

Swaraj Party, Formation, Objectives, Significance

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The Swaraj Party was founded in January 1923, following the Gaya session of the Indian National Congress in December 1922. Its main objective was to secure greater self-governance and political freedom for Indians under British rule, grounded in the idea of "**Swaraj**," meaning "**self-rule**" or "independence."

Leaders like C. R. Das and Motilal Nehru advocated for working within the legislative councils to push for reforms. Consequently, in the 1923 Bengal Legislative Council elections, the Swaraj Party achieved significant success. However, after the death of C. R. Das, the Swaraj party began to decline.

Swaraj Party Overview

The Swaraj Party, also known as the Congress-Khilafat Swarajya Party, was established on January 1, 1923, by Chittaranjan Das and Motilal Nehru. The party emerged in response to Mahatma Gandhi's suspension of the **Non-Cooperation Movement** after the Chauri Chaura incident in 1922, where violent clashes resulted in the deaths of several policemen. Gandhi halted the movement, stressing non-violence and constructive work.

- **Frustration Over the Suspension:** The suspension of the Non-Cooperation Movement frustrated many Congress members who believed the movement was at its peak and that its abrupt withdrawal was

premature.

- **Split Within Congress:** The dissatisfaction with Gandhi's decision caused a rift within the Indian National Congress, leading to the formation of the Swaraj Party.
- **Goals of the Swaraj Party:** The Swaraj Party aimed to achieve self-rule (Swaraj) and greater political freedom for Indians by entering legislative councils to obstruct British policies and press for reforms from within the system.
- **Strategic Shift in Independence Struggle:** The creation of the Swaraj Party marked a strategic shift in India's struggle for independence, reflecting growing political fervour and discontent with British rule during the colonial era.

Swaraj Party Formation

The Swaraj Party was formed in January 1923, following a disagreement within the Congress over the issue of council entry. This agreement led to the emergence of two factions within INC: Swarajists and No-Changers:

- **Swarajists:** Led by C.R. Das and Motilal Nehru, the Swarajists advocated for entering legislative councils to expose their weaknesses and use them as a platform for political struggle.
- **No Changers:** The other group came to be known as No Changers led by C. Rajagopalachari, Vallabhbhai Patel, **Rajendra Prasad**, and M.A. Ansari opposed council entry and advocated for constructive work and the continuation of boycott and non-cooperation.
- **"End or Mend":** The disagreement regarding council entry between the two factions led to the rejection of the Swarajists' proposal to either "end or mend" the councils during the Congress session in Gaya in December 1922.

Swaraj Party Objectives

The Swaraj Party, formed in January 1923, sought to use legislative councils as platforms for political struggle and to expose the shortcomings of British governance. The objectives of the Swaraj Party are as follows:

- To obtain the right to form a constitution that aligns with the country's conditions and aspirations.
- The party strived to attain Swaraj (self-rule) as a means to empower the Indian populace and assert their political rights.

Swaraj Party Leaders

Following the defeat of the Swarajists' proposals, C.R. Das and Motilal Nehru resigned from their Congress positions and subsequently formed the Swaraj Party. C.R. Das became the president of the Swaraj Party, while Motilal Nehru served as its secretary.

Swaraj Party in Elections

The Swarajists were permitted to contest elections as a faction within the Congress. They agreed to the Congress program, except for their intention to join legislative councils. Elections for the newly formed Central Legislative Assembly and provincial assemblies were scheduled for November 1923.

- **The Swarajist Manifesto**, issued in October 1923, took a strong anti-imperialist stance. It claimed the British governed India for selfish interests, disguising reforms to exploit India's resources and keep Indians subordinate.
 - The Party pledged to advocate for self-government within councils. If refused, they would obstruct governance to create deadlocks on legislative measures.
- The Swaraj Party contested the 1923 and 1926 elections. In 1923, they secured 42 out of 141 seats, achieving a majority in the Central Provinces and becoming the largest party in the Central Assembly, Bombay, and Bengal.
 - However, in 1926, they performed poorly, winning only 40 seats in the Centre and a few in Madras.

Swaraj Party and Gandhi

Mahatma Gandhi initially opposed the Swarajist proposal for council entry. However, after his release from prison in February 1924, he began to reconcile with them, believing public opposition would be counterproductive.

- Following a government crackdown on revolutionary terrorists and the Swarajists at the end of 1924, Gandhi expressed his support for the Swarajists.
- In December 1924, during the **Belgaum session** of Congress, both sides agreed for the Swarajists to work within the councils as a core part of the Congress.

Swaraj Party Activities

The Swaraj Party activities made a significant contribution to nationalist politics, but they had limitations. Motilal Nehru admitted that Swarajist politics had not advanced the country towards Swaraj. The government could easily override the Swaraj Party's opposition in the Assembly using special powers granted by the **Government of India Act 1919**. This made the Swaraj Party's opposition ineffective in the Assembly.

Swaraj Party Achievements

The Swaraj Party began its political journey in the legislature in 1923, providing a concrete expression to opposition politics within the councils. Furthermore, the party achieved notable victories against the government, both in terms of tangible results and psychological impact.

- **Budget Matters:** With coalition partners, Swarajists defeated the government several times on budget matters and passed adjournment motions.
- **Advocacy:** Delivered powerful speeches advocating for self-government, civil liberties, and industrialization.
- **Leadership:** Vithalbhai Patel became the Speaker of the Central Legislative Assembly in 1925.
- **Montford Scheme:** Exposed flaws and limitations of the Montford scheme.
- **Public Safety Bill:** Successfully opposed the 1928 Public Safety Bill, a victory against government attempts to suppress socialist and communist ideas.
- **Political Void:** This played a crucial role in filling the political void during a time when the national movement was regaining strength.
- **Political Action:** Demonstrated that councils could serve as a platform for meaningful political action and resistance against the government.

Swaraj Party Significance

The Swaraj Party played a significant role in the Indian independence struggle. The party participated in legislative councils, advocating for constitutional reforms and voicing Indian grievances, which helped them become a major force in provincial elections.

- **Bridging Gaps:** Aimed to bridge the gap between extremists and moderates within the Indian National Congress and supported the Civil Disobedience Movement.
- **Influence:** Their experience in legislative advocacy influenced later leaders and parties in independent India.
- **Diverse Strategies:** Highlighted the diverse strategies employed in the Indian National Movement through involvement in legislative councils and pursuit of responsible government.

Overall, these efforts contributed to the momentum that ultimately led to India's independence in 1947.

Swaraj Party Decline

By the time the **1926 elections** took place, the political atmosphere in the country had shifted significantly, which was likely to impact the future of the Swaraj Party. The party faced several drawbacks, including internal divisions, diminishing public support, and an inability to effectively challenge the government, all of which contributed to the decline of the Swaraj Party.

- **Lack of coordination:** The Swaraj Party failed to coordinate their legislative activities with the mass struggle outside, relying solely on newspaper reports for communication.
- **Obstructionist strategy:** The Swaraj Party's obstructionist approach had limitations and did not achieve significant results.
- **Coalition challenges:** Conflicting ideas with coalition partners limited their effectiveness.
- **Failure to resist power and privileges:** Members of the Swaraj Party succumbed to the temptations of power and office.
- **Failure to support peasants:** The Swaraj Party's failure to support peasants in Bengal alienated religious minority members who were pro-peasant.

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