

# **Towards Independence and Partition: The Last Phase (1935-1947)**



## **IMPORTANT POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS**

### **1.1. GROWTH OF SOCIALIST IDEAS**

#### **Role of M.N. Roy**

Narendra Nath Battacharya, later known as **M.N. Roy**, was born on 21 March, 1887, at Arbelia, located in the North 24 Parganas of West Bengal, near the town Basirhat. His early schooling took place at Arbelia. In 1898 his family moved to Kodalia and Narendra Nath continued his studies at the Harinavi Anglo-anskrit School where his father taught until 1905. He later joined at the National College under Aurobindo Ghosh, before moving to the Bengal Technical Institute, now known as the Jadavpur University. There he studied Engineering and Chemistry.



Towards the end of the 19th Century, revolutionary nationalism began to spread among the educated middle classes of Bengal inspired by the writings of Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay and Swami Vivekananda. Narendra Nath was very much influenced by the writings of these two persons. During this time in 1905, the partition of Bengal was announced. A number of mass movements started for annulment of the partition and this gave him the chance to take part in the movement. He was expelled from the school for participating in a march against the partition. He then went to Calcutta and joined the Anushilan Samity as an active worker. On 6 December, 1907 he successfully committed the first act of political banditry to raise fund for the secret society. He was arrested and ultimately released on bail. He was looking something more constructive than making and throwing bombs towards the British officers. Many nationalists including M.N. Roy became convinced that only an armed struggle against the British would separate India from the British Empire. To achieve this object, the revolutionary nationalists looked towards Germany for funds and armaments. The plan was to use help from Germany, to storm and free Andaman Islands and then arm the prisoners there and land the army of liberation on the Orissa coast. But this project never materialized because Germany did not help the Indian leaders. He then went to Japan for Japanese support to liberate India from the British authority. There he met the Chinese nationalist leader Sun Yat-Sen who then took shelter in Japan. But Sun Yat-Sen refused to assist him in his plan of organizing anti-British revolution in India. From there he reached San Fransisco. It was in the New York Public Library, M.N. Roy developed his interest in Marxism. He then fled to Mexico. There he founded the Socialist party in December, 1917, later it was converted into the Communist Party of Mexico in 1919, the first Communist Party formed outside Russia. He was then invited to participate in the 2nd World Congress of the Communist International held in Moscow in 1920. At the request of Lenin, he prepared his paper the East - especially India - for revolution. He then formed the Communist Party of India, outside the country, at **Tashkent in 1920**. The Indian Communist Party was then formed in September, 1924, at Kanpur. It was followed by an All India Conference of the Communists at Kanpur. **This Conference is regarded as the formal beginning of the Communist Party of India (December, 1925)**. He then contacted his erstwhile revolutionary colleagues who at this time were hesitant between Radicalism of Jugantar Party and Mohandas Karam Chand Gandhi's novel programme. In the mean time, M.N. Roy had difference of opinion with Stalin, as a result of which he was expelled from the Comintern in December, 1929.

