

THE ROLE OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR IN INDIA

(In the context of the National Movement and the Socio-Economic Changes)

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ABSTRACT

The First World War played a vital role in India, which brought a decisive impact on Socio-Economic and political development. It was the outbreak of the Indian National Movement, which was inactive after the Swadeshi Movement. The First World War gave a new energy for the Nationalist Movement. During the First World War Britain was facing difficulties, which was an opportunity of India. This opportunity was seized, in different ways and with varying success. The Ghadar revolutionaries based in North America attempted a violent overthrow of British rule, while in India Lokamanya Tilak, Annie Besant and their Home Rule League launched a nation-wide agitation for securing Home Rule or Swaraj. The question of British participation in the First World War was before the Nationalist of their response. The Moderate and the Extremists supported the empire in the war. However, the Revolutionary decided to utilize this opportunity to wage a war on the British Rule and liberate the Country. All these efforts were admittedly of political reforms from the British Government. Similarly the Socio-Economic development did not take place in isolation. The British used Indian resources to recruit soldiers and earn funds. They also provided vast amounts of food, money, and munitions. In return, British promised to award self-rule to India at the end of the war, which eventually was not delivered.

The World War I of 1914 resulted in increased taxes, military's expenditure and deployment of Indians to fight in the War. The War fueled demand for Indian industries, which helped them recover. When the War ended, all sections of the Indian population were experiencing hardship on various fronts. This article discusses India's post-war situation, which influenced the emergence of historical mass movements.

Keywords:- *Hardships, Nationalist Movement, Nation-wide agitation, Opportunity, Political reforms, Socio-Economic Changes, Self-rule.*

Introduction:

The First World War (1914-1919) was fought between the Allied powers and the Central powers. Britain was one of the main members of Allied powers with France, Russia, USA, Italy and Japan. The main members of the Central power were Germany, Austria, Hungary, Turkey and Bulgaria. World War I was not brought about by a single incident. The War happened because of several different events that took place in the years building up to 1914. The imperialism was one of the major factors for the First World War. A rise in conflict contributed to the outbreak of World War I as a result of growing rivalry and the ambition for larger empires. At this time, the nationalism also led directly to the War. The War ended on November 11, 1918, when a general armistice was agreed to by both sides with the signing of the Treaty of Versailles. The World War First officially ended, but the "war to end all wars" turned out to be the opposite. By enduring Germany's economic ruin and political humiliation the Post-war settlement provided fertile ground for World War II.

India being a former British colony played a vital role in helping Britain and its allies win over Germany and allies, a role that is often overlooked the Indian Army fought against the German Empire in East Africa and on the western Front. They served in places as diverse as France and Belgium, Mesopotamia, Egypt, Gallipoli and Sinai. Indian soldiers who fought for the British in World War I lost more than 70,000 of their lives. Without the Indian Army, Britain would not have survived the wars, according to Cloude Auchinleck, Chief Commander of the Indian Army. The India Gate arch was built in New Delhi as a war memorial by the British in 1931. Over 70,000 Indian soldiers who died in the First World War while serving with the British

Army have been remembered at India Gate. During the First World War the Indian National Movement and the country's Socio-Economic Development also did not take place in isolation. This period was shown the maturity of Indian nationalism. In time the question raised to participation in the First World War to support of British. The Moderates supported in the war as a matter of duty and the Extremists including Tilak supported the war efforts in belief that Britain repay in the form of Self Government. However, the Revolutionaries decided to utilize the opportunity to wage a war on British rule for the liberate the Country. The Revolutionaries were carried out their activity through Ghadar party based in North America. The outbreak of the First World War was the most important development that made the Ghadar revolution imminent. "After all, this was the opportunity they were not really prepared, but should they now let it just pass by? At a special gathering of the movement's top activists, it was decided that the chance must be taken and that it was better to perish than do nothing at all. Ailan-e-Jung, or the Ghadar party's proclamation of war, was published and extensively disseminated. However, the Ghadarits tried a violent overthrow of British authority and failed to develop a sustainable leadership that was able to integrate the movement's diverse facets.

