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# UNIT 15 REVOLUTIONARY TRENDS, GHADAR PARTY AND HOME RULE LEAGUE

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## 15.0 OBJECTIVES

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In the early years of the twentieth century a new dimension was added to the Indian National Movement. This was the emergence of revolutionary terrorism as a political weapon. After reading this Unit you will be able to:

- identify the factors that contributed to the emergence of revolutionary terrorism,
- know about the early activities of revolutionaries and the causes of their decline,
- understand what was the strategy of the Ghadar Movement and its details,
- discuss the achievements of the Ghadar Movement, and
- know about the Home Rule Leagues and their contribution in the National Movement.

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## 15.1 INTRODUCTION

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The first major attempt at a country-wide mass movement—the Swadeshi Movement—all but died out by 1907; the next major effort came after the First World War. In the intervening years, the national movement was to witness three different experiments in political action, all of which contributed in their own way to the furthering and deepening of national consciousness. The first experiment, that of revolutionary terrorism, synchronised with the end of the mass phase of the Swadeshi movement, the other two, the Ghadar and Home Rule Movements spanned the years of the First World War.

## 15.2 REVOLUTIONARY TRENDS

Revolutionary terrorism was the form of political action adopted by a generation of highly-motivated nationalist youth whose creative energies failed to find adequate room for expression within the existing political trends.

### 15.2.1 Factors Leading to Revolutionary Trends

The Extremists' critique of Moderate politics had convinced them of the futility of trying to convert the British rulers by petitioning and reasonable argument. They had participated actively in the Swadeshi movement in the hope and belief that Extremist methods of agitation such as boycott, passive resistance, etc., would take the national movement out of its elitist groove. They expected that this movement would bring the British Government to its knees. As you have already studied in Unit-11, the Swadeshi movement was only partially successful in mobilising vast sections of the masses. It also could not secure the reversal of the partition of Bengal. This failure was however, almost inevitable. Firstly because it was the first major attempt at mass mobilisation. And secondly its methods were new and unfamiliar both to those who advocated them and to those who hesitated to adopt them. It led to a growing sense of impatience and frustration among the youth who began to feel that perhaps something even more dramatic was needed to arouse the people.

The inability of the Extremist leadership to either adequately analyse the weaknesses of the movement or to suggest new ways out of the impasse further strengthened this trend. Some sections of the leadership, such as Aurobindo Ghosh, in fact supported the new trend. Those who did not quite agree, preferred to remain silent rather than come out in open criticism, perhaps out of a feeling that this would be playing into Government hands.

Another factor that helped the growth of the trend of revolutionary terrorism was the brutal repression of the Swadeshi movement by the Government. For example the police made the unprovoked assault on the peaceful crowd at the Barisal Political Conference on 27th April, 1906 which had led the nationalist paper **Jugantar** to give the call: "Force must be stopped by force". The Government's ability to repress was considerably enhanced by the split that took place in the Indian National Congress at Surat in 1907 between the Moderates and the Extremists, since it removed or at least reduced the danger of alienating the Moderates in the event of repression of the Extremists. Luring the Moderates with promises of constitutional reform, the government proceeded to launch an all-out attack on the Extremists; Tilak was sentenced to six years of exile in Burma, Aurobindo Ghosh was arrested in a revolutionary conspiracy case. During this period a whole generation of nationalist youth especially in Bengal, were:

- angered by repression
- convinced of the futility of the moderate path and
- impatient with the inability of the extremists to either extract immediate concessions from the government or to achieve a full scale mobilisation of the masses.

This young generation turned to the path of individual heroic action or revolutionary terrorism, a path that had been taken before them by the Irish nationalists and the Russian Nihilists. Though believing in the necessity, in the long-run, of an armed mass revolt by the people in order to overthrow imperialism, the daunting nature of this task as well as of attempts to subvert the loyalty of the army left them with only one choice for immediate action: assassination of individual British officials, especially the unpopular ones. This was done:

- in order to strike terror among officialdom;
- remove the fear and inertia of the people; and
- arouse their nationalist consciousness.

### 15.2.2 Early Activities

Though the trend of revolutionary terrorism acquired a real force only around 1907-8, there had been earlier examples as well:

- As early as 1897 the Chapekar brothers of Poona—Damodar and Balkrishna—had assassinated two British officers.
- In Maharashtra again, by 1904, V.D. Savarkar and his brother Ganesh had organised the **Mitramela** and the **Abhinav Bharat** as secret societies.

- After 1905, many newspapers and individuals started advocating this form of political action. In 1907, there was an attempt, though unsuccessful, on the life of the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal.