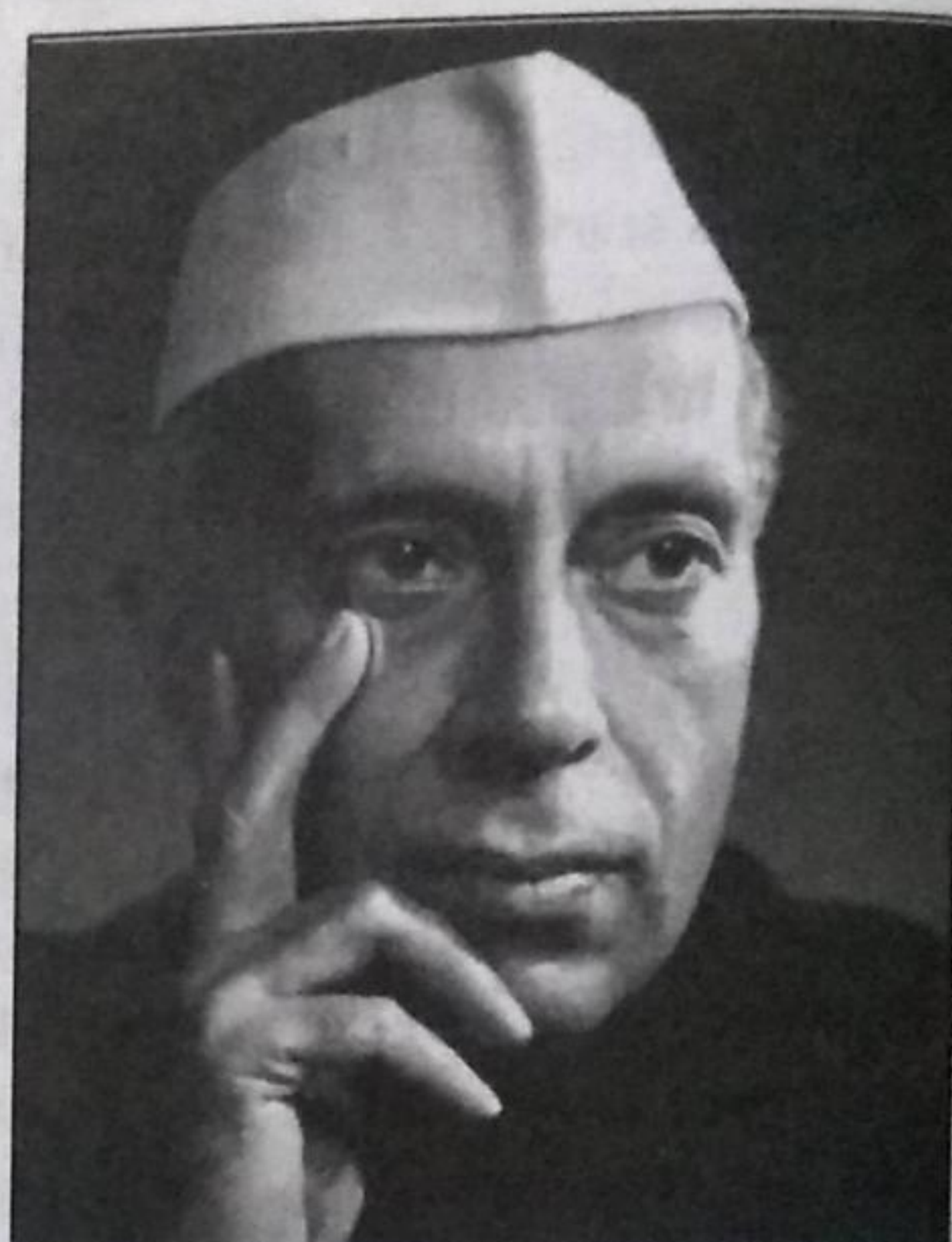
He came back to India in 1930 and met Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose. He was soon arrested and served 5 years in different jails. After his release in 1936, Nehru invited him to Allahabad to improve his broken health. Defying the Comintern order to boycott the Indian National Congress, Roy urged the Indian Communists to join this party to radicalize it from within. In April, 1937, his weekly "Independent India" appeared and was welcomed by the progressive Congress leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose, unlike Gandhiji, and the staunch Communists who accused him for deviation from the party line. He became disillusioned with bourgeoisie democracy and communism. He severed his connection with Congress and created the Radical Democratic Party in 1940. He died at Dehradun on 25th January, 1954.



## Jawaharlal Nehru

In the 1930s Socialist ideas were felt within and outside Congress. Among the early Congress leaders, Jawaharlal Nehru, was very much impressed and influenced by the socialist ideas. When he was in Switzerland in 1926 for the treatment of his ailing wife Kamala Nehru, Jawaharlal first came to know about the Socialist ideas. He also learnt about the economic activities of the Soviet Union after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917.

In November, 1927, he visited the Soviet Union on the official invitation and was greatly impressed by the economic and social reconstructions that were being made there. He came to know about socialist ideas and expected to make full use of them in India. He came back in December, 1927, and for all practical purposes turned a Socialist. Hence, Socialist ideas also began to attract the young factory workers and the peasants.