The Home Rule Movement was India's less emotional but more successful response to the First World War than was the case for Indians who were residing overseas, who chose to respond through the romantic Ghadar journey. "Tilak was ready to assume leadership after his release in June 1914 and had made conciliatory gestures to the government reassuring it of his loyalty and associated to the moderates that he waited like the Irish Home rulers. Tilak also acknowledged that the violence had done nothing more than impede India's democratic development. He pleaded with every Indian to help the British Government in this time of need." The Home Rule Leagues were essential in determining the future direction of the struggle for freedom. It signalled the change from the Congress's previous state of inactivity to the Gandhian Phase. Many moderate legislators joined the home rule movement after becoming disenchanted with the Morley-Minto reforms and frustrated with the state of idleness that the legislature had descended into. Tilak and Annie Besant took the efforts towards the Moderate-Extremist reunion at Lucknow revived the Congress an effective instrument of Indian Nationalism. All these efforts became an integral part of the Indian National Movement.

After the end of the War, the condition in India and influences from abroad created a situation that was ready for the national upsurges against British Rule. The Indian supporters of British war efforts with expectation of political gains for cooperation in the War. But this contribution has gone unacknowledged. Most of the Indian Nationalists extended cooperation to the war effort and a large number of Indian troops sacrificed their lives on the War fronts. Therefore there was high expectation of political gains from the British Government. Most nationalist including Tilak expected that Britain would repay the Indian Loyalty in the form of Self-government. The surge of nationalism and rise of mass civil disobedience when the Montagu-Chelmsford failed to deliver on the expectation of Home Rule that had led to popular support for the British war efforts. The British government returned to its earlier 'carrot and stick' strategy, refusing to surrender or even share its power with Indians. Measures like the Rowlatt Act served as the Stick, while the insignificant Montagu-Chelmsford reform served as the Carrot. The battle also brought about socioeconomic upheavals. Oliver Vanden Eynde from the Paris School of Economics 'used information from census records to estimate the impact of military recruitment during the First World War in Punjab on the literacy rates.' He found that-"between 1911 and 1921 literacy rates (as well as the number of literacy individuals) increased significantly heavily recruited communities. This effect is strongest for men of military age, which is consistent with the hypothesis write on other foreign campaigns." Women were to play a significant role in the national movement, particularly those from the urban middle classes, usually home-centered women participated actively in processions and picketing. They were to contribute significantly to the National Movement going on. For the hitherto domesticated Indian women, taking part in the Home Rule Movements throughout the first decades of the twentieth century was a profoundly liberating experience.

The First World War also distorted Indian Economy. During the war India contributed in men and money towards the British war efforts. There were sharp increase in the food supply and high taxation for the keeping Army. Demand for food supplies, particularly cereals, led to food inflation. Another result was inflation that Industrial prices nearly doubled in the six years after 1914. The industry faced an increased in prices, then a recession coupled with increased foreign investment brought many industries to the brink closure of and loss. There was also a sharp increase in the price of daily commodities. The exports of cash crops like jute suffered due to the loss of the European market. As Bengali jute mills created monopolies, rising military demand for jute products countered a decline in civilian demand, resulting in an even more uneven distribution of wealth. Amiya Kumar Bagchi points out in "Indian Economy and Society during World War One" that the British government drained the Indian economy of roughly 367 million pounds in the form of cash, gifts, and loans. The reduction in British products, which dominated the pre-war market, helped domestic manufacturing industries like cotton. A deal to provide rails to the Mesopotamian war gave the struggling Tata steel mills a lifeline, which helped the steel industry as a whole. Britain experienced severe economic troubles after the war, which caused the British investment to be redirected to the UK, creating possibilities. Though when the war ended, all sections of the Indian population were experiencing hardships on various fronts. Peasantry faced with high taxation and

poverty. The workers and artisans faced unemployment and bore the brunt of high prices, similarly educated urban classes was facing unemployment as well as suffering from an acute awareness of racism in the attitude of the British. Thus the economic situation of the country in the post-war years had become alarming. Due to the war, almost every segment of society experienced economic suffering, which fueled anti-British sentiment.

CONCLUSION

The Post-war hardship made the background to the National Movement developed into one of the greatest mass movement in world history. After the war it derived its entire strength from the militancy and self-sacrificing spirit of the masses. Numerous strategies were used to mobilize millions of men and women. The National Movement was in its various forms and phases took modern politics to the people. The National Movement succeeded in mobilizing the youth, women, the urban petty bourgeoisie, the urban and rural poor, urban and rural artisans, peasants, workers, capitalists and a large number of small landlords. The Indian national movement was able to harness the varied energy, abilities, and capacities of a wide range of individuals because it was a mass movement. The history of the First World War was shaped by a string of incidents that flatly contradicted any notions of the government's kindness towards its inhabitants in India. World War I had a major impact on how closely tied India was to global affairs. History like that should be preserved.

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