CHAPTER TWO
EARLY INVOLVEMENT IN FREEDOM MOVEMENT

The Indian National Congress which had its first meeting in 1885 was attended by 72 delegates. Originally it was an institution of the moderates. Different from its predecessors, it had its branches scattered all over different parts of India. In the initial phase Indian National Congress had a limited number of delegates but soon it became popular enough to attract over a thousand delegates. By 1892 it began to criticize the policies of the government.¹ The government of India soon became hostile to this organization.

A discontentment towards the British had spread all over the country especially among both the common people and the educated middle class. A famine broke out in 1870, which spread all over the country. In 1877, Queen Victoria (1837-1901) was declared as the Empress of India, at the durbar in Delhi when people were suffering from a disastrous famine. The government was getting alarming reports from various districts and the British officials feared a wide spread revolt against the British and that it would create a dangerous situation to the British rulers. The British officials wanted to change the situation.² So the British began to envisage the formation of an organization under the leadership of an educated middle class in India to get rid of the discontentment that was spreading all over the country and to feel the pulse of the people.
Lord Lytton's (1876-1880) administration had created a bad situation in India in various ways. In 1878, he introduced the Vernacular Press Act for curtailing the freedom of the press. The press stood for criticizing various repressive policies of the Government. In 1878, Arms Act, another one to check the freedom of the people came into prominence. This Act banned the people from taking up arms with them for self-protection. Both these acts accelerated the discontent among the people towards the British and Lord Lytton became unpopular. He became an object of hatred for Indians.³

Between 1865 and 1880, a group of famines occurred in different parts of India which caused great suffering and loss of life. It was a great transitional period, famine ruined the life of the Indian peasants.

After the suppression of the Revolt of 1857, the British pursued a policy of pleasing the feudal landlords who wrought much havoc on Indian peasants. As a result of this policy the princes, the big landlords, and the money lenders started a policy of exploitation of the people which resulted in the outbreak of perilous famines in various regions of the country⁴. These famines increased the hatred of the Indian people towards the English rulers by leaps and bounds. The British economic politics caused the destruction of Indian handicrafts and cottage industries. This led to the growth of
various liabilities towards the aristocrats and ruination of the peasant section.

The British economic policies resulted in the outbreak of a number of peasant riots. The Deccan peasant uprising of 1875 was the most serious among them. The Government appointed the Deccan Ryot Commission to investigate the whole agrarian situation. But the Indian masses were not well satisfied with these measures. The circumstances made the people to turn against the imperialist power and with a burning heart people began to criticize various policies of the government. Intense nationalism engulfed the thoughts of the people. People began to think about methods of expulsion of the British from the Indian soil. The situation was getting more favourable towards a trial to struggle for freedom.

Lord Lytton was succeeded by Lord Ripon (1880-1884) as the Viceroy of India. All the measures and policies adopted by Lord Ripon towards Indian masses were satisfactory compared to the work of Lord Lytton. He became very much popular among the Indians but at the same time he became unpopular among the Anglo-Indians. Ripon was a kind man with broad outlook. He repealed the Vernacular Press Act that provided a popular approval to his administration. He introduced a policy of Local self-government which laid the foundations of representative institutions in India. Another major reform introduced by Lord Ripon was the controversial Ilbert bill. That provided equal treatment to the Indians.
and Englishmen in the sphere of criminal jurisdiction. But the entire European community strongly protested against this bill and the bill had aroused the anger of Anglo-Indian officials. Most of the policies introduced by Lord Ripon came in favour of Indians. He left a permanent impression in the minds of Indians.

Indian masses became fed up with the arrogant British rule. Lord Lytton’s measures were leading to a revolution, even though Lord Ripon tried to console the masses by introducing some progressive measures. It was at this time A.O. Hume and his advisers were inspired to interfere. Hume started thinking of some positive action to counteract the growing unrest. It is in this way that an idea of a national organization came to his mind. He strongly believed that such an organization could be an effective device to avoid any danger of violence. The then Viceroy of India Lord Dufferin accepted the proposal made by A.O Hume, which culminated in the founding of the Indian National Congress.