The real launching of the new trend is, however, identified with the throwing of a bomb in April 1908, by Khudiram Bose and Prafulla Chaki on a carriage in which they believed Kingsford, the unpopular district judge of Muzaffarpur, to be travelling. But unfortunately, the carriage was carrying two British ladies who were thus inadvertently killed. Prafulla Chaki shot himself dead rather than be arrested, but Khudiram Bose was arrested and later hanged. The government also used the opportunity to involve Aurobindo Ghosh his brother Barin, and many others in a conspiracy case in which Aurobindo himself was acquitted but his brother and many others were sentenced to deportation and harsh prison terms.



15. Prafulla Chaki

**Formation of Secret Societies and Revolutionary Activities:** The repression by the British triggered off the formation of secret societies and a spate of assassinations and what were termed as 'swadeshi' dacoities to raise funds for buying arms, etc. In Bengal, which became the main centre of revolutionaries, the organisation of revolutionary activities was spearheaded by the **Anushilan** and **Jugantar** societies. In Maharashtra, Poona, Nasik and Bombay became centres of revolutionary activity. In Madras, Vanchi Aiyar of the Bharata Matha Association assassinated an official who was responsible for firing on a crowd that was protesting the arrest of the Extremist leader Chidambaram Pillai. In London, Madan Lal Dhingra killed Curzon Wylie, an Indian Office official and Rashbehari Bose organised a daring attempt on the life of the Viceroy, Lord Hardinge, as he entered Delhi on 23rd December, 1912. Other revolutionaries, such as Shyamji Krishna Varma, Lala Har Dayal, V.D. Savarkar, Ajit Singh and Madame Cama established centres in Europe from which they could continue to spread the revolutionary message and render assistance to comrades at home. In all, it was estimated that 186 revolutionaries were either killed or convicted in the years 1908-1918.



16. Khudiram Bose.

### 15.2.3 Decline of the Revolutionary Trend

Stern repression facilitated by a series of draconian laws and the lack of a popular response led to the gradual decline of this wave of revolutionary terrorism. Individual heroic action undoubtedly earned the revolutionaries a great deal of popular adulation and sympathy, and many of them such as Khudiram Bose and Prafulla Chaki became folk heroes. By its very nature, however, this form of political action could only be emulated by a few individuals, and not by the mass of people, who still awaited a movement that could accommodate their weaknesses and make effective use of their strengths.

#### Check Your Progress 1

- 1 Give two important causes for the growth of the trend of revolutionary terrorism.

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- 2 Write three main actions undertaken by the revolutionary terrorists.

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- 3 In which regions were the revolutionaries most active?

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## 15.3 THE GHADAR MOVEMENT

The First World War broke out in 1914 and to many Indian nationalists, it appeared that once-in-a-lifetime opportunity had arrived to take advantage of Britain's difficulty. Being embroiled in the War, it was felt, Britain would not be in a position to effectively answer a nationalist challenge. The challenge was thrown by two very different groups of nationalists, the Ghadar revolutionaries based in North America, and the Home Rule Leagues of Tilak and Annie Besant in India. We shall first discuss the Ghadar Movement.

### 15.3.1 Background of the Movement

The Ghadar revolutionaries were recruited largely from the ranks of Punjabi immigrants who had settled on the West Coast of North America at least since 1904. They were mostly debt-ridden and land-hungry peasants from the crowded areas of Punjab, especially Jullundur and Hoshiarpur, many of whom had served in the British Indian Army and had thus acquired the confidence and the means necessary for emigration. The hostile attitude of the local population including of the white labour unions, the increasingly restrictive immigration laws, helped by the active complicity of the Secretary of State for India—all pushed the Indian community to the realisation that they must organise themselves if they were to resist the blatant racial discrimination being imposed on them. For example, Tarak Nath Das, an Indian student who was one of the first leaders of the Indian community in North America and responsible for starting a paper called **Free Hindustan** understood very well that while the British government encouraged Indian labourers to go to work to Fiji where they were needed by British planters it discouraged their emigration to North America for they feared that they might get infected by the current ideas of liberty.

### 15.3.2 Early Activities

The first stirrings of political activity among Indian immigrants became evident as early as 1907 when a **Circular-e-Azad** (Circular of liberty) was brought out by Ramnath Puri, a political exile, in which he pledged support to the Swadeshi movement. Tarak Nath Das started the **Free Hindustan** and G.D. Kumar brought out a Gurmukhi paper **Swadesh Sevak** advocating social reform and asking Indian troops to rise in revolt. By 1910, Das and Kumar had set up the United India House in Seattle in the USA and began lecturing every week to a group of Indian labourers. They also developed close links with the Khalsa Diwan Society which resulted in 1913 in a decision to send a deputation to meet the Colonial Secretary in London and the Viceroy and other officials in India. They failed to meet the Colonial Secretary, despite a wait of a month, but succeeded in securing an audience with the Viceroy and the Lieutenant Governor of Punjab. Their visit to Punjab became the occasion for a series of public meetings in different Punjab towns and enthusiastic support from the people and the press.