Jawaharlal Nehru

The election of Jawaharlal Nehru as the President of the National Congress in 1929, 1936 and 1937 and of Subhas Chandra Bose in 1938 clearly showed the left-wing tendency within the Congress fold. In the Karachi Session of March, 1931, Jawaharlal Nehru unequivocally stated, **“In order to end the exploitation of the masses, political freedom must include real economic freedom of the starving millions.”** He also demanded living wages for the workers, special taxes on property, state control and ownership of key industries, mineral resources, railways, waterways, shipping and other means of transport. Jawaharlal Nehru’s thesis on Fundamental Rights and Economic Programme adopted in the Karachi Session, 1931, was also an important step towards Congress Socialism. In the Lucknow and Faizpur Sessions in December, 1935 and 1936, Jawaharlal elaborated his Socialist ideas with great clarity. Nehru’s Working Committee after Lucknow included three Socialists, namely, Jayaprakash Narayan, Narendra Dev and Achyut Patwardhana. The Lucknow Session was a landmark in the evolution of socialist ideas and programme of the Congress. In 1937 the Congress condemned Japanese aggression in China and in the next year a medical mission was sent to China led by Dr. Kotnis. He urged the National Congress to accept socialism as its goal and to bring itself closer to the peasantry and the working class.

## Subhas Chandra Bose

Another Person **Subhas Chandra Bose** had also Socialist leaning. In the early twenties, he became the founder-President of the All Bengal Youth League where he announced the programme. He said, “Complete Independence of India, community of interests with labours and peasants, amelioration of economic condition of the masses, reduction of working hour, a



minimum scale of wages, medical leave with full pay, old age pension compensation for infirmity or serious accidents etc.” should be ensured.

In his free India, Subhas Chandra Bose had the aim of creating an egalitarian society in which all members would enjoy almost equal economic benefits and social status. There would not be any distinction between man and man on account of accident of birth, parentage, caste and creed. In his presidential address at the Maharashtra Provincial Congress held at Poona on May 3, 1928, he said that privileges on birth, caste or creed should go, and equal opportunities should be thrown to all irrespective of caste, creed or religion. He said, “Free India will not be a land of capitalists, landlords and castes. Free India will be a social and political democracy.....a reign of perfect equality, social, economic and political shall prevail in free India.

It was under his leadership that the labour strike in the Tata Iron and Steel Works at Jamshedpur ended in honourable settlement in 1928. He also became the President of the All India Trade Union Congress in 1931. Espousing the cause of labour he clearly said that it was the duty of the state to provide employment to the citizens and where the state failed, it should accept the responsibility of maintaining them. Because the worker-citizen would not be at the mercy of the employer, to be thrown out on the street at his sweet will and made to starve. He also laid emphasis on the industrialization of India and planned economic growth on the Soviet pattern.

Both Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra had Socialist leaning. Both of them had a large number of followers who had already been calling themselves as “Lefist Congressmen”. Subhas Bose’s attempt to seek re-election for Congress Presidentship in 1939, sharply divided the National Congress into ‘Lefist’ and the ‘Rightist’ camp. Socialism had already made its power felt in the Congress, but now it constituted a powerful left wing with distinct leaning towards Communist leadership. The younger section lost faith in the non-violent programme which had made very slow progress and so far yielded only poor results.<sup>1</sup>

## Congress Socialists

Within the Congress, there were persons like **Jaya Prakash Narayan, Achyut Patwardhan, Acharya Narendra Dev, Ram Mohan Lohia, Aruna Asaf Ali** and others who formed the **Congress Socialist Party** in 1934 within the Congress itself. They sought to work out socialist programme through the Congress. They joined hands with the Congress to carry on national struggle with the help of the workers and the peasant class.

Pattavi Sitaramyya, Sardar Patel, Rajendra Prasad and other old guards did not conceal their hostilities towards the Congress Socialists. Sitaramyya even called the founders ‘Scum’ and the Working Committee of the National Congress in 1934 condemned the radical programme of the Socialists. Jawaharlal’s attitude was rather hesitant. Actually he was intellectually inclined towards Socialism. He was sympathetic towards this group, supported many of views of the Socialists but did not formally join this group. His personal and political attachment to Gandhiji

1. Dr. R.C. Majumdar - History of the Freedom movement in India, India, Volume-3, P -478



prevailed over his intellectual attachment towards Socialism. His personal loyalty towards Gandhiji would be evident again and again throughout 1930s.