In its initial stage the Congress was receiving assistance and co-operation from the British officials. But gradually they deviated from their attitude towards the organization. The activities of the congress were more intensified and administrative reforms became more vigorous. The congressmen were not satisfied with the annual meetings and the just passing of resolutions. They published pamphlets and other materials for criticizing the policies of the government. They conducted public meetings throughout India.
The Indian National Congress was a product of circumstances rather than the creation of individuals. It had its roots in separate associations in various parts of India. It is clear that the Congress was mainly started with the object of sparing the British empire from a danger than of giving political liberty to the Indians. They gave primary importance to the interests of the British and the Indian interests were of secondary importance. The Congress comprised of educated Indian middle class who not only founded the Congress but also maintained British rule in India. The founders of Indian National Congress wished to make the people of different parts of India personally known to each other. They believed that political freedom would reach India as a gift from the British people. The Indian liberals have strong faith in the British democracy. They hoped that the British administration would provide new modern progressive democratic ideas to the people of India. Congress leaders expected that British rule in India would foster political education on Indian people. They believed that the British administration would make Indian people capable to overcome their social and cultural backwardness. They had great confidence in the justice and generosity of the English people. Thus they were loyal to the British. They believed in slow and orderly progress. They adopted the weapon of constitutional agitation for achieving their goal.
During the first phase, the Indian National Congress was in the hands of a number of English educated moderate leaders. They never made any attempt to reach the Indian masses. During this phase the Congress gave much care for the opinion of the government and the officials than for the interests of the country. The leaders lacked sufficient political consciousness. They believed that the country was not prepared for any intense movement against the Government. But it would be unfair to start a national political movement unless the leaders are not ready to make great sacrifices for it. However the movement started by the leaders of the first phase of Indian National Congress lacked the essentials of a national perspective. Under the moderate leaders, the Indian National Congress kept a distance from the common people. Its propaganda was confined to a few English educated persons, and they were loyal to the British.

In the early phase (1885-1905), the leaders of Indian National Congress never considered the British rulers as their enemies. They desired to have a cordial relation with them for fulfilling their political demands. They thought that only through some peaceful agitation, they can attain political freedom. In its initial stage Indian National Congress had not attained the label of a mass organization. The early national leaders did not organize mass movements against the British. They demanded various reforms from the side of the British, such as administrative reforms, introduction of representative institutions for the Indians, protection for Indian industries and repeal
of various repressive acts. But most of the demands made by the Congress remained unsatisfied. The British gave a deaf ear to all the demands made by the Indian leaders. The moderate leaders began to lose their faith in the British authorities.\(^{15}\)

The Indian National Congress passed a number of resolutions each year demanding various administrative reforms but the British Government did not pay any attention to all these demands.\(^{16}\) Several factors shook the faith of Indian national Congress. Gradually the Indian leaders realized that the British officials are not going to do anything that would come in favour of the Indians. All the policies of Indian National Congress failed to satisfy the political thinkers of the time in India.\(^{17}\)

By the end of the 19\(^{th}\) century people became convinced of the drawbacks of the political methods of the Congress. It seemed to be powerless to bring them any relief against the imperialistic powers. Many felt that their movement lacked any kind of sacrifice on their part. This situation led towards a cry for swadeshi and swaraj.\(^{18}\) Indian people became frustrated and tended to follow some violent methods to expel the foreign powers from Indian soil by the last decade of the 19\(^{th}\) century. British unpopularity was increasing as a result of famines and plagues that broke out in different parts of India. Indian soil was becoming ready for the rise of extremism or militant nationalism.\(^{19}\)
Many radical leaders ridiculed the policies of the Congress for remaining aloof from the common masses. Vast majority of Indian people had no participation in the activities of the Indian National Congress. Most of the Muslim leaders stood away and the ruling chiefs, the land lords, and the merchants had no participation in the activities of the Congress. There occurred a steady decline in the faith of the people in the British government especially after the arrival of Lord George Nathaniel Curzon. Curzon’s viceroyalty (1899-1905) made great impact on the political history of India. Curzon became unpopular among the Indian nationalists through his suppressive policies like educational reforms and the partition of Bengal. Curzon’s regime came as a curse to the Indians.

