

The Rise of Political Awareness (1883–1911)

Introduction: The Rise of Political Awareness (1883–1911)

During the late 19th century, India saw a new sense of political awareness among its people. The British had established control after 1857, but Indians were becoming more educated and politically active. Western education helped create a new class of Indian thinkers, journalists, and lawyers who started discussing rights, justice, and representation in government. Newspapers and public debates increased knowledge about political issues. This was the beginning of organized political thinking in India. Both Hindus and Muslims realized that their progress depended on their unity and participation in political affairs, though they responded differently to these new challenges.

The Formation of the Indian National Congress (1885)

The Indian National Congress (INC) was founded in 1885 by **Allan Octavian Hume**, a British official who wanted to give Indians a peaceful way to express their opinions. It brought together educated Indians — mostly Hindus, Parsis, and a few Muslims — to discuss political reforms. The Congress did not aim to overthrow British rule but to work within it for gradual improvements. Its early leaders, called the **Moderates**, believed in peaceful means such as petitions and resolutions. Famous leaders like **Dadabhai Naoroji**, **Gopal Krishna Gokhale**, and **Surendranath Banerjee** worked to make Indian voices heard.

Early Objectives and Demands of the Congress

The early Congress sessions focused on simple and loyal demands. Members wanted greater Indian representation in the legislative councils and equal chances in government jobs. They also asked for civil rights, freedom of speech, and economic protection for local industries. The Congress believed that the British could be convinced through logical arguments and cooperation. Its peaceful approach made it acceptable to the British government at first. However, many Indians later began to think that peaceful methods alone would not bring true change.

Muslim Response and Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's Advice

Muslims reacted carefully to the new political movement. **Sir Syed Ahmad Khan**, a respected leader and reformer, advised Muslims not to join the Indian National Congress. He believed the Congress was mainly a Hindu organization and that Muslims, being weaker in number and education, would not benefit from it. Sir Syed encouraged Muslims to concentrate on **modern education, science, and economic progress** before joining politics. Most Muslims followed his advice and stayed away from Congress activities, though a few educated Muslims participated in its early meetings. Over time, this separate political attitude prepared Muslims for the formation of their own organization — the **All India Muslim League in 1906**.

Impact and Significance (1883–1911)

The growth of political awareness between 1883 and 1911 was a turning point in Indian history. The Congress gave Indians their first platform to raise political issues and demand reforms. It helped people learn the value of unity, representation, and constitutional struggle. Although Muslims did not join actively at first, they learned the importance of having their own voice in politics. This period laid the foundation for future political developments — including the creation of the Muslim League and later, the Pakistan Movement. The years from 1883 to 1911 were the **beginning of modern Indian political life**.