



## Concept of freedom movement and national awakening in India

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### Abstract

Indian freedom movement was a historical and revolutionary process that incorporated political resistance, social reform, and cultural renaissance against British colonial domination. The paper suggests that it would analyze the emergence of national awakening in India with special focus on ideological, social, and political forces driving the struggle for independence. Based on a historical and qualitative analysis, it explores key events, figures, and movements that played a role in the construction of Indian nationalism—from early reform movements to mass mobilization under Mahatma Gandhi. The study finds that the freedom movement was not just a political movement, but also a wide national awakening based on shared cultural identity, historical consciousness, and a vision of self-rule. The study concludes by stating that this multifaceted movement became the foundation of India's democratic culture and remains to influence its socio-political landscape.

**Keywords:** Indian nationalism, freedom movement, colonialism, cultural revival, political awakening, independence struggle, national identity

### Introduction

The concept of the freedom movement and the awakening of the nation in India is a centuries-long struggle, reform, resilience, and finally, the attainment of self-governance<sup>[1]</sup>. India's own path to freedom was not merely a political fight against British colonialism but also a broader cultural and ideological transition that sought to remake national identity, revive civilizational pride, and install the values of justice, equality, and self-determination<sup>[2]</sup>.

The origin of India's national awakening is traceable to the latter half of the 18th century, that is, when the consolidation of British colonial domination via the East India Company took place. When India was shifting from a quilt of regional kingdoms towards a colonized nation under British imperialism, changes in the socio-political and economic sphere started to ferment dissent among different segments of society<sup>[3]</sup>. The plundering of resources, exploitation of peasants, destruction of indigenous industries, and racial discrimination against Indians laid the groundwork for a growing consciousness of foreign domination. However, it was not until the 19th century that this discontent began to take a coherent ideological shape<sup>[4]</sup>. A significant factor that catalysed this transformation was the introduction of Western education and liberal ideas. English-educated Indians, who had been exposed to values of the Enlightenment like liberty, equality, democracy, and nationalism, increasingly scrutinized colonial authority and interrogated its validity. This made the intelligentsia class that championed calls for reform as well as for the unity of the nation come to the foreground<sup>[5]</sup>. Influential thinkers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy championed the cause of social and religious reform, challenging orthodox practices and emphasizing rational thought, women's rights, and education. Simultaneously, movements such as the Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj, and the Aligarh Movement helped in mobilizing different communities toward the idea of a unified Indian identity<sup>[6]</sup>.

The national awakening was also deeply intertwined with the socio-religious and cultural revival that sought to restore

pride in India's ancient heritage and values<sup>[7]</sup>. Figures like Swami Vivekananda and Bankim Chandra Chatterjee emphasized India's spiritual legacy and the importance of self-confidence in the face of colonial inferiority narratives. Literature, journalism, and art became powerful tools for awakening nationalist sentiments and spreading political awareness among the masses<sup>[8]</sup>.

Politically, the founding of the Indian National Congress in 1885 was the birth of organized political voice. Modest in orientation at first, the Congress argued for constitutional adjustments and more participation by Indians in the government<sup>[9]</sup>. But soon, by the early 20th century, the movement veered towards militancy with protagonists such as Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Bipin Chandra Pal agitating for Swaraj (self-rule) and mass awakening. The 1905 partition of Bengal also intensified nationalist sentiment and resulted in mass protests, boycotts, and the Swadeshi Movement, which focused on indigenous industries and national self-reliance<sup>[10]</sup>.

With the entry of Mahatma Gandhi into the freedom struggle, there has been radical change in the strategies as well as scope of the movement. According to Khan *et al.* (2017)<sup>[11]</sup>, Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolent resistance or Satyagraha, along with his ability to connect with and unify people across all class, caste, and religious barriers brought this movement into mass character. Movements like these such as the Non-Cooperation Movement, Civil Disobedience Movement, and Quit India Movement became mobilizing for millions, turning the demand for independence to a national aspiration, not just one of the elites alone<sup>[12]</sup>.

