

Swadeshi Movement

[UPSC Notes]

What is Swadeshi Movement?

The Swadeshi Movement was formally announced on the 7th of August, 1905, from the Calcutta Town Hall in retaliation to the process of the Partition of Bengal based on religious and linguistic grounds. The Partition of Bengal had been in talks since 1903 and was finalized on 16th October 1905. The day was mourned across the state of Bengal. People fasted, and no fire was lit.

This movement saw the rise of Indian nationalism in the populace. The swadeshi movement is also said to have been the blueprint for the future movements led by Mahatma Gandhi. The movement owes its vast participation and progression to the active participation of the affluent of India, who stepped up to donate money and land for cultivating Khadi and Gramudhyog over the years. It shaped the rich culture of swadeshi goods that we still observe today in the country. The entire idea was based on the principles of self-reliance and self-sufficiency.

Swadeshi Movement: Rise of Nationalism

The Swadeshi Movement progressed in several stages, and the history behind the trajectory of its development has been broken down chronologically below;

- The start of the 19th century saw the development of Indian nationalism and national identity. The social, economic and political factors led to this realisation.
- The British intent was getting more evident to the masses as the government cared very little about the demands and well-being of the population, and the economic crisis after the 1890s further cemented the exploitative nature of the colonial rule.
- The growing graph of underemployment and unemployment also fuelled resentment among the people.
- The development of foreign nationalistic movements flickered the facade of British Imperial invincibility.
- Lord Curzon's administrative policies that functioned on the basic idea of 'Divide and Conquer' was the tipping point that acted as a catalyst for the movement.
- His conservative policies like the Indian Universities Act, the Calcutta Corporation Act and especially the Partition of Bengal triggered protests and discontent on a national level.
- The Swadeshi Movement had its concept in the making for a while, but it gained shape and momentum after the Bengal Partition of 1905. It is the most successful movement from the Pre-Gandhian era.
- Moderates launched the Anti-Partition Campaign to pressure the government to prevent the unjust partition from being implemented. Petitions were written, and public meetings were held. These ideas found great momentum in newspapers like Hitabadi, Bengalee and Sanjibani.

Swadeshi Movement Year & Timeline

The formal announcement of the Swadeshi movement came on 7th August 1905, at the Calcutta Town Hall, where the crowd was preached to boycott British goods and encourage the consumption and production of home-developed goods. This event catapulted the entire movement in different parts of the country.

- **Protests:** Goods like the Manchester cloth and Liverpool salt were publicly boycotted.
 - Vande Mataram, now our National song, was sung in the streets when the Partition of Bengal was finalised in October 1905.
 - Rabindranath Tagore's Amar Sonar Bangla was composed during this movement.
 - People tied rakhis on each other's wrists to propagate unity.
- **Nationwide Participation:** Despite being major in Bengal, the movement picked up its pace and popularity in different states under the leadership of different leaders;
 - Bal Gangadhar Tilak in Poona and Bombay
 - Syed Haider Raza in Delhi
 - Lala Lajpat Rai and Ajit Singh in Punjab
 - Chidambaram Pillai in Chennai
- **The Indian National Congress:** The Partition of Bengal was criticised and condemned by the Indian National Congress in their session of 1905.
 - They also came in with support for the anti-partition campaign and the Swadeshi Movement.
 - There was a rift observed between the Moderates and the Radicals in the INC about the scope of this movement. While the Radicals wanted to take the movement outside of Bengal and widen its scope, the Moderates were unwilling of it.
 - However, under the chairmanship of Dadabhai Naoroji in the session of 1906, the INC took up the notion of 'Swaraj' or self-rule as its primary objective.
- **The 'Garam Dal':** The Extremists or the Garam Dal held great influence in the Swadeshi movement in Bengal between the years 1905-08.
 - The era was also called the 'Era of Passionate Nationalists' because of their dominant influence.
 - The Radicals were spearheaded by the trio of Lal-Bal-Pal, consisting of Lala Lajpat Rai, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Bipin Chandra Pal.
 - The emergence of the Garam Dal is often attributed to the failure of the Moderate-led movement along with the violent suppression of the movement by the British.
 - The Radicals wanted to boycott government-run schools and colleges, government services, legislature, courts, etc.
 - This was also the era that had Tilak's famous words: "Freedom is my birthright, and I shall have it".
- **Local Participation:** The movement saw mass mobilisation from all over the country. The Protestors came from all backgrounds and runs of life.
 - Students were the most active participants in this movement, especially visible in Bengal, Poona (Maharashtra), Guntur (Andhra Pradesh), Madras and Salem (Tamil Nadu). However, the Police held a policy of brutal repression. Students were beaten, fined, expelled and blacklisted from government services and jobs.
 - Women were active in this movement as well.
 - Muslim participation was observed. However, a sector of the upper and middle class of Muslims supported the decision of the Partition as they liked the idea of an East Bengal with a Muslim-majority populace.

Impact of the Swadeshi Movement

The impact of the Swadeshi Movement was greatly felt on multiple levels.

- There was an observed decline in imports during 1905-08. The boycotting of foreign goods in India led to deep financial losses for the British.
- The movement resulted in rifts between the ideologies of several leaders. Extremism in this era triggered violence in wanting to bring an immediate end to the British government.
- This movement obviously saw a great surge toward locally produced goods, and many swadeshi institutions were established during this time.
 - Shantiniketan by Rabindranath Tagore, the Bengal National College, and numerous schools and colleges were erected.
 - The National Council of Education was established in 1906 to organise a national education system.
 - Bengal Institute of Technology was instituted for technical education.
 - This movement saw the revival of the Indian Cottage industry and the renewal of indigenous goods being used.
- The Morley-Minto Reforms came to India in 1909 after the protests undertaken during the Swadeshi Movement. These reforms provided some respite. Gopal Krishna Gokhale helped significantly in the framing of these reforms.

Suppression of the Swadeshi Movement

All good things come to an end, and so did the successful run of the Swadeshi Movement. Several factors contributed to its fate, as discussed below:

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- Government Repression: By 1908, the Swadeshi Movement was almost over in an open phase due to the government's violent repression.
- Absence of Leaders and Organisation: The movement failed to create an effective organisation. It was rendered leaderless as most leaders were arrested or deported by the time.
 - Maintaining the high intensity of such a mass movement was a difficult task without effective leaders.
- Internal Conflicts: The internal conflicts and differences in ideologies among the leaders did more harm to the movement than good.
- Limited Extent: The movement failed to reach the peasantry and was only confined to the upper and middle classes.

Partition of Bengal and Swadeshi Movement

The partition of Bengal was why the entire movement was kickstarted. Seeing the rage and discontent growing within the masses, the decision was rescinded in 1911 by Lord Hardinge. This move was mostly made to put a stop to the revolutionary terrorism that had taken shape in the country. The following changes were made with the annulment of the Bengal Partition;

- Bihar and Orissa were separated from Bengal.
- A separate province was made out of Assam.

- This annulment did not sit right with the Muslims. This is said to be why the British moved their administrative capital from Calcutta to Delhi, as Delhi is associated with Muslim glory.