Meanwhile, in early 1913, Bhagwan Singh, a Sikh priest who had worked in Hong Kong and the Malay states, visited Vancouver in Canada and openly preached the violent overthrow of British rule. Such was the effect of his exhortations that he was extorted from Canada after three months, but his ideas had fired the imagination of his audiences.

### 15.3.3 Towards Organisation

Disappointed with the lack of response from the Indian and British governments, convinced that their inferior status in foreign lands was a consequence of their being citizens of an enslaved country, and aroused to nationalist consciousness and a feeling of solidarity by the consistent political agitation, the Indian community in North America felt the acute need for a central organisation and a leader. The leader they found was Lala Har Dayal, a political exile from India, who had come to the U.S. in 1911 and had been lecturing at Stanford University as well as to the various American groups of intellectuals, radicals and workers on the anarchist and syndicalist movements but had not shown much interest in the affairs of Indian immigrants. His attitude changed with the news of the bomb attack on the Viceroy in Delhi in December 1912 which convinced him that the revolutionary spirit was still alive. He assumed leadership of the immigrant Indian community and, in May 1913, the need for a central organisation was met with the setting up of the **Hindi Association** in Portland, which later changed its name to **Hindustan Ghadar Party**. Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna was elected the President, Lala Har Dayal the General Secretary and Pandit Kanshi Ram Maroli the Treasurer at the first meeting of the Association which was also attended by others including



Lala Har Dayal

#### 17. Lala Har Dayal

Bhai Parmanand and Harnam Singh 'Tundilat'. A sum of \$ 10,000 was collected on the spot and decisions were taken to set up a headquarter by the name of **Yugantar Ashram** in San Francisco and start a weekly paper, the **Ghadar**, for free circulation.

#### 15.3.4 Strategy and Action

The plans of political action outlined by Lala Har Dayal and accepted by the Hindi Association were based on the understanding that British rule could only be overthrown by armed revolt and that for this to **happen** it was necessary that Indian immigrants go to India in large numbers and carry this message to the masses and the soldiers of the Indian army. He also believed that the freedom available in America should be used to fight the British and not the Americans, for in any case Indians would never be accepted as equals abroad till they were free in their own land. Basing themselves on this understanding, the militant nationalists launched a vigorous propaganda campaign, touring factories and farms where Indian immigrants worked.

#### Launching of Paper and its Impact

The paper **Ghadar** was launched on the first of November, 1913; the first issue was in Urdu followed a month later by the Gurmukhi version.

The format of the **Ghadar** paper was designed to convey the message of nationalism in simple and bold terms. Its very name meant revolt, thereby leaving no doubts about its intentions. On its masthead was inscribed the caption : **Angrezi Raj Ka Dushman** or 'An Enemy of British Rule'. Besides, the front page of each issue carried the '**Angrezi Raj Ka Kacha Chittha**' or 'An Expose of British Rule', which consisted of 14 points enumerating the negative effects of British rule. This **Chittha** was in effect a summary of the entire nationalist critique of British rule on the issues of drain of wealth, high land revenue, low per capita income, recurrence of famines which killed millions of Indians, high expenditure on Army and low expenditure on health, the policy of divide and rule by pitting Hindus and Muslims against each other. The last two points of the **Chittha** also pointed to the way out

by highlighting the small number of Englishmen present in India as compared to the crores of Indians and by suggesting that the time had come for another revolt since already fifty-six years had lapsed since the last one in 1857.



18. Ghadar Newspaper

The **Ghadar** was, of course, circulated widely among Indian immigrants in North America, but it soon reached immigrants in the Philippines, Hong Kong, China, Malay states, Singapore, Trinidad and the Honduras as well as Indian regiments stationed in many of these centres. It was sent to India as well. The response it generated among immigrant communities was tremendous, groups were formed to read it and discuss the issues it raised and contributions poured in. The most popular proved to be the poems that were published in the paper, which were soon put together in the form of a collection called **Ghadar Ki Goonj**, and were recited and sung at gatherings of Indians. The poems were marked by a revolutionary spirit and a strongly secular tone, as the following lines show:

No Pundits or Mullahs do we need  
No Prayers or litanies we need recite  
These will only scuttle our boat  
Draw the Sword ; 'it is time to fight'.

The **Ghadar** also exhorted the Punjabi to atone for his pro-British role in the Revolt of 1857 by playing a leading part in throwing off the British yoke and it changed his self-image from that of a loyal soldier, an image that had been assiduously cultivated by the British, to that of a rebel whose only aim was freedom. The message of **Ghadar** went home so rapidly that Har Dayal himself was surprised at the intensity of the response and the impatience of those who had been aroused into action.