By the last decades of the 19th century, Britishers could realize one fact that the unity among the Indians would be a serious menace for the existence of their power over Indian territory. That made them to think about the application of “divide and rule” policy on Indians. During that time Bengal was the nerve centre of Indian nationalism. The British government wanted to weaken the emerging spirit of Indian nationalism. As a first step of this decision the British government divided Bengal for administrative reasons during the viceroyalty of Lord Curzon. The partition intended to reduce the Bengali influence on Indian national movement. In fact when Curzon got his appointment, he declared that his mission in India would be to give the tottering Indian empire a deep burial.
On 19th July 1905, the decision of the partition of Bengal was formally announced. People from all over India, strongly protested against this decision. Spontaneous protest meetings were held in different parts of India. The partition came into effect on 16th October 1905. This day was declared as a day of mourning throughout Bengal. 23

After the partition, the Swadeshi Movement began to take deep roots in different parts of India. There arose a love for liberty. People wanted to adopt some new measures to check the exploitative policies of the British government. They started their propaganda by boycotting government offices and institutions. They criticized the slow methods adopted by the moderate leaders. Indian leaders began to expand their political programmes from the demand for administrative reform to a demand for self government. By this time a new group of militant nationalists with a new political ideology emerged in India. They were known as extremists and they began to grow rapidly by the opening of the 20th century. 24

The political situation in India got a drastic change after the partition of Bengal. It became revolutionary in character. There emerged a radical section in the Congress, and they encouraged a movement for boycotting foreign goods as a way of protest against the partition. Secret societies sprang up in various parts of India. The government took up strong methods to curb the rising agitations against the British. Various laws were passed to put many
restrictions on popular movements as well as on press and public gatherings. Many leaders were arrested, wounded and hanged to death.  

The radical section in congress started criticizing the policies and methods of the (moderate) educated middle class in the Indian National Congress who were following a policy of “mendicants”. Their prayers and petitions failed to achieve anything substantial from the hands of the British. Ideological explosions sprang up among the two sections. The earliest leaders of the Congress like Pherozshah Mehta of Bombay, Gopal Krishna Gokhale of Poona and Surendra Nath Banerjee of Calcutta were afraid of taking up the national movement too quickly. The Extremist leaders like Bal Gangadhar Tilak strongly opposed the view of the moderate leaders. They wanted to bring some changes in the method of political agitations. The Extremists were led by prominent personalities like Tilak, G.S Khaparde, Lala Lajpat Rai, Bipin Chandra Pal and Aurobindo Ghose (1872-1950). They condemned the slow moving methods of the moderate leaders and condemned such methods as ‘mendicant politics’. This situation culminated in the split between the moderate and the extremists in the Surat session of Indian National Congress, in 1907.  

Many nationalist leaders like Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal, Lajpat Rai and others organized a country wide campaign through the press and many other ways to popularize their revolutionary ideas.
This movement spread rapidly throughout India. The extremist movement and simultaneous militant nationalism added new vigour to the Congress. Terrorist groups also sprang up mainly in Bengal, Maharashtra and Punjab, later spread to other parts of India. Their activities made a strong fear among the British officials in India.  

The emergence of Mahatma Gandhi on the political scene of India brought many changes to the Indian political scenario. Gandhi had a successful political career in South Africa, before coming back to India. Gandhi pleaded for the adoption of a non violent method of political agitation. He believed in peaceful methods for attaining political freedom.

The third phase of Indian National Movement starts from the year 1916 when Mahatma Gandhi entered into the political field. This phase is known as Gandhian Era where Gandhi recognized the role of Indian masses in the Indian national struggle for freedom. This period witnessed the active participation of different sections of people from various parts of India.

