



Spirit of Swadeshi: Maharashtra's Role in the Indian Freedom Movement

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Abstract

One of the pivotal moments in the history of the Indian Freedom Movement was the Swadeshi movement. It began as a movement against Bengal's partition in 1905 and quickly expanded to other regions of the nation, including Maharashtra. Along with other ideas, the slogans of Swaraj, boycotts, national education, and the spirit of Swadeshi were carried from Bengal to Maharashtra. The primary goal of this article is to examine the Indian Swadeshi movement, with a focus on Maharashtra. The study emphasizes Maharashtra's role in the Swadeshi movement and discovers that, despite the term being introduced in 1905, Goudpad Charya of Nasik used it for the first time in Maharashtra in 1716 during the Peshwa period. In 1846, residents of Poona, Shankar Shashtri Gokhale and Bhau Wadekar, launched the Swadeshi initiative in Maharashtra. Observing the Ganapati Utsav and Sivaji festivals was a significant milestone in Maharashtra's history of the liberation movement.

Introduction

One of the most important moments in Indian freedom movement history was the Swadeshi movement. It began as a protest against Bengal's division in 1905. The province with the largest population in British India was the Presidency of Bengal. It encompassed not only the western and eastern regions but also the majority of Orissa, Bihar, and Assam. The population of this vast administrative area was divided, with Muslims predominating in the eastern half of Bengal and Hindus in the western section. The two communities counterbalanced each other in central Bengal. Conquest and annexations have resulted in the Bengal presidency's growing size as an administrative unit, which made it difficult to manage. As a result, the British officials discussed the possibility of restructuring the Bengal presidency. Since the Orissa famine of 1866, there have been talks regarding the division of Bengal. Assam was split off from Bengal in 1874 in this manner. For Assam to become a province under the Lieutenant Governor, proposals to rename the districts of Dacca and

Mymensingh as well as to rename the Chittagong division as Assam were made in 1892 and 1896, respectively. However, nothing of these proposals came to pass. The official's considerations for Bengal's split had been purely administrative up until this moment.

By the time of Lord Curzon, however, things had started to shift. In 1903, he originally conceived up a scheme that called for the Central Provinces to acquire the Chota Nagpur, Dacca, Mymensingh districts, and Assam divisions from Bengal; in exchange, Bengal would gain Sambalpur and the feudatory kingdoms from the Central Provinces, etc. On July 19, 1905, the final Bengali partition plan was unveiled, albeit with minor changes from the original blueprint. According to this plan, Tippera, Malda, Assam, and all of the districts of the Chittagong, Dacca, and Rajshahi divisions were combined to form a new province called Eastern Bengal and Assam. This partition plan was motivated by something more than just administrative considerations. If Curzon had done so on administrative grounds, he would have agreed to various other reasonable divisions, such as linguistic divisions. However, his main goals were to split the unified Bengali community that had controlled the Congress and further undermine the Congress, which had little to show for its existence in 1903 (John R. McLane, 1977), to stifle the burgeoning nationalism.

The Swadeshi Movement and Anti-Partition Movement

The Moderates initially objected to the proposal when it was being developed. By using moderate tactics like a press campaign, meetings, petitions, and conferences at the Calcutta Town Hall in March 1904, the Moderates opposed the idea. Numerous petitions were submitted to the government of Great Britain. But in the end, their efforts were in vain, and the partition took place. The Moderates marked the day of Bengal's division as a day of grief. Rakshabandhan was observed as a festival throughout Bengal. People flocked to hundreds of protest meetings to hear lectures from speakers like Surendranath Banerjea.

The Moderates abandoned their usual political strategies after their petitioning tactics failed to halt the division. Thus, at a conference in Calcutta in 1905, Surendranath Banerjee called for a boycott of British institutions and goods. August 7, 1905, saw the official boycott resolution enacted at Calcutta Town Hall, signalling the start of the Swadeshi Movement. For the first time, the Moderates extended beyond the literate sections and took part in the labour struggles and the national education campaign. Their aim in using these non-traditional

techniques was to get the partition annulled. But even if they stopped using their traditional approaches, their ideology didn't change.

Under G. K. Gokhale, the Indian National Congress (INC) officially adopted the call for Swadeshi during its annual meeting in Banaras in 1905. The intriguing thing about this was that Gokhale, a moderate, backed the boycott and Swadeshi movements for Bengal. Stated differently, the goal of the Swadeshi Movement for Moderates was to limit its reach to Bengal alone, with no intention of becoming a nationwide movement. However, the militant nationalists under the leadership of Tilak, Bepin Chandra Pal, Lala Lajpat Rai, and Aurobindo Ghosh pushed for the movement to be expanded over the entirety of India and to go beyond the Swadeshi and boycott program to become a full-fledged political mass fight. Their priority was Swaraj, and the abolition of the division had become less important. Even though Swaraj was the extremists' ultimate goal, different leaders gave it varied meanings. Tilak Swaraj advocated for administrative authority by India rather than a complete break from the United Kingdom. In contrast to Bepin Chandra Pal, who thought that self-government was impossible under British supremacy, Swaraj represented total independence from British rule. For Aurobindo Ghosh, it signified complete political independence (Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, 2004). As a result, to achieve Swaraj, they had to employ more drastic measures than the Moderates. As a result, the Extremists adopted a strategy known as passive resistance. It entailed resisting colonial control by breaking unfair laws, abstaining from British institutions and goods, and creating Swadeshi and national education as alternatives.