**Check Your Progress 2**

1 Give the causes of the rise of Ghadar Movement.

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2 What were the aims of Ghadar Party?

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3 Give names of four important leaders of Ghadar Movement.

4 What was the message spread by the Ghadar Paper?

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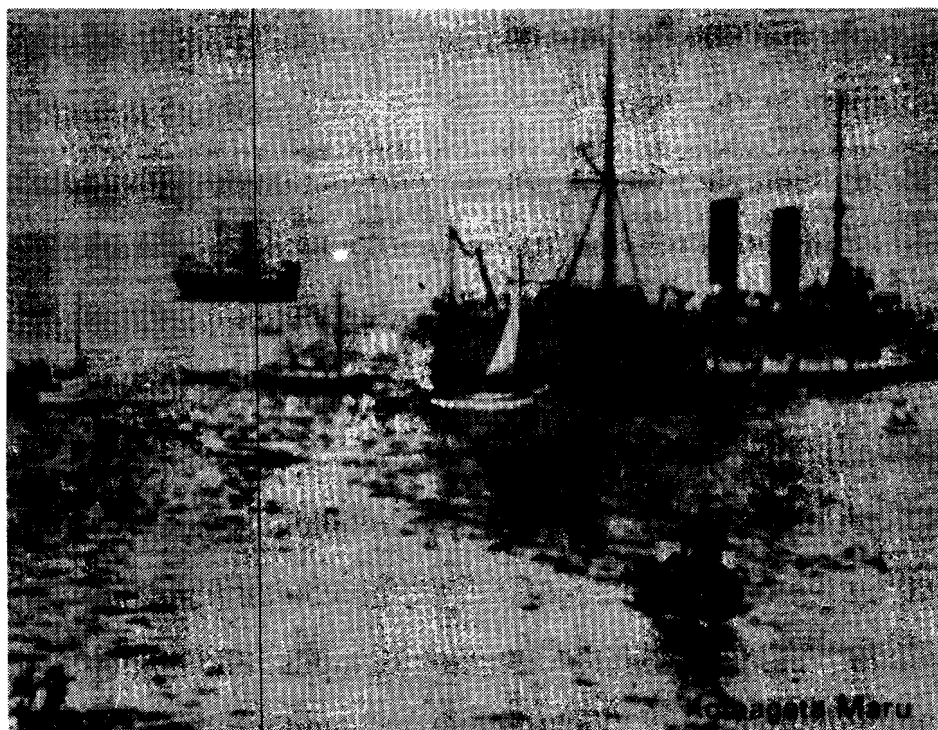
### 15.4 GHADAR MOVEMENT: THE MAIN EVENTS

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The subsequent course of the Ghadar Movement was, however, determined by three major events in 1914: the arrest, jumping of bail and flight to Switzerland of Lala Har Dayal, the fateful voyage of the ship *Komagata Maru*, and the beginning of the First World War.

i) In March, 1914 Har Dayal was arrested. The most likely reason was the pressure exerted by the British government who for obvious reasons would like to see him removed from the leadership of the Ghadar Movement, but the stated reason was his anarchist activities. He was released on bail and it was decided that he jump bail and go the Switzerland.

ii) Meanwhile, in an attempt to defy Canadian immigration laws which forbade entry to all except those who made a "direct passage in their own ship," Gurdit Singh, an Indian contractor living in Singapore chartered a ship, the **Komagata Maru**, and, with 376 Indian passengers originating from various places in East and South East Asia, set sail for Vancouver. On the way, Ghadar party mobilisers visited the ship, gave lectures and distributed literature. Receiving prior intimation of the intended immigration, the Press in Vancouver warned of the 'Mounting Oriental Invasion' and the Canadian government prepared to meet the challenge by tightening its laws.





On arrival, the ship was not allowed into the port and was cordoned off by the police.

Despite the strenuous efforts of the "Shore Committee" in Vancouver led by Husain Rahim, Sohan Lal Pathak and Balwant Singh and a powerful campaign in the USA led by Barkatullah, Bhagwan Singh, Ram Chandra and Sohan Singh Bhakna, the Komagata Maru was forced out of Canadian waters. Before it reached Japan, the First World War broke out and the British government ordered that no passenger was to be allowed to leave the ship till it reached Calcutta.

