



Role of Indian National Congress in Freedom Movement of India

Dr. Girish Singh

Associate Professor, Political Science, S.D. Govt. College, Beawar, Rajasthan, India

ABSTRACT: The Indian National Congress (INC), colloquially the Congress Party or simply the Congress, is an Indian political party.^[34] Founded in 1885, it was the first modern nationalist movement to emerge in the British Empire in Asia and Africa.^{[a][35]} From the late 19th century, and especially after 1920, under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, the Congress became the principal leader of the Indian independence movement.^[36] The Congress led India to independence from the United Kingdom,^[d] and significantly influenced other anti-colonial nationalist movements in the British Empire.^{[e][35]}

Congress is one of the two major political parties in India, along with its main rival the Bharatiya Janata Party.^[39] It is a "big tent" party whose platform is generally considered to lie in the centre to centre-left of Indian politics.^{[21][16][40]} After Indian independence in 1947, Congress emerged as a catch-all and secular party, dominating Indian politics for the next 20 years.

KEYWORDS: Congress, nationalist, independence, political, Mahatma Gandhi, secular, major, british

I.INTRODUCTION

The party's first Prime Minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, led the Congress to support socialist policies by creating the Planning Commission, introducing Five-Year Plans, implementing a mixed economy, and establishing a secular state. After Nehru's death and the short tenure of Lal Bahadur Shastri, Indira Gandhi became the leader of the party.

In 1969, the party suffered a major split, with a faction led by Indira Gandhi leaving to form the Congress (R), with the remainder becoming the Congress (O). The Congress (R) became the dominant faction, winning the 1971 general election with a huge margin. However, another split occurred in 1979, leading to the creation of the Congress (I), which was recognized as the Congress by the Electoral Commission in 1981. Under Rajiv Gandhi's leadership, the party won a massive victory in the 1984 general elections, nevertheless losing the election held in 1989 to the National Front. The Congress then returned to power under P. V. Narasimha Rao, who moved the party towards an economically liberal agenda, a sharp break from previous leaders. However, it lost the 1996 general election and was replaced in government by the National Front (then the BJP). After a record eight years out of office, the Congress-led coalition known as the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) under Manmohan Singh formed a government post-winning 2004 general elections. Subsequently, the UPA again formed the government after winning the 2009 general elections, and Singh became the first Prime Minister since Nehru in 1962 to be re-elected after completing a full five-year term. However, in the 2014 general election, the Congress suffered a heavy defeat, winning only 44 seats of the 543-member Lok Sabha (the lower house of the Parliament of India). In the 2012 general election, the party again suffered a heavy defeat, winning only 52 seats in the Lok Sabha.

The Indian National Congress conducted its first session in Bombay from 28 to 31 December 1885 at the initiative of retired Civil Service officer Allan Octavian Hume, known for his pro-Indian activities.^[41] In 1883, Hume had outlined his idea for a body representing Indian interests in an open letter to graduates of the University of Calcutta.^{[42][43]} It aimed to obtain a greater share in government for educated Indians and to create a platform for civic and political dialogue between them and the British Raj. Hume took the initiative, and in March 1885 a notice convening the first meeting of the Indian National Union to be held in Poona the following December was issued.^[44] However due to a cholera outbreak there, it was moved to Bombay.^{[45][46]}

Hume organized the first meeting in Bombay with the approval of the Viceroy Lord Dufferin. Umesh Chandra Banerjee was the first president of Congress; the first session was attended by 72 delegates, representing each province of India.^{[47][48]} Notable representatives included Scottish ICS officer William Wedderburn, Dadabhai Naoroji, Pherozeshah Mehta of the Bombay Presidency Association, Ganesh Vasudeo Joshi of the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha, social reformer and newspaper editor Gopal Ganesh Agarkar, Justice K. T. Telang, N. G. Chandavarkar, Dinshaw Wacha, Behramji Malabari, journalist, and activist Gooty Kesava Pillai, and P. Rangaiah Naidu of the Madras Mahajana Sabha.^{[49][50]} This small elite group, unrepresentative of the Indian masses at the

time,^[51] functioned more as a stage for elite Indian ambitions than a political party for the first decade of its existence.^[52]