When Subhas Chandra Bose was expelled from the Congress after the Tripuri rift, he formed a political party Forward Bloc in 1939 with his left wing followers. He wanted to keep Forward Bloc as a platform of the like-minded parties and to enlist the support of the Communists and the Socialists. But the Congress Socialists wanted to keep unity with the National Congress. Subhas Chandra realized that without an organized and disciplined left wing, it was impossible to fight against the Gandhi wing. In the opinion of Dr. Sumit Sarkar the choice had been difficult for the Left wing for Bose's previous record had not been one which could inspire a confidence unqualified enough to risk a total break with the National Congress.<sup>1</sup> In spite of the differences within the National Congress, the Socialists did not want to separate themselves from the National Congress because they felt that the National Congress was only party that had the capacity to oust the British from the country. Moreover, the Socialists were minority within the Congress. They supported the radicals in the National Congress and started organizing peasant movements out of the National Congress.

Gradually these Socialists and the left-wing followers became an important political force within the National Congress during 1930s and 40s.

### There were two basic differences between the Congress Socialists and the Communists

(1) The Congress Socialists owed their allegiance to the National Congress and they were nationalists, the Congress Socialists believed in class struggle and wanted abolition of capitalism, zamindari system and the princely states.

(2) The Communists expressed their allegiance to the Communist International. The Communists also believed in the goal of an International Communist Society.

### TRADE UNION ACTIVITIES

Bombay and Calcutta was main centre of textile, jute and tea industry. Naturally these two regions had maximum working class population. The working and living conditions of these workers were very miserable. They worked hard for 15, 16, and even 18 hours a day. There was no leave rules, no security of job. In this situation, a few individuals like **Shasipada Banerjee**, a radical Brahmo, founded a working men's club. He also published a journal, the **Bharat Shramajibi** or **Indian Worker** in 1874. But he did not form any trade union. In Bombay, **N.M.Lokhande** started the weekly **Dinabandhu** in 1880. He also founded **Bombay Mill-Hands Association** in 1890. This association was not a trade union in modern sense. The first trade union **Madras Labour Union** was founded in April, 1918 by **B.P. Wadia**, a close associate of Mrs. Annie Besant. Mohandas Karam Chand Gandhi also led a strike of the workers in 1918 at

1. Sumit Sarkar - Modern India 1885-1947, P. 373.



Ahmedabad. In 1920 Gandhi formed the **Majur Mahajan** which advocated peaceful relations between the workers and their employers.