Its return journey triggered off a wave of resentment at every port of call among the communities of immigrant Indians and heightened anti-British feelings. When the ship reached Budge Budge near Calcutta, the hostile attitude of the police led to a clash which resulted in the death of 18 passengers. 202 were arrested and the rest succeeded in running away.

iii) The third and most important event that brought about a dramatic change in the situation was the outbreak of the First World War. This was the opportunity that the Ghadarites had been waiting for to seize and to make the best of Britain's difficulty. It came earlier than they had expected, and their preparations were still in a rudimentary stage. Nevertheless, a special meeting of the leading workers of the party met and decided that the time had come for action and that their biggest weakness, lack of arms, could be made good by persuading the Indian soldiers to revolt. The Ghadar party accordingly issued its **Ailan-e-Jung** or 'Proclamation of War', which was circulated among Indians living abroad. Ghadar activists also embarked on tours exhorting people to return to India and organise a revolt. The response was tremendous, with large numbers offering themselves and their entire belongings to the cause of the nation. Encouraged by this the Ghadar party began the exodus to India, and batches of revolutionaries began to arrive in India by different routes in the latter half of 1914.

#### 15.4.1 The Movement in the Last Phase

The Government of India was lying in wait, armed with the new Ingress into India Ordinance. Returning immigrants were carefully scrutinised, and of an estimated 8,000 who returned, 5,000 who were considered 'safe' were allowed to go unhindered. Of the remaining, some were interned in their villages, others detained. Nevertheless, many hard-core activists succeeded in reaching Punjab.

Kartar Singh Sarabha, the young and brilliant Indian student who had joined the Ghadar Movement in the USA and played a prominent role in the production of the Ghadar paper, had been among the first to reach Punjab safely and he set about the task of organising and contacting the returning emigrants, holding meetings and formulating a plan of action. Ghadar activists toured the villages, cyclostyled and distributed party publications, addressed gatherings at **melas** and made every effort to persuade the people to rise in revolt. But the Punjab in 1914 was very different from what they had expected, and the people were in no mood to embark upon the romantic Ghadar adventure. They had also to contend with the active hostility of loyalist elements such as the Chief Khalsa Diwan who declared them to be apostates or fallen Sikhs and criminals and cooperated fully in the governments efforts to crush them.

Disappointed with the popular response, the Ghadar revolutionaries next attempted to spread their message among the soldiers and engineer a mutiny. Attempts at revolt in November 1914 failed for lack of proper organisation and centralised leadership. Another, more organised, attempt was made in February 1915 after Rash Behari Bose had been contacted and entrusted the task of leadership and organisation, but this too proved abortive as the government succeeded in penetrating the organisation and taking pre-emptive measures. Bose managed to escape, but most of the other leaders were arrested and the Ghadar movement effectively crushed.

#### 15.4.2 The Repression

The repression that followed was the heaviest possible: 42 were sentenced to death and 200 to long prison terms. As a consequence, an entire generation of the nationalist leadership of Punjab was politically beheaded. Efforts by Indian revolutionaries in Berlin to use German help and organise mutinies among Indian troops stationed abroad and by Raja Mahendra Pratap and Barkatullah to enlist the aid of the Amir of Afghanistan proved equally abortive. Violent rebellion to overthrow British rule was not fated to have much success.

### 15.4.3 Failure and Achievements

Should, we, therefore, term the Ghadar movement a failure? Can we say that because they did not succeed in their immediate stated objective of organising an armed revolt and driving the British out, their efforts were in vain? By that token, all the major national struggles of 1920-22, 1930-34 or 1942, would have to be termed as failures, since none of them succeeded in immediately winning independence. But if the yardstick of success is whether there was a furthering of nationalist feeling, creation of traditions of resistance, emergence and trial of new methods of struggle, the spread of forward-looking ideologies of secularism, democracy and egalitarianism, then the Ghadar movement occupies a very important place in India's struggle for freedom.

**Achievements:** The Ghadarites succeeded in popularising nationalist ideology—especially the critique of colonialism and the understanding that Indian poverty and backwardness was a consequence of British rule—among vast masses of Indians in India and abroad. They created a cadre of highly motivated nationalists—and though many of these were lost through repression, some permanently and others for number of years—who continued to play an important role in building up the national and later the left and peasant movements in Punjab and other parts of India for many decades to follow.

Ghadar ideology was also strongly egalitarian and democratic in content. Their aim was to set up an independent republic in India. Har Dayal, deeply influenced as he was by the anarchist and syndicalist movements, also imparted to the movement an egalitarian outlook. His constant references to the Irish, Mexican, and Russian revolutionaries also helped in saving the movement from a chauvinist nationalism and in giving it an inter-nationalist character.

But perhaps the most important achievement of the Ghadarites was that despite the fact that the vast majority of their followers were recruited from amongst Punjabi Sikh immigrants, they never betrayed any communal tendencies and were, on the contrary, strongly secular in their outlook. Concern with religion was seen as petty and narrow-minded, and unworthy of revolutionaries.