Early years

At the beginning of the 20th century, Congress' demands became more radical in the face of constant opposition from the British government, and the party decided to advocate in favour of the independence movement because it would allow a new political system in which Congress could be a major party. By 1905, a division opened between the moderates led by Gokhale, who downplayed public agitation, and the new extremists who advocated agitation, and regarded the pursuit of social reform as a distraction from nationalism. Bal Gangadhar Tilak, who tried to mobilise Hindu Indians by appealing to an explicitly Hindu political identity displayed in the annual public Ganapati festivals he inaugurated in western India, was prominent among the extremists.^[53] Congress included several prominent political figures. Dadabhai Naoroji, a member of the sister Indian National Association, was elected president of the party in 1886 and was the first Indian Member of Parliament in the British House of Commons (1892–1895). Congress also included Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal, Lala Lajpat Rai, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, and Mohammed Ali Jinnah. Jinnah was a member of the moderate group in the Congress, favouring Hindu–Muslim unity in achieving self-government.^[54] Later he became the leader of the Muslim League and instrumental in the creation of Pakistan. Congress was transformed into a mass movement by Surendranath Banerjee during the partition of Bengal in 1905, and the resultant Swadeshi movement.^[50]

In 1915, Mahatma Gandhi returned from South Africa and joined Congress.^{[55][56]} His efforts in South Africa were well known not only among the educated but also among the masses. During 1917 and 1918, Mahatma Gandhi was involved in three struggles— known as Champaran Satyagraha, Ahmedabad Mill Strike and Kheda Satyagraha.^{[57][58][59]} After the First World War, the party came to be associated with Gandhi, who remained its unofficial spiritual leader and icon.^[60] He formed an alliance with the Khilafat Movement in 1920 as part of his opposition to British rule in India,^[61] and fought for the rights for Indians using civil disobedience or *Satyagraha* as the tool for agitation.^[62] In 1922, after the deaths of policemen at Chauri Chaura, Gandhi suspended the agitation.

II.DISCUSSION

With the help of the moderate group led by Gokhale, in 1924 Gandhi became president of Congress.^{[63][64]} The rise of Gandhi's popularity and his satyagraha art of revolution led to support from Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Rajendra Prasad, Khan Mohammad Abbas Khan, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Chakravarti Rajgopalachari, Anugrah Narayan Sinha, Jayaprakash Narayan, Jivatram Kripalani, and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. As a result of prevailing nationalism, Gandhi's popularity, and the party's attempts at eradicating caste differences, untouchability, poverty, and religious and ethnic divisions, Congress became a forceful and dominant group.^{[65][66][67]} Although its members were predominantly Hindu, it had members from other religions, economic classes, and ethnic and linguistic groups.^[68]



Flag adopted by INC, 1931

At the Congress 1929 Lahore session under the presidency of Jawaharlal Nehru, *Purna Swaraj* (complete independence) was declared as the party's goal, declaring 26 January 1930 as *Purna Swaraj Diwas* (Independence Day).^[69] The same year, Srinivas Iyenger was expelled from the party for demanding full independence, not just home rule as demanded by Gandhi.^[70]

After the passage of the Government of India Act 1935, provincial elections were held in India in the winter of 1936–37 in eleven provinces: Madras, Central Provinces, Bihar, Orissa, United Provinces, Bombay Presidency, Assam, NWFP, Bengal, Punjab, and Sindh. The final results of the elections were declared in February 1937.^[71] The Indian National Congress gained power in eight of them – the three exceptions being Bengal, Punjab, and Sindh.^[71] The All-India Muslim League failed to form a Government in any Province.^[72]



Congress Ministers resigned in October and November 1939 in protest against Viceroy Lord Linlithgow's declaration that India was a belligerent in the Second World War without consulting the Indian people.^[73] In 1939, Subhas Chandra Bose, the elected President of India in both 1938 and 1939, resigned from Congress over the selection of the working committee.^[74] Congress was an umbrella organisation, sheltering radical socialists, traditionalists, and Hindu and Muslim conservatives. Mahatma Gandhi expelled all the socialist groupings, including the Congress Socialist Party, the Krishak Praja Party, and the Swaraj Party, along with Subhas Chandra Bose, in 1939.^[60]

After the failure of the Cripps Mission launched by the British government to gain Indian support for the British war effort, Mahatma Gandhi made a call to "Do or Die" in his Quit India movement delivered in Bombay on 8 August 1942 at the Gowalia Tank Maidan and opposed any help to the British in World War 2.^[75] The British government responded with mass arrests including that of Gandhi and Congress leaders and killed over 1,000 Indians who participated in this movement.^[76] A number of violent attacks were also carried out by the nationalists against the British government.^[77] The movement played a role in weakening the control over the South Asian region by the British regime and ultimately paved the way for Indian independence.^{[77][78]}