The study attempts to analyze the development of the Indian freedom struggle and the corresponding national awakening in terms of its ideological basis, key movements, socio-cultural contributions, and contributions made by various groups and leaders. It will also assess how the concept of nationalism in India evolved as a response to colonial policy and indigenous dynamics to ultimately lead to the independence of India on August 15, 1947. Understanding

this historical journey is crucial not only for appreciating the legacy of the freedom struggle but also for recognizing the foundational principles upon which modern India stands today.

The research paper is divided into five sections. Section 1 comprises of the introduction part of the research paper. The systematic literature review related to the topic "Concept of freedom movement and national awakening in India" is presented in section 2. Section 3 comprises of the research methodology of the research paper. Objectives, hypothesis, findings, and discussion are presented in the research paper in section 4. Section 5 of the research paper comprises of conclusion, implications, limitations, and future research directions of the research paper. At last of the research paper, references have been listed down.

## Review of Literature

### Theme 1: Colonial Policies and Socio-Political Transformations in Pre-Independence India

The existing literature on colonial policies and socio-political transformations in pre-independence India reveals a complex interplay between British administrative strategies and the gradual erosion of traditional Indian structures. Scholars such as Bipan Chandra (1980) <sup>[13]</sup> and R.C. Dutt (1901) <sup>[14]</sup> argue that British economic policies, including the Permanent Settlement and the drain of wealth, significantly disrupted agrarian economies and led to widespread rural impoverishment. Sumit Sarkar (1983) <sup>[15]</sup> highlights how these economic dislocations fuelled early peasant uprisings and created a fertile ground for anti-colonial sentiment. The administrative centralization introduced by the British, as analysed by Thomas Metcalf (1994) <sup>[16]</sup>, contributed to the creation of a modern bureaucratic state but simultaneously alienated Indians from governance. C.A. Bayly (1983) <sup>[17]</sup> points to the development of a new English-educated elite who, though they gained from colonial institutions, also became vocal critics calling for reform and resistance. These political and social transformations, coupled with racial discrimination and suppression of native industries, fueled a growing sense of national consciousness. The studies discussed here all refer to the fact that colonial rule inadvertently accelerated political awakening by transforming the social fabric, displacing traditional power structures, and laying the foundation for organized resistance in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

### Theme 2: Intellectual Awakening and the Role of Education, Reform, and Liberal Thought in Indian Nationalism

Academic texts on intellectual awakening in colonial India highlight the revolutionary impact of Western education, liberal political thought, and indigenous social reform movements in ushering in early nationalist consciousness. Historians such as Partha Chatterjee (1993) <sup>[18]</sup> and Sugata Bose (2011) <sup>[19]</sup> argue that the spread of English education exposed a new Indian intelligentsia to Enlightenment principles of liberty, equality, and nationalism, which deepened their perception of colonial rule. Raja Ram Mohan Roy's writings, who is widely regarded as the founder of modern Indian thinking, are studied widely for the synthesis of religious reform and rationalism, which is seen in the writings of V.C. Joshi (1975) <sup>[20]</sup> and Amiya P. Sen. (2002) <sup>[21]</sup> Moderate political activity based on liberal principles

was promoted by Lajpat Rai and Gopal Krishna Gokhale, among others, while the intellectual awakening within the Muslim community was addressed by the activities of Syed Ahmed Khan and the Aligarh Movement. Scholars including Kenneth Jones (1989) <sup>[22]</sup> have analyzed how reformist movements like the Arya Samaj, Ramakrishna Mission, and the Brahmo Samaj were key in redefining Indian identity, upsetting orthodoxy, and generating collective pride in India's civilizational heritage. This literature stresses that the ideological core of Indian nationalism was not reactively formed only in response to colonial domination, but also purposefully constructed through reformist ideation and pedagogic empowerment, which produced a vision for self-governance based upon moral and intellectual renewal.