Two Significant Themes in Bengal

There were two themes in Bengal's Swadeshi movement. Initially, there was the "constructive Swadeshi" trend. During this stage, there was no political movement. It placed a greater focus on positive programs that were seen as self-strengthening movements, which helped to provide the groundwork for the ensuing political struggle. The revivalism of the Hindu faith was valued in their self-strengthening agenda since it was seen as a foundation for envisioning India as a nation. National schools and indigenous businesses were formed as part of a positive initiative.

Political extremism was the opposite phase of the Swadeshi movement in Bengal. Political radicals like Aurobindo Ghosh and Bepin Chandra Pal spearheaded this movement.

They criticized the non-political constructive approach and maintained that India's political independence might be a requirement for the revitalization of the country. Thus, attaining total independence, or Swaraj, became their objective. At this point, passive resistance was the plan. This program required mass mobilization to support the movement. Religion was a tool for the same objective. Another strategy for popular mobilization was the establishment of the Samaritan Society. Programs like physical training and the spread of the Swadeshi message were carried out through samiti.

The bureaucracy in Bengal was resolved to put an end to the Swadeshi boycott movement. The Barisal meeting demonstrated the ruthlessness of coercive techniques. On April 14, 1906, the police attacked the march led by Surendranath Banerjee, Motilal Ghose, and Bhupendranath Babu because they were shouting "Vande Mataram" during the conference. The Marathi newspaper Kesari (Kesari, May 15, 1906) applauded the action of the Bengali leaders who had chanted for the rights and yelled the phrase "Vande Mataram."

The Swadeshi Movement in Maharashtra

The Swadeshi movement did not only exist in Bengal. It expanded to other regions of the nation, and other national leaders actively participated in the campaign. Thus, the movement that began in Bengal spread throughout the entire nation, enlisting the support of notable leaders from each region: Tilak participated directly in Maharashtra, Lala Lajpat Rai participated in Punjab, and Subramaniam Bharati participated in South India. This section of the article is devoted to the Maharashtra Swadeshi movement.

The anti-partition movement gave rise to the slogans of Swaraj, the concepts of Swadeshi, Boycott, and National Education. Eventually, the spirit of Swadeshi spread from Bengal to Maharashtra along with other regions of the country like Madras and other provinces. Boycott was no longer just a Bengali issue; it had become an issue of national importance. It is important to consider the Maharashtra Swadeshi Movement in the context of its development over the pre-existing Swadeshi.

Thus, before talking about the Swadeshi movement in Maharashtra, it is instructive to look at the history of the Swadeshi in the area.

The Swadeshi was originally employed in Nasik in 1716 by Goudpad Charya during the Peshwa era (Kesari, January 30, 1906). Regarding this, Subodh Patrika believes that in

1846, two Poona locals, Shankar Shashtri Gokhale and Bhau Wadekar, founded the Swadeshi movement. According to Shankar Shashtri Gokhale, indigenous industrial development cannot occur unless and until the educated citizens of India utilize the Swadeshi commodities. They began weaving Swadeshi cloth on looms they had set up in their homes for the same reason. In the nineteenth century, Gopal Hari Deshmukh was an Indian social activist. In the Prabhakar newspaper, he penned a hundred letters known as Shatapatre to chronicle the social landscape of India. In Prabhakar's columns, Lokhitwadi—a person who aspires to the benefit of the people—exhorted the populace to adopt Swadeshi products in 1849, despite their potential roughness and coarseness (Bipan Chandra, 1966).

Subsequently, in 1871, R. Joshi and R. B. Gavande carried on the initiative in Poona (Subodh Patrika, December 23, 1906). Through his lectures at Poona in 1872 and 1873, Ranade concentrated on drawing attention to Swadeshi (N. G. Jog, 1962). "The idea of Swadeshi and preferring the goods produced in one's own country even though they may prove to be dearer or less satisfactory than finer foreign product" (Bipan Chandra, 1966) was made popular by him during these lectures. Ganesh Vasudev Joshi, also known as Sarvajanik Kaka (a lovingly humorous moniker for Joshi, who was a social activist in Pune due to his keen interest in public affairs) was responsible for keeping Swadeshi alive. He worked as a lawyer in Maharashtra and was dressed in a Khadi shirt and dhotis (Kesari, January 30, 1906).

