colonial government, the nationalist movement in Tamil Nadu entered a period of lull and some sort of revival happened only with the **Home Rule Movement in 1916**.
- Besides building new techniques of political propaganda, the movement also gave impetus to carry on a sustained resistance even in the **Gandhian phase of freedom movement**.
- It was also a communication revolution as the **Swadeshi movement** resulted in a shift from **English to swadeshi language** (regional language) as the medium of political propaganda.
- The swadeshi movement also led to the emergence of youth who remained fascinated by the idea of taking to violence.
- The swadeshi atmosphere richly contributed to an interest in history, literature, and poetry on patriotism and nationalism in vernacular languages.
- **The militants**, however, **failed** to connect the nationalist slogans with larger economic grievances and the mass contact programmes, as the **British unleashed violence against the nationalists**.
- The use of religion and religious symbols to mobilize the **Hindus alienated Muslims**.

MORE TO KNOW:

- **The idea of education** in vernacular language made its appearance much before the **swadeshi movement** with the foundation of **Dawn Society** by **Satish Chandra** in **1902**.