## Research Methodology

This research paper adopts a qualitative, historical-analytical methodology to explore the concept of the freedom movement and national awakening in India. The study is primarily based on secondary sources such as academic books, scholarly articles, historical documents, speeches, biographies, and archival records. Emphasis is placed on examining and interpreting historical events, ideological developments, and socio-political movements through a critical lens. The research also includes thematic analysis of key texts and speeches by prominent leaders and reformers to understand their influence on nationalist thought. By synthesizing various perspectives from historians and political thinkers, the study aims to provide a comprehensive and contextual understanding of how India's freedom struggle evolved and contributed to the shaping of a unified national identity. The methodology also incorporates comparative insights to highlight regional variations and the inclusive nature of the Indian independence movement.

## Findings

### Obj. 1: To analyse the historical background and socio-political conditions that led to the emergence of the Indian freedom movement and national awakening.

The analysis reveals several interconnected historical and socio-political conditions that contributed significantly to the emergence of the Indian freedom movement and the rise of national consciousness:

#### 1. Economic Exploitation and Colonial Policies

The British colonial economic policies, such as the Permanent Settlement, Ryotwari system, and heavy land taxation, caused widespread agrarian distress and the decline of traditional industries, especially textiles. Scholars highlight that these policies led to mass poverty, famines, and rural indebtedness, generating deep resentment among the Indian population. The perceived "drain of wealth", as described by Dadabhai Naoroji, became a rallying cry against British exploitation.

#### 2. Political Centralization and Exclusion

The establishment of a unified colonial government, instead of scattered regional powers, transformed the political landscape of India. But this unification went hand in hand with systematic exclusion of Indians from meaningful involvement in the government. Lack of political representation, combined with racial discrimination in civil

services and legislatures, created a shared grievance that cut across regional as well as class lines.

### 3. Impact of the 1857 Revolt

The Revolt of 1857, while a failure in itself, was nevertheless a watershed moment in exposing the flaws of British rule and serving as a nascent representation of pan-Indian resistance. The vicious suppression of the revolt and the restructuring of the British Raj thereafter led to greater dissent and consideration for alternatives to resistance.

### 4. Rise of a New Middle Class

Even the very act of establishing Western educational systems and disseminating the English language in India gave rise to an entire new class of Indians whose intellectuals formed the backbone of the nationalist movement. This middle class consisting of lawyers, teachers, journalists, and civil servants was aptly attuned to articulating demands for civil rights and political representation.

### 5. Socio-Religious Reform and Identity Formation

The Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj, and Aligarh Movement was concerned with issues of caste oppression, women's subordination, cultural pride, and moral regeneration in India. These movements fostered a sense national identity while addressing other issues, such as colonial domination and social orthodoxy.

### 6. Early Political Associations and Nationalist Thought

The establishment of political associations like the Indian Association (1876) and subsequently the Indian National Congress (1885) set the stage for systematic political action. Early nationalist leaders such as Dadabhai Naoroji, Surendranath Banerjee, and Gopal Krishna Gokhale stressed constitutional means and raised India's grievances in British forums.

### Obj. 2: To examine the role of Western education, liberal ideas, and social reform movements in shaping nationalist consciousness in India.

The study identifies that Western education, the spread of liberal ideology, and the emergence of socio-religious reform movements were important forces in the fostering of a politically conscious, modern Indian identity, shaped eventually into the ideological moorings of Indian nationalism. The findings are as below:

#### 1. Western Education as a Catalyst for Political Awareness

The establishment of English education during British rule, especially through colleges such as Hindu College (Calcutta), Presidency College (Madras), and subsequently, Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras universities, brought into being a generation of English-educated Indians. They were introduced to the values of the Enlightenment, including liberty, equality, secularism, and democracy, which shaped their political thought significantly. This educated elite became articulate voices in critiquing colonial policies and provided the basis for nationalist thinking.