On his return to India Gandhi founded the Satyagraha Ashram on the banks of the Sabarmathi river near Ahmedabad. He introduced a new method of political agitation based on non violence. This new technique of political agitation seems to be very new to the Indian masses. They provided whole hearted support to the new method of political agitation introduced by Gandhiji.
Gandhiji’s idea of non violence or *ahimsa* was taken from Hindu, Jain and Buddhist traditions but infused with new meaning which contains the characters of both love and struggle. 30 After coming back to India, Gandhiji began to take active part in the freedom movement of India and his active participation made the Indian National Congress a mass organization. Both Hindus and Muslims responded to Gandhiji’s call for non-violent satyagrahas. 31

Gandhiji soon became the leader of Hindus, Muslims and all other communities. He started using the weapons based on nonviolence against the British. Gandhi started a peaceful political movement to expel the imperialist powers from Indian soil. Long before Gandhiji became very active, he consulted in Chennai, Barrister G.P Pillai for expert advice as to the methods to be adopted towards the British. 32

At this time George Joseph entered into the scenario of Indian freedom movement. Arrival of Gandhiji to the forefront of the Indian political field occupies crucial importance in the history of India. Gandhiji gave a new shape and vigour to the national struggle of India. His views and new ideas gave a great impetus to many Indians both educated and uneducated.
KERALA SCENE

Kerala is famous for its uniqueness in various fields. Its geographical features, its social conditions, economic life, its culture and many factors made this state different from the rest of India. This state stretches for about 576 kilometers along the Malabar Coast on the western side of the Indian peninsula. Kerala is a land of natural beauty with 44 rivers, hills and vegetation. Kerala has become an essential part of the Indian subcontinent due to its substantial features. Both geographically and politically Kerala has been differenced from the rest of India. Its natural beauty provides a unique position to Kerala among the other regions of India.

Kerala lies as a narrow strip of land between the Western Ghats on the one side and the Arabian sea on the other. The peculiar geographical condition provided this region with a separate culture, entirely different from other states of India. Its natural boundaries protected this region from the foreign invasions that had taken place in different parts of India. Some of the major religions that had flourished in the north by about the 6th Century B.C reached Kerala in the same century. Thus Kerala could maintain peculiar social customs and practices without much interference from its neighbours. 33

When Vascoda Gama reached Kerala in 1498, he could find that Kerala was divided into many petty principalities. But this region
Kerala had an ancient cultural heritage. According to legends Kerala was created by Parasurama, a great Brahmin sage and warrior. He belonged to the race of Bhrigu the greatest of Rishis. The great saint Jamadagni was his father and his mother was Renuka. It is believed that Parsurama is one of the ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu. Kerala’s geographical features, its language and customs gave this region a distinct entity from the very early period. This region had maintained its own political systems. The higher caste section in the society enjoyed a good position in all fields.

Kerala is an area in which the *Malayalam* language is spoken. The natives of this region are always called *Malayalis* that is speakers of *Malayalam*. There are different theories about the origin of this language. It is believed that *Malayalam* has existed for at least 1400 years, some scholars have expressed the view that *Malayalam* has separated from the proto-Dravidan languages. Some others attribute the date of the earliest specimen of pure *Malayalam* prose to about 1250 A.D. From the very early period *Malayalis* spoke a language of their own.

Kerala society consisted of various castes. Rigid caste system was one of the major features of Kerala society. Caste system had its intensity in Kerala than in any other parts of India. Kerala was ruled by petty chieftains from the early period and all these rulers claimed a *Kshatriya* inheritance. They enjoyed a high position in the society. *Nairs* come next to the *Nambudiris* and
Kshatriyas. Most of them were warrior groups and owners of land. They also enjoyed a reputed position in the society. Muslims and Christians were the other two prominent sections that existed in Kerala. Most of them were traders.