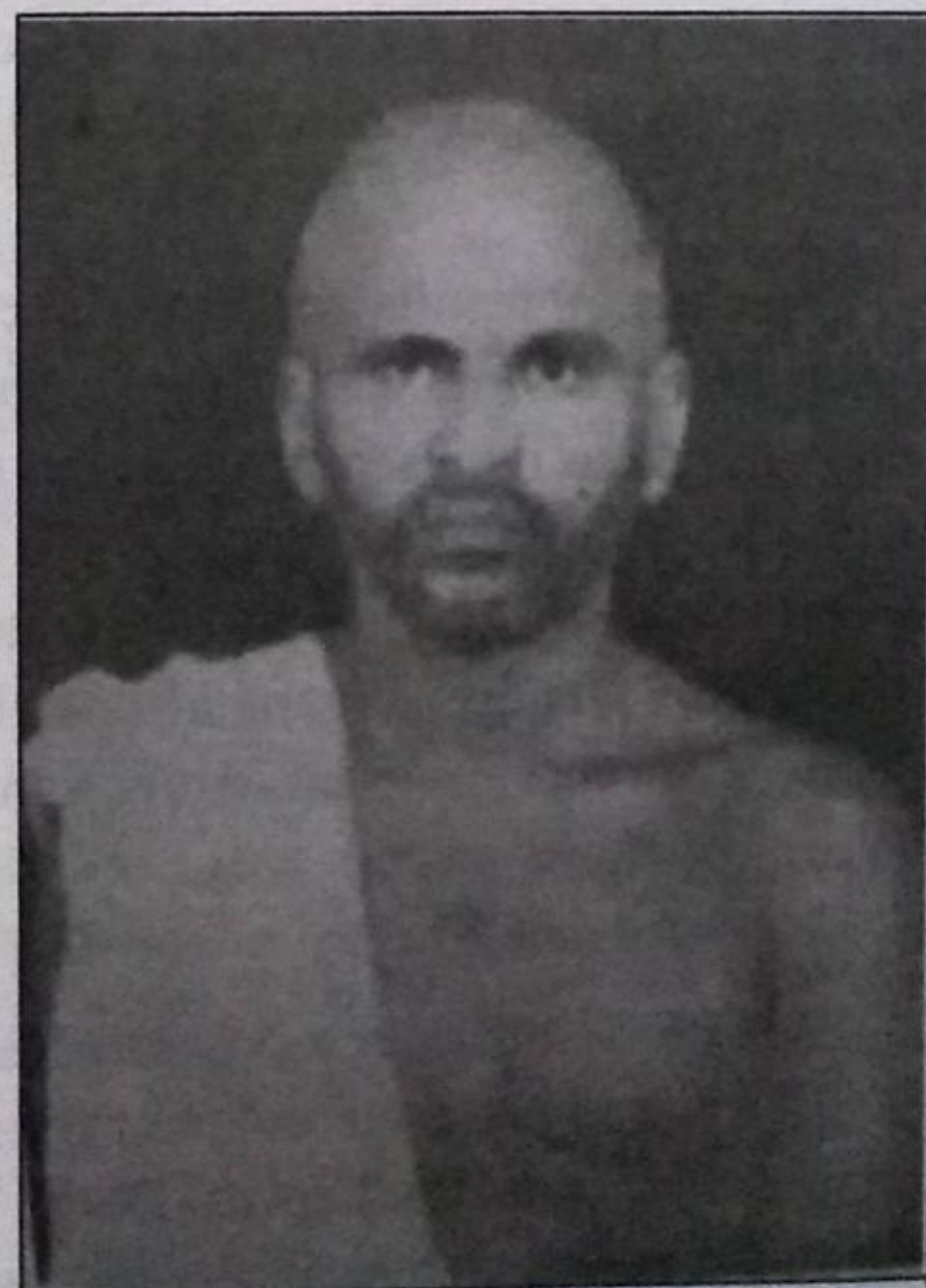
Trade union movement was thus slowly taking shape. In 1919-20, industrial strikes took place at Kanpur, Calcutta, Bombay, Madras, Jamshedpur and Ahmedabad. A large number of workers participated in these strikes. It was now felt the need for an all India organization and subsequently the **All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) was formed in Bombay in 1927**. Lala Lajpat Rai presided over the inaugural session and this session was attended by nationalist leaders like Motilal Nehru, C.F. Andrewas, B.P. Wadia, Annie Besant and N.M. Joshi. Still then, the growth of trade union among the workers was slow because the fear of dismissal kept them away from trade union movement. The Great Economic Depression of 1929-30 had its effect on our country. A good number of factories were closed down and the workers lost their jobs.

In the meantime there were many ups and downs in trade union movement and a split took place within AITUC. In 1929, the Moderates left the AITUC and formed the **Indian Trade Union Federation**. In 1931, the Communists also left the AITUC and formed the **Red Trade Union Congress**. These splits naturally weakened the trade union movement. Attempts were also made by the Leftists and the Socialists to unite the workers and the peasant organizations for collective movements.

## KISAN SABHA MOVEMENT

The excessive burden of taxation, fear of eviction, no-occupancy right on land, rise in prices of essential commodities, torture of the landlords and passive attitude of the authority compelled the peasants to revolt against the authority. Thus a number of peasant revolts took place in various parts of India during 1920s and 1930s. The Non-Cooperation Movement of 1920 also encouraged the peasants to revolt against the British government. The main centre of peasant movement was in U.P. during this period. The peasant movement then spread to Bihar, Bengal, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Orissa, Malabar, Assam and other provinces. But the demands varied from region to region. In some parts of U.P., the movement became violent and the police fired on them killing a number of peasant demonstrators on the spot (January, 1921).