In addition, he vowed to utilize only material woven by him and spun Khadi. (1962, N. G. Jog). Although the Moderates in Maharashtra backed the Swadeshi Movement, they opposed the boycott of products. Gokhale, for example, noted that the Swadeshi Movement was economic and patriotic and that boycotts were political tools that were to be used sparingly (J. C. Johari, ed., 1993).

Tilak founded the Ganapati Utsav on August 11, 1893, to foster a sense of power, unity, and solidarity among Hindus (Vishwanath Prasad Varma, 1978). He had turned it into a platform for promoting nationalistic views through a public celebration. A few years later, in 1895, Tilak launched the Shivaji festival in Raigad. Originally a Maratha celebration, it eventually took on a national significance (D. P. Karmarkar, 1956). While the Shivaji festival had political connotations, the Ganapati festival was primarily social. The true aim of the

festivals was to elevate people's spirits through public performances and aid in the popularization of the Indian National Congress.

The goal of the Swadeshi movement was to engage the masses and middle classes in political and economic activity. The Swadeshi boycott campaign employed several political agitation strategies, including large-scale processions, open forums, strikes, picketing, and more, in an impressive effort to defend the people's right to self-government. After labourers were urged to join the Swadeshi Movement, the movement gained more traction. Among manufacturing workers, Tilak raised knowledge of the Swadeshi Movement. Swadeshi's primary goals were to create jobs for the populace, support the growth of the country's already-established indigenous businesses, and simultaneously advance the welfare of the populace.

During the Maharashtra Swadeshi movement, the Bombay mill owners rather than the British officials profited from the gains. This was evident from the money the owners of Bombay's mills made during the Swadeshi Movement. Compared to a wage expense of Rs. 1.68 crores, it was projected to have been Rs. 3.25 crores in 1906 (Sumit Sarkar, 1983). As more people began utilizing Swadeshi products, the movement gave the mill owners in Bombay the chance to create, sell, and raise the pricing of their items on the market. As a result, the industrialists started to back the movement, but only because it suited their interests.

It wouldn't be an overstatement to say that the Maharashtra Swadeshi Movement was positioned alongside the Swadeshi movement in Bengal. The Marathi daily paper Kesari concurs, stating that Maharashtra is the only place after Bengal where Swadeshi is found (Kesari, January 30, 1906). According to Tilak, Maharashtra has been more supportive of the Swadeshi Movement than any other state since women there wear Lugad, a traditional dress, and men do not use foreign clothing, which would have aided the movement.

The Swadeshi Movement included the demand for national education as a key component. Its main goal was to create a three-pronged educational system—literary, scientific, and technical—that would be run on national territory and under national authority to fulfil the country's destiny. Supported by the Swadeshi Movement, the National Council of Education, or N.C. E., was a cultural autarchy movement for India that began on March 11,

1906, when some of our nation's best men founded what was essentially a national university. In August 1906, the Bengal National College and School in Calcutta was established by the National Council of Education. Aurobindo Ghosh served as the school's principal, and Satis Mukherjee was the superintendent. English was kept as a required second language as a tool of global culture, but vernacular was embraced as the medium of instruction from the lowest to the highest levels. The study of Hindi and Marathi, as well as Sanskrit, Pali, and Persian, were provided as sources for first-hand historical investigations. The National Council's power surpassed Bengal's boundaries and advanced over the province of Bengal and the presidencies of Bombay and Madras. The two most notable proponents of National Education outside of Bengal were B.G. Tilak and Lajpat Rai (Haridas Mukherjee).

Conclusion

The British used oppressive tactics to quell the Swadeshi movement, including the arrest and deportation of numerous Swadeshi leaders. During the campaign, prominent Maharashtrian figures such as Tilak and Shivaram Mahadev Paranjape were imprisoned. In summary, Maharashtra was a key player in the Swadeshi movement. It was also significant to note that, despite the introduction of Swadeshi in 1905, Goudpad Charya of Nasik employed it for the first time in Maharashtra in 1716, during the Peshwa period (Kesari, January 30, 1906). Subodh Patrika claims that in 1846, two Poona residents, Shankar Shashtri Gokhale and Bhau Wadekar, launched the Swadeshi movement in Maharashtra. Tilak actively participated in the Maharashtra Swadeshi movement and promoted a boycott. He informed the workers in the factories about the Swadeshi Movement. Maharashtra effectively promoted the slogans of Swaraj, the ideas of Swadeshi, Boycott, National Education, and the spirit of Swadeshi that arose during the anti-partition struggle. A pivotal moment in the history of Maharashtra's freedom movement was the celebration of holidays like Ganapati Utsav and Sivaji festival.

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