They freely accepted non-Sikhs and non-Punjabis as leaders: Har Dayal was a Hindu, Barkatullah a Muslim, Rash Behari Bose a Hindu and Bengali. They revered leaders from all over India—Tilak, Savarkar, Khudi Ram Bose and Aurobindo Ghosh were their heroes. They also understood that the ideology of the Sikhs being a 'martial race' was a creation of the colonial rulers and was meant to preserve them as loyal soldiers and they tried their best to counter it. They popularised the nationalist salute **Bande Mantaram** as the rallying cry of the movement and not any religious greeting such as **Sat Sri Akal**. In the words of Sohan Singh Bhakna, the Ghadari Baba who later became a major nationalist and left leader, "we were not Sikhs or Punjabis, our religion was patriotism".

**Weaknesses:** The Ghadar movement inevitably had its share of weaknesses as well, the chief of which was its over-estimation of the level of readiness of the movement. One might say that they sounded the bugles of war without stopping to examine the state of their own army. The response that they evoked in the immigrant Indian community, whose nationalist consciousness was aroused by daily experiences of racial insult, alienation produced by living in unfamiliar surroundings, and whose small numbers made the task of its organisation relatively easier, misled them into thinking that the vast mass of Indians in India were also in a similar state of readiness. They also underestimated the might of the British rulers, the strength of the ideological foundations of their rule, and thought that all that the people of India needed was a call to revolt. The cost that had to be paid for this crucial weakness not only by the Ghadar movement but by the entire national movement was heavy indeed, for it is not unlikely that if the major part of the Ghadar leadership had not been removed from the scene, the political complexion of the national movement, certainly in Punjab, would have been very different indeed as the Ghadarites with their committed nationalist and secular ideology would inevitably have played a critical role in checking the communal tendencies that were to raise their head in later years.

#### Check Your Progress 3

- 1 Mention the three important events of 1914 which influenced the Ghadar Movement.

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2 What action was planned by Ghadar leaders in India?

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3 What was the main achievement of the Ghadar movement?

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4 What were the main weaknesses of the Ghadar movement?

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## 15.5 HOME RULE LEAGUES

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There was another, less dramatic but more effective, response to the situation arising out of the First World War—the Home Rule Leagues of Lokmanya Tilak and Annie Besant.

### 15.5.1 Events leading to the Formation of Leagues

When Tilak returned to India after serving a long sentence of six years in Mandalay in Burma, he initially concentrated all attention on securing the readmission of himself and other Extremists into the Indian National Congress from which they had been thrown out in 1907 at Surat. Even in 1907, he had been far from happy with the split, and now he was convinced even more that unity was necessary. Besides, the sanction of the Congress was seen to be desirable for any political activity as the Congress had come to symbolise the national movement in the minds of the people. Further, disunity had only helped the British who had removed the Extremists through repression, and then ignored the Moderates by granting reforms that fell far short of their expectations. The complete lack of political activity since 1908 was also making the Moderates unhappy and many of them were now more favourably disposed towards the question of the return of the Extremists to the fold.

The Moderate leaders were also under considerable pressure from Mrs Annie Besant, who wanted to build up a movement in India on the lines of the Irish Home Rule League, and was urging them to accept the Extremists back into the Congress. Annie Besant, aged 66 in 1914, had come to India from England in 1893 to work for the Theosophical Society, and had earlier been an exponent of Free Thought, Radicalism and Fabianism. She had set up her headquarters at Adyar near Madras, and developed a large network of followers of the Theosophical Society from among those educated Indians whose communities had experienced no cultural revival of their own. With this as a base, she now wanted to start a political movement on agitational lines.

### 15.5.2 Two Leagues

The Extremists failed to be allowed re-entry into the Congress at its session in December 1914, but consistent efforts throughout 1915, including the campaigns launched separately by Annie Besant and Tilak through newspapers and local associations, secured them their re-entry in December 1915. The opposition to the Extremists was also considerably whittled down by the death of Pherozeshah Mehta who had been the most recalcitrant in his opposition. The Congress, still dominated as it was by the Moderates, however, failed to keep its promise of reviving local level Congress Committees and beginning a programme of educative propaganda by September 1916. Therefore, Annie Besant and Tilak launched their own organisations, the Home Rule Leagues, in 1916. The two Leagues demarcated their areas of operation: Tilak's League was to work in Maharashtra, Karnataka Central Provinces and Berar and Annie Besant's in the rest of India.