During 1930s the peasant also rose in revolts in different provinces. During this period, the Congress gave a call for no-tax movement in U.P. and gradually no-tax campaign spread to other provinces like Bengal and Bihar. In different regions, provincial Kisan Sabhas had already been formed during 1920s. But the need for one central organization was gradually felt by the Socialists and the Communists. This urge led to the formation of the **All**



Sahajananda Saraswati



**India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) in 1936 under Swami Sahajananda Saraswati, N.G. Range, Narendra Dev, Indulal Yagnik and Bankim Mukerjee.** They were prominent leaders of the All India Kisan Sabha.

In the first Conference of the Kisan Sabha in Lucknow in 1936, the objectives of the Kisan Sabha were declared as follows:

1. To free the peasants from all sorts of economic exploitation,
2. Abolition of zamindari system,
3. Distribution of lands to the landless peasants,
4. Cancellation of all debts and
5. Afford irrigational facilities to the peasants for improvement of agriculture.

The Congress leadership also needed the support of the peasantry in its struggle against the British Raj. The leaders also knew the grievances of the peasants. But the Right-Wing leaders of Congress did not like Kisan Sabha for its demand like the abolition of zamindari system. Whenever the peasants revolted against the landlords, the Congress leadership tried to restrain them. But the Kisan Sabha leadership had full faith on the National Congress and its role for the liberation of the country. This was the basic issue which led to difference between the Congress leaders and the peasant leadership.

## GROWTH OF COMMUNALISM

Another important development of the period was the growth of communalism in the country. The Government of India Act, 1935, provided for provincial autonomy with some restrictions. The election results showed that in General Constituencies, the Congress almost swept the poll. The Muslim League claiming to be the representative of the Indian Muslims performed very badly.

The election results confronted the Muslim League and the National Congress with different message. It was now clear that Congress had a mass base among the Hindus, but the Muslim League failed to represent itself as the spokesman of the Muslim community. It also became clear that the Muslim League should try to come closer to the urban lower middle class. Just to gain support, Muslim League now raised the cry of '**Islam in Danger**' and threat from the impending '**Hindu Raj**'. These slogans ultimately created a feeling of hatred of the Muslims against the followers of other religion. M. A. Jinnah and the other Muslim League leaders declared that the real aim of the Congress was not independence but to establish a Hindu Raj which would be hostile towards the Muslim minorities. This was the only way to create Hindu-Muslim division.

Thus the prospect of a possible Hindu Raj created a deep-seated fear in the Muslim mind. It became easy to raise the demand for a separate home land where the Muslims could live and practise their own faith in freedom. The demand for Pakistan would inevitably raise by the politics of fear and hatred created by the Muslim League leaders after 1937. At the Lahore Session on 23 March, 1940, Jinnah came forward with his two-nation theory. He said that the



Hindus and the Muslims consisted of two nations and economically, politically, socially, culturally and historically they were different people. So the Muslims of India should have a separate sovereign state for themselves. The Muslim League then passed the famous '**Lahore Resolution**' demanding an independent state for the Muslims because the Hindus and the Muslims were two nations. As a result of this, communalism began to emerge as an organized mass force.

On the other side, Hindu communalists also appealed to religion like their Muslim counterpart. Madan Mohan Malaviya's place was taken by leaders like **V.D. Savarkar of Hindu Mahasabha** and **M.S. Golwalkar of the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangha**. Golwalkar's book '**We**' became the manifesto of Hindu communalism. They declared that the Hindus were the only nation living in India and the Muslims should either leave or live as second class citizens. This was the Hindu communalists' version of the two-nation theory. They condemned the National Congress and the Congress men for supporting "Our most inveterate enemies." In this way, the political and social atmosphere became vicious and 1940s became the most crucial and decisive phase of both Hindu and Muslim communalism.



Answer the following :

1. Discuss the growth of Socialist ideas within Congress in 1930s.
2. Discuss the background for the formation of the AITUC in Bombay.
3. Why was the Kisan Sabha formed?
4. What was the content of the Hindu communalism?
5. What led to discontent among the Muslim leaders after the election of 1937?