In 1945, when World War 2 almost came to an end, the Labour Party of the United Kingdom won elections with a promise to provide independence to India.^{[79][80]} The jailed political prisoners of the Quit India movement were released in the same year.^[81]

In 1946, the British tried the soldiers of Japanese-sponsored Indian National Army in the INA trials. In response, Congress helped form the INA Defence Committee, which assembled a legal team to defend the case of the soldiers of the Azad Hind government. The team included several famous lawyers, including Bhulabhai Desai, Asaf Ali, and Jawaharlal Nehru.^[82] The British Empire eventually backtracked in the face of opposition by the Congress.^{[83][84]}

III.RESULTS

After Indian independence in 1947, the Indian National Congress became the dominant political party in the country. In 1952, in the first general election held after Independence, the party swept to power in the national parliament and most state legislatures. It held power nationally until 1977 when it was defeated by the Janata coalition. It returned to power in 1980 and ruled until 1989 when it was once again defeated. The party formed the government in 1991 at the head of a coalition, as well as in 2004 and 2009 when it led the United Progressive Alliance. During this period the Congress remained centre-left in its social policies while steadily shifting from a socialist to a neoliberal economic outlook.^[85] The Party's rivals at state level have been national parties including the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPIM), and various regional parties, such as the Telugu Desam Party, Trinamool Congress and Aam Aadmi Party.^[86]

A post-partition successor to the party survived as the Pakistan National Congress, a party which represented the rights of religious minorities in the state. The party's support was strongest in the Bengali-speaking province of East Pakistan. After the Bangladeshi War of Independence, it became known as the Bangladeshi National Congress, but was dissolved in 1975 by the government.^{[87][88][89]}

Nehru and Shastri era (1947–1966)

From 1951 until his death in 1964, Jawaharlal Nehru was the paramount leader of the party. Congress gained power in landslide victories in the general elections of 1951–52, 1957, and 1962.^[90] During his tenure, Nehru implemented policies based on import substitution industrialisation, and advocated a mixed economy where the government-controlled public sector co-existed with the private sector.^[91] He believed the establishment of basic and heavy industries was fundamental to the development and modernisation of the Indian economy.^[90] The Nehru government directed investment primarily into key public sector industries—steel, iron, coal, and power—promoting their development with subsidies and protectionist policies.^[91] Nehru embraced secularism, socialistic economic practices based on state-driven industrialisation, and a non-aligned and non-confrontational foreign policy that became typical of the modern Congress Party.^[92] The policy of non-alignment during the Cold War meant Nehru received financial and technical support from both the Eastern and Western Blocs to build India's industrial base from nothing.^{[93][94]}

During his period in office, there were four known assassination attempts on Nehru.^[95] The first attempt on his life was during partition in 1947 while he was visiting the North-West Frontier Province in a car. The second was by a knife-wielding rickshaw-puller in Maharashtra in 1955.^[96] A third attempt happened in Bombay in 1956.^[97] The fourth was a failed bombing attempt on railway tracks in Maharashtra in 1961.^[95] Despite threats to his life, Nehru despised having excess security personnel around him and did not like his movements to disrupt traffic.^[95] K. Kamaraj became the president of the All India Congress Committee in 1963 during the last year of Nehru's life.^[98] Prior to that, he had been the chief minister of Madras state for nine years.^[99] Kamaraj had also been a member of "the syndicate", a group of right wing leaders within Congress. In 1963 the Congress lost popularity following the defeat in the Indo-Chinese war

of 1962. To revitalise the party, Kamaraj proposed the Kamaraj Plan to Nehru that encouraged six Congress chief ministers (including himself) and six senior cabinet ministers to resign to take up party work.^{[100][101][102]}

In 1964, Nehru died because of an aortic dissection, raising questions about the party's future.^{[103][104][105]} Following the death of Nehru, Gulzarilal Nanda was appointed as the interim Prime Minister on 27 May 1964, pending the election of a new parliamentary leader of the Congress party who would then become Prime Minister.^[106] During the leadership contest to succeed Nehru, the preference was between Morarji Desai and Lal Bahadur Shastri. Eventually, Shastri was selected as the next parliamentary leader thus the Prime Minister. Kamaraj was widely credited as the "kingmaker" in for ensuring the victory of Lal Bahadur Shastri over Morarji Desai.^[107]