Tiyas or Ezhavas were the next in caste hierarchy. They had main occupations like ayurvedic treatment, toddy tapping and they were workers on the land. Their position in the society was next below to the Nairs. There existed families of artisan castes. They were scattered over different parts of Kerala. During ancient time many lower castes existed throughout Kerala like the Pulayas and the Parayas. They were subjected to do heavy work on the land.\(^39\)

Kerala is noted for its rigid caste system. The lower sections in the society had a miserable life without having any kind of freedom or entertainment. They were considered as beasts by the upper classes. The arrival of Europeans brought some changes to the society of Kerala and their reforms improved the plight of untouchables or unseeables.

There are some evidences which show that the lower castes occasionally enjoyed certain privileges. Pulappedi and Mannappedi were two different customs which were being held at a particular time of the year. On this occasion the low castes especially the Pulayas had the right to carry off any high caste woman they could touch or hit with a stone.\(^40\) Matrilineal system was another unique feature of Kerala society. This distinguished system of inheritance
distances Kerala from other parts of India, a system that originated in the 10th or 11th Century.

Upto the 19th Century the matrilineal system of inheritance was strictly followed in Kerala, even Christians and Muslims of Kerala followed matrilineal practices. But by the beginning of the 20th century efforts were made to change the matrilineal system by successive Diwans of Travancore. The Nair and Ezhava Regulations of the first half of the 20th Century gave a shock treatment to the system. Still it has not disappeared and it exists in one form or other. The Christians and Muslims also moved with others to bring out changes in their system of inheritance.

It is believed that Kerala was known to the Aryans from the very early time. It is quite difficult to reach a conclusion regarding the age of Kerala. Some sources say that it is as old as any of the puranic kingdoms that are mentioned in the ancient Indian epics. Kerala was one among the many places cited by the royal servants of king Sugriva in search of Sita, Rama’s lost queen (Ramayana stanzas). Ramayana mentions of a lofty peak mountain that situated in South Travancore called Mahendra Giri, from which it is believed that Hanuman procured some herbs to awaken Lakshmana, younger brother of Lord Rama. Similar versions appeared in Puranas like, the Padma and the Skanda. Katyayana (1st half of the 4th Century B.C) and Patanjali (150 B.C) two great poets of ancient India had mentioned Kerala in their writings. Asokas's second and
thirteenth rock edicts had referred to the realms of Keralaputras. Rulers of Kerala are referred to as Calobothras and mentioned Muziris (modern Kodungallur) as his capital by Pliny, a Greek traveller (1st Century AD) 46.

Another unique feature of Kerala is its Onam festival. It is a harvest festival and is being held in the months of August or September. This festival is based on the idea of equality. Onam is celebrated in memory of a king named Mahabali who is believed to have ruled over Kerala. It is believed that under Mahabali’s rule, all people were treated as equals. Onam is considered as the national festival of the Malayalis47.

During the time of British domination, Kerala was divided into three parts- Malabar in the north under the direct rule of the British, Cochin in the middle, under royal control and the princely state of Travancore in the far South48. Travancore was ruled over by the Travancore royal family. These rulers were simple and strong devotees of Lord Sri. Padmanabha from times immemorial and they were considered as the servants of Sri. Padmanabha. They adopted the title of Padmanabha Dasa ever since the days of Marthanda Varma (1729-58) king of Travancore if not earlier. A ruler in Travancore was succeeded by sons of his sister-example of matrilineal system. In the absence of a sister, the succession turns to a crisis. From 1810 to 1829, this state was ruled by two princesses. Attingal, one of the major principalities of Travancore,
situated in the north of Trivandrum was by custom always ruled by a woman. Matrilineal system was in full existence in Kerala and most of the families provide girls basic education from very early times.

Landing of Christian missionaries brought drastic changes to the society of Kerala. The most important contribution made by these missionaries proved to be the introduction of various educational programmes. Rulers of Travancore provided their full consent and support for the attempts made by the missionaries. Foreign missionaries started schools in various parts of Travancore. In the initial period, the Government schools were dominated by the higher caste Hindus and by the Syrian Christians. By the beginning of the 20th century, the rulers offered concessions to the lower caste students for better education.