#### 2. Liberal Ideas and Political Modernity

The works of European intellectuals such as John Locke, Rousseau, J.S. Mill, and Edmund Burke had a substantial influence on Indian intellectuals. They influenced Indian

reformers and early political leaders by inspiring them with their concepts on rights, representation, and self-rule to aspire for increased involvement in governance, civil liberties, and legal parity under colonial control. The focus on individual freedom and rational governance enabled Indians to envision alternatives to colonial control.

### 3. Rise of Social Reform Movements and Moral Awakening

Reform movements such as the Brahmo Samaj (founded by Raja Ram Mohan Roy), Arya Samaj (founded by Dayananda Saraswati), and the Aligarh Movement (led by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan) had a dual function—opposing retrograde practices in Indian society as well as instilling a sense of moral and cultural pride. These movements stressed education, women's rights, religious reform, and the restoration of rationalism and thus advanced progressive thought and national rebirth.

### 4. Formation of a Common National Identity

By tackling social evils such as sati, child marriage, untouchability, and illiteracy, reformers encouraged Indians to introspect about internal social vulnerabilities while at the same time pushing back against colonial Indian inferiority discourses. This resulted in the gradual emergence of a pan-Indian identity that was inclusive, forward-looking, and politicized.

### 5. Role of Print Media and Vernacular Literature

The growth of vernacular journals, newspapers, and nationalist literature was a potent vehicle for the dissemination of reformist and nationalist thought. Intellectuals such as Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, in writings such as Anandamath, and social commentators who wrote in Indian languages, instilled a sense of unity and cultural nationalism among the masses.

### 6. Bridge Between Reform and Political Action

Most of the reformers shifted to political office or directly impacted political bodies. Gopal Krishna Gokhale, for example, a moderate Indian National Congress leader, was highly impacted by reformist principles. Their involvement ensured that the new nationalist movement had its roots not just in anti-colonialism but also in social advancement and moral governance.

### Conclusion

The freedom struggle in India was a very dynamic and multidimensional movement, born out of a towering consciousness of history and earnest aspiration for national self-determination. Based on cultural renaissance and political consciousness, the movement was influenced by universal principles of freedom and revolution but had a distinctly Indian tone. From the very first anti-British resistance campaigns to mass mobilizations led by Mahatma Gandhi, the movement grew to embrace several social classes and political ideas. They had come together in regions, languages, and religions to fight for independence and eventually drove the British out of India in 1947.

### 1. Implications, Limitations, and Future Research Directions

The story of India's liberation movement speaks volumes about the impacts that historical consciousnesses and

common identities have in the processes of nation-building. How a cultural resurgence with political modernization in the context of social movements worked at elevating the national consciousness above regional and sectarian fault lines can also be seen. This movement laid the foundations for India's democratic ethos, secularism, and constitutionalism and determined post-independence trajectories. It also provides examples of civic participation, leadership, and resistance that are still relevant today in struggles for social and political change.

Though the paper gives an overall account of key events and ideologies of the Indian freedom struggle, it remains descriptive in most part. It fails to examine critically the internal contradictions, regional inequalities, or differential social forces within the struggle. In addition, the viewpoint of marginalized sections like women, Dalits, and tribal populations is touched upon briefly or not examined at length. These exclusions narrow the scope of the study and limit a comprehensive understanding of the freedom movement.

Subsequent studies may build upon this basis by investigating subaltern and regional histories that led to India's independence. Research that examines local movements, women's involvement, and the participation of marginalized groups would provide a richer and more complete historical narrative. Comparative studies of other anti-colonial movements in Asia, Africa, and Latin America can further enhance our understanding of decolonization's global character. Furthermore, interdisciplinary frameworks that integrate history, political science, and sociology may yield more complex insights into the afterlife of the national awakening in constituting contemporary India.

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