As prime minister, Shastri retained most of members of Nehru's Council of Ministers; T. T. Krishnamachari was retained as Finance Minister of India, as was Defence Minister Yashwantrao Chavan.^[108] Shastri appointed Swaran Singh to succeed him as External Affairs Minister.^[109] Shastri appointed Indira Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru's daughter and former party president, Minister of Information and Broadcasting.^[110] Gulzarilal Nanda continued as the Minister of Home Affairs.^[111] As Prime Minister, Shastri continued Nehru's policy of non-alignment,^[112] but built closer relations with the Soviet Union. In the aftermath of the Sino-Indian War of 1962, and the formation of military ties between China and Pakistan, Shastri's government expanded the defence budget of India's armed forces. He also promoted the White Revolution—a national campaign to increase the production and supply of milk by creating the National Dairy Development Board.^[113] The Madras anti-Hindi agitation of 1965 occurred during Shastri's tenure.^{[114][115]}

Shastri became a national hero following victory in the Indo-Pakistani War of 1965.^[116] His slogan, "Jai Jawan Jai Kisan" ("Hail the soldier, Hail the farmer"), became very popular during the war.^[117] On 11 January 1966, a day after signing the Tashkent Declaration, Shastri died in Tashkent, reportedly of a heart attack; but the circumstances of his death remain mysterious.^{[118][119][120]} After Shastri's death, Congress elected Indira Gandhi as leader over Morarji Desai. Once again, K. Kamaraj was instrumental in achieving this result. The differences among the top leadership of the Congress regarding the future of the party during resulted in the formation of several breakaway parties such as Orissa Jana Congress, Bangla Congress, Utkal Congress, and, Bharatiya Kranti Dal.

IV.CONCLUSIONS

In 1967, following a poor performance in the 1967 Indian general election, Indira Gandhi started moving toward the political left. On 12 July 1969, Congress Parliamentary Board nominated Neelam Sanjiva Reddy as Congress's candidate for the post of President of India by a vote of four to two. K. Kamaraj, Morarji Desai and S. K. Patil voted for Reddy. Indira Gandhi and Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed voted for V. V. Giri and Congress President S. Nijalingappa, Home Minister Yashwantrao Chavan and Agriculture Minister Jagjivan Ram abstained from voting.^{[121][122]}

In mid-1969, she was involved in a dispute with senior party leaders on several issues. Notably – Her support for the independent candidate, V. V. Giri, rather than the official Congress party candidate, Neelam Sanjiva Reddy, for the vacant post of the president of India^{[123][124]} and Gandhi's abrupt nationalisation of the 14 biggest banks in India.

Congress split, 1969

In November 1969, the Congress party president, S. Nijalingappa, expelled Indira Gandhi from the party for indiscipline.^{[125][126]} Subsequently Gandhi launched her own faction of the INC which came to be known as Congress (R).^[f] The original party then came to be known as Indian National Congress (O).^[g] Its principal leaders were Kamraj, Morarji Desai, Nijalingappa and S. K. Patil who stood for a more right-wing agenda.^[127] The split occurred when a united opposition under the banner of Samyukt Vidhayak Dal, won control over several states in the Hindi Belt.^[128] Indira Gandhi, on the other side, wanted to use a populist agenda in order to mobilise popular support for the party.^[127] Her faction, called Congress (R), was supported by most of the Congress MPs while the original party had the support of only 65 MPs.^[129] In the All India Congress Committee, 446 of its 705 members walked over to Indira's side. The "Old Congress" retained the party symbol of a pair of bullocks carrying a yoke while Indira's breakaway faction was given a new symbol of a cow with a suckling calf by the Election Commission as the party election symbol. The Congress (O) eventually merged with other opposition parties to form the Janata Party.

On 2 January 1978, Indira and her followers seceded and formed a new opposition party, popularly called Congress (I)—the "I" signifying Indira.^[138] During the next year, her new party attracted enough members of the legislature to become the official opposition.^[137] In November 1978, Gandhi regained a parliamentary seat. In January 1980, following a landslide victory for Congress (I), she was again elected prime minister. The national election commission declared Congress (I) to be the real Indian National Congress for the 1984 general election



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however (other than Hume) Congress remained, during its first decade at least, more of a sounding board for elite Indian aspirations than a political party.

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