By the middle of the 19th Century, there was a rush of protestant missionaries to Travancore than in any other parts of India. In the Southern parts of Travancore, the London Missionary Society (LMS) worked enormously to convert the Hindus and Muslims towards Christianity. In the Northern part of Travancore the Church Missionary Society (CMS), worked hard to convert the Hindus and Muslims. They succeeded in converting thousands of lower caste Hindus to Christianity and no wonder Kerala has today about 20% Christians if not more. The converted lower caste Hindus could enjoy some freedom and they were able to save themselves from the caste abuses. Thus by the beginning of the 20th
century a great transformation began to take place in Kerala Society. Syrian Christians have occupied a prominent place in the society of Kerala. They enjoyed numerous powers and privileges from the hands of the rulers of Kerala. Tradition says that apostle St. Thomas preached Christianity in Kerala in 52 A.D. St. Thomas reached Malankara and started preaching Christianity among the people residing there. He converted many people to Christianity, especially from the higher caste Hindus. He then founded seven and half churches in various parts of Kerala. There is a strong belief that St. Thomas reached Muziris or Cranganore and attended the wedding feast of Kerala Perumal’s daughter. This is more the theory of the believers and there is no archaeological or historical proof for this.

Muziris was one among the most famous ports in the Chera Kingdom until the flood in the river Periyar in 1341. The Chera Kingdom was one of the three Kingdoms in the far South. It comprised the whole of modern Kerala, famous as the land of spices. Spices attracted many foreigners to head towards this part of the world.

Kerala has the credit of being the place where Christianity reached for the first time in the Indian subcontinent, based on St. Thomas tradition. He preached the gospel of Jesus Christ among the natives and converted many persons into Christianity. The conversion mainly took place among the higher caste sections of the
Hindu society especially among the Nambudiri brahmins. These converted Christians are called Syrian Christians of Kerala. The Syrian Christians of Kerala are the descendants of Hindu converts. In all the customs and manners they are similar to Hindus.

The Syrian Christians included ‘Syrian rite’ in their religious services. The Syrian Christians are the original Christians in Kerala. They were also known as “Nasrany Christians”, “St. Thomas Christians”, and “Malankara Christians”.

The Syrian Christians of Kerala never tried to expand their religion to other parts of the country. It was mainly because of the caste system that prevailed in the Kerala society during this period. The Syrian Christians of Kerala were converts from high-caste Hindus so they wanted to follow the rigid caste system like other high caste Hindus. They were given the same social status as the higher caste Hindus were having in the Kerala society. Due to their dignified position in the society the St. Thomas Christians were not ready to convert the lower caste non-Christians to Christianity. Thus the Syrian Christians did not spread to other parts of India.

In Travancore, the Syrian Christians held a high status as that of the Nairs. They had a strong and dignified position in the society of Kerala. They received patronage from the rulers of Kerala. The Syrians were well trained in the use of arms. In many matters the
Syrians also followed the strict caste system that had been existing in the society of Kerala.  

With the coming of the Portuguese, Roman Catholicism began to spread to Malabar. But Protestantism appeared in Malabar only with the advent of British rule in India. By the beginning of the 19th C, several Christian missionaries visited Kerala and started many missionary activities. The British Residents in Travancore like Col. Macaulay, Major Munro etc were in favour of preaching Christianity in Kerala. They strongly desired to spread their religion in this country. The British Residents in Travancore showed keen interest in the welfare of the Christians in this region. That resulted in a rapid increase in the number of Christians in Travancore.

End Notes:

6. Lala Lajpath Rai, *Young India- An Interpretation And a History of the Nationalist Movement From Within*, pp. 109-110. Also see Cover Files kept in the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML) New Delhi.


18. *Ibid*.


20. *Ibid*.

21. NMML Cover Files Vol.IV- V

22. *Ibid*.

23. *Ibid*.


25. *Ibid*.
38. *Ibid*. 

70
43. He is a great devotee of Lord Rama and Lord Siva at the same time.
50. *Ibid*.
58. *Ibid*.
61. Cover Files English Records, Central Archives, Thiruvananthapuram (ERTV).