19. Tilak

### 15.5.3 Tilak's Home Rule League

Tilak's Home Rule League, launched at the Bombay provincial Conference held at Belgaum in April 1916, was organised into 6 branches, one each in Central Maharashtra, Bombay city, Karnataka and Central Provinces, and two in Perar. It published 6 pamphlets in Marathi and 2 in English, of which 47,000 copies were sold. Pamphlets were also brought out in Kannada and Gujarati. Apart from these, the most crucial role was played by Tilak's tours of Maharashtra during the course of which he lectured on and explained the demand for Home Rule. "India was like a son who had grown up and attained maturity", he said. "It was right now that the trustee or the father should give him what was his due". His speeches during this period also show no trace of a religious appeal and he categorically stated :

"Alienness is not connected with religion, trade or profession; it is a question of interests. He who does what is beneficial to the people of this country, be he a Muhammedan or an Englishman, is not alien."



Nor did his ideas reflect any narrow regional linguistic chauvinism or caste bias. He wanted all the regional languages and cultures to develop, and argued for education to be imparted in the vernaculars. He frontally opposed untouchability, declaring: "If a god were to tolerate untouchability, I would not recognise him as God at all". He also urged Brahmins to be tolerant of the non-Brahmin demands and not oppose them, and simultaneously urged non-Brahmin not to see their problems of lack of jobs, etc., in terms of Brahmin vs. non-Brahmin, but to understand that it was the greater spread of education among Brahmins that gave them greater access to jobs.

As soon the Tilak's movement began to gain ground, the government decided to strike a blow by demanding that he furnish securities of Rs. 60,000 and threatening to bind him for good behaviour for a period of one year. Tilak lost the case in the lower court but the High Court exonerated him in November 1916. The government's attempt to silence him and its subsequent failure gave a big fillip to the movement, and Tilak pushed home the advantage by declaring that Home Rule now had legal sanction. By April 1917, Tilak's league had enlisted 14,000 members.



20. Indian Home Rule League Deputation

### 15.5.4 Annie Besant's Home Rule League

Meanwhile, Annie Besant's League had also been very active. Even before the League was formally inaugurated in September, 1916 the Propaganda Fund has sold 300,000 copies of 26 English pamphlets discussing mainly the system of government existing in India and the reasons for the demand for self-government. More pamphlets in Indian languages were brought out and local branches organised lectures and discussions and set up libraries. The headquarters at Adyar, run by Annie Besant and her lieutenants Arundale, C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyar, and B.P. Wadia also brought out the papers **New India** and **Commonweal**, and Arundale's column on 'Home Rule' in **New India** acted as the vehicle for spreading news and giving instructions. Besides the existing Theosophical Society members, many new members including Jawaharlal Nehru in Allahabad, and B. Chakravarti and J. Banerjee in Calcutta joined the League.

The Home Rule Leagues also succeeded in enlisting the support of many Moderate Congressmen who were unhappy with the lack of activity by the Congress. Members of Gokhale's Servants of India Society toured and lectured and brought out pamphlets supporting the demand for Home Rule; in U.P., Moderate Congressmen joined the Home Rule Leaguers in touring the mofussil towns and villages. Nor was there anything very

surprising about this since the Home Rule Leagues were only implementing in a vigorous fashion the programme of the Moderates.

The annual session of the Congress in December 1916 at Lucknow also provided the Home Rule Leaguers with an opportunity of demonstrating their strength and they turned up at this Congress in large numbers. Tilak and Annie Besant also played a leading role in bringing about the famous Congress League Pact which was signed at this session. Tilak answered criticism that the Hindus had been too generous to the Muslims by saying:

I am sure I represent the sense of the community all over India when I say that we would not care if the rights of self-government are granted to the Mohammedan community only....I would not care if these rights are granted to any section of the Indian community.

“When you have to fight against a third party, it is a very important thing that we stand on this platform united, united in race, united in religion and united as regards all shades of different political opinion”. And though undoubtedly the provision for separate electorates for Muslims which was accepted in the Congress League Pact was a very controversial one it could not be faulted on grounds of lack of generosity of the majority.

The Home Rule Leagues held a joint meeting at the end of the session attended by more than 1,000 delegates and addressed by Besant and Tilak, and on their return journeys both the leaders toured extensively through parts of North, Central and Eastern India.

The government's decision to again try repression acted as a further spur to the movement. In June 1917, Besant, B.P. Wadia and Arundale were placed under arrest. Immediately, many who had earlier kept their distance now voiced their protest and joined the movement. Jinnah, Surendarnath Banerjee and Madan Mohan Malaviya were among the most famous of these. Tilak advocated passive resistance to the AICC meeting in July 1917, and Gandhi's suggestion of collecting the signatures of one thousand men willing to defy the internment orders and march to Besant's place of detention was implemented. Village tours and meetings were intensified and the movement displayed a new resolve.

### 15.5.5 Change in British Attitude

Faced with this growing agitation, the government in Britain decided to adopt a soft line. The signal for the change of policy was the declaration of Montagu, the Secretary of State for India, in the British House of Commons which stated: “the policy of His Majesty's government.... is that of increasing association of Indians in every branch of the administration and the gradual development of self-governing institutions with a view to the progressive realisation of responsible government in India as an integral part of the British Empire”. This statement was a distinct advance on the position taken in 1909 when Morley while introducing the Reforms had categorically stated that they were not intended to lead to self-government. After Montagu's declaration, the demand for self-government or Home Rule could no longer be treated as seditious, and this was an important achievement. This did not, however, mean that Britain was about to grant self-government to India. Any doubts on this score were dispelled by the accompanying part of the statement which made it clear that the nature and timing of the reforms would be decided by the government alone. This gave enough room for continual postponement of transfer of any real power to Indians.

The immediate gain of the new policy was that Annie Besant was released in September 1917. She was, at Tilak's instance, elected President of the annual session of the Congress in December 1917. Her popularity at this time was at its height, and the movement appeared poised for greater advances.

### 15.5.6 Decline of the Home Rule Leagues

During 1918, however, the Home Rule agitation gradually fizzled out. Among the factors responsible for this was the withdrawal of support by the Moderates who had again been won over to the hope for reforms and worried by the increasing talk of civil disobedience among the Home Rule rank and file. The publication of the Reforms Scheme in July 1918 further divided the nationalists: while some wanted to reject them, others wanted to give them a trial. Annie Besant herself demonstrated considerable inconsistency in her stand both on the question of the reforms and on the issue of passive resistance. Tilak was on the whole more consistent in his approach that the reforms were unworthy of Britain to offer and India to accept, but given Besant's continuous vacillation, there was little he could do on

his own. His decision to go to England at the end of 1918 to pursue a libel case he had filed against Valentine Chirol, the author of **Indian Unrest**, physically removed him from the scene for many critical months. The movement was essentially rendered leaderless.

The tremendous achievement of the Home Rule movement was in creating a politically aware and committed band of nationalist workers who were to play the leading role in the coming mass struggles. The contacts they had established in towns and villages during the course of the agitation were also to prove invaluable in the coming years. The ground was also created by the wide popularisation of the idea of Home Rule and the arousal of national feeling.

True, the leaders of the Home Rule Movement were themselves unable to show the way forward and translate this consciousness into a mass struggle. But they prepared the ground for the next stage—a stage that was to be shaped and given a unique character by the personality of Mahatma Gandhi.

#### Check Your Progress 4

1 Why did Tilak and Annie Besant strive to gain re-entry for the extremists into the Indian National Congress?

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2 Discuss the objectives of the two Home Rule Leagues.

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3 What was the political impact of the leagues?

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### 15.6 LET US SUM UP

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In this Unit we have seen how revolutionary trends emerged within the National Movement. The Amushilan and Jugantar societies were important trends in the revolutionary movement. The Revolutionary activities were not confined to any one region of the country and at times they even crossed the boundaries of India. The Ghadar Party is the best example of this. The Government suppressed these movements with an iron hand. And yet these movements were successful in generating and adding to the anti-British consciousness. However, their major weakness was their isolation from the masses in general.

The Home Rule Leagues further took the message of self rule to the masses. In fact they had provided the background to a political atmosphere wherein Gandhi moved in with his new doctrine of non-violence and Satyagrah.

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## 16.8 KEY WORDS

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**Arbitration Award** : Terms and Conditions on which a body mediating in industrial dispute makes a settlement possible.

**Disenfranchisement** : Deprivation of voting rights.

**Ideology** : A system of ideas organised around a principle e.g. Gandhian ideology conferred around the principle of Ahimsa.

**Indentured** : Bonded.

**Passive Resistance** : Opposition without physically hurting the opponent.

**Trustees for the workers** : Gandhi advocated that capitalist and the labour could live in harmony and that the capitalist should make an attempt to be the guardian of workers' interests.

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## 16.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

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### Check Your Progress 1

- 1 See Sub-sec. 16.2.1
- 2 i) × ii) ✓ iii) × iv) ×

### Check Your Progress 2

- 1 i) × ii) ✓ iii) × iv) ×
- 2 See Sub-sec. 16.2.3

### Check Your Progress 3

- 1 See Sub-sec. 16.4.1
- 2 See Sub-sec. 16.4.3
- 3 i) × ii) ✓ iii) ✓ iv) ×

### Check Your Progress 4

- 1 See Sub-sec. 16.5.1
- 2 See Sub-sec. 16.5.2
- 3 See Sub-sec. 16.5.2

### Check Your Progress 5

- 1 See Sub-sec. 16.6.1
- 2 See Sub-sec. 16.6.4