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The Birth of Indian National Congress: A Safety Valve for Colonial India

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Abstract: ***The Indian National Congress (INC) has been around longer than any other Indian political party, having been founded in 1885. In the fight for Indian independence from British colonial control, the establishment of the Indian National Congress was a critical factor. The Congress's formation was not, however, without debate. The "safety valve theory" was at the centre of one such debate; this theory proposed that the British established the Congress in order to alleviate the strain of rising Indian nationalism. The purpose of this research is to examine the relationship between the emergence of the Indian National Congress and the concept of a safety valve. The Indian National Congress (INC) is one of India's oldest and most influential political parties, having been instrumental in the country's fight for freedom from British colonial authority. This organisation, known as the Congress, had its origins in the late 19th century, when a group of Indian intellectuals and professionals sought to organise in order to better express their discontent with the British colonial government. In 1885, Indian nationalists banded together to form the Congress in the hopes of bringing about sweeping political and social change in the country. The 'Safety Valve' theory, however, argued that the Congress was formed to unleash the mounting anger among the Indian masses and forestall revolutionary outbreaks. This paper will examine the formation of Indian national congress and the role of safety valve theory.***

Keywords: Safety-valve theory, Lala Lajpat Rai, Allan Octavius Hume,1885, the Indian National Congress, British colonialism.

I. INTRODUCTION

On December 28, 1885, in what is now Mumbai, India, a retired civil employee named Allan Octavian Hume laid the groundwork for what would become the Indian National Congress. Bombay was the location of this occurrence. The Indian Middle Class was dissatisfied with British colonial rule, and the INC was formed to represent their concerns. There were 72 delegates present at the first Indian National Congress (INC) conference. These delegates hailed from all corners of India, and they embodied a broad cross-section of the country's cultures and professions. Dadabhai Naoroji, Pherozeshah Mehta, Dinshaw Wacha, and Surendranath Banerjee are just a few of the names associated with the INC's inception. Indian middle-class dissatisfaction with ongoing British colonial rule prompted the establishment of the Indian National Congress as a political movement. (moulton, 2007) Many members of India's middle class who studied in the West grew to support democratic ideals like freedom, fairness, and equality as a result of their exposure to these concepts. Nevertheless, these ideas were unavailable to them while they were subject to the colonial government of the United Kingdom. The Indian National Congress was formed to provide India's middle class with a voice in the political process. The Indian National Congress was known early on for making fair demands for political reform. Provisions such as the right to run for public office and increased representation in legislative councils were included in these changes. Both the lowering of land revenue and the removal of the salt tax were major topics in the campaigns waged by the Indian National Congress. The salt tax was a factor in each of these cases. The Indian National Congress was founded by a group of educated Indian professionals and intellectuals including Allan Octavian Hume, Dadabhai Naoroji, Dinshaw Wacha, and Surendranath Banerjee. The primary goal of the Congress was to provide Native Americans with a platform to express their opposition to British colonial rule and to promote positive changes in Indian society and culture. In its first meeting, held in Bombay in December 1885, 72 delegates representing various parts of India were present. Initially, members of Congress sought more moderate goals, such as ensuring all Indian children had access to elementary school and lowering the tax on land. The Congress' aspirations for independence from British rule began with a modest aim and grew increasingly severe as its strength and influence rose. British colonial administrators in India believed the Indian National Congress would liberate nationalist sentiment. (Bevir, 2003) The view held that British control over Indian nationalism was necessary. The safety valve thesis claims that the British founded the INC to channel Indian nationalist fervour into a manageable political movement. The idea was that allowing Indians to express their frustrations and goals through the INC would prevent more violent resistance to colonial control. According to the safety valve idea, the British created the Indian National Congress to ease Indian nationalism's tension.

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The hypothesis is that the Brits thought they could control the nationalist movement by offering Indians a place to vent. Lord Curzon, India's Viceroy, suggested it in 1901. (III, 1993) Curzon, per "The Congress lets volatile and explosive components out. It allows individuals voice their worries and thoughts, which would otherwise fester and explode, threatening public harmony." Lord Randolph Churchill's "Safety Valve" theory was introduced in 1885. Churchill believed Congress freed Indian wrath and prevented revolt. He hoped the Congress would let Indians voice their grievances and prevent violent uprisings. Churchill believed the Congress could govern the Indian nationalist movement, and British authorities agreed. They believed they could maintain British control over India by supporting moderate Congress leaders and avoiding extremist nationalists. The British officials worried that the Congress would become a platform for radical nationalism if its demands were not met. (Choudhary, 2018) According to the controversial safety valve thesis, the British encouraged the Congress's establishment to channel Indian nationalism into a safe political outlet. According to this idea, unchecked Indian nationalism undermined British colonial power in India. The Congress gave moderate Indian leaders a voice, according to the notion. The Brits intended to create a safety valve to relieve Indian nationalism's rising tension and prevent war. Safety valve theory is contested. Some historians consider the Congress indigenous. Indian nationalists founded and led the Congress, they say. The Congress was indigenous, but some argue the British impacted its early direction. The British colonial rulers permitted the Congress to have annual sessions and engage with different groups of India in its early years. (AHMED, 1987)

II. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1) Know about how the Indian National Congress got its start as a political party in colonial India by looking at its background.
2) Explain how the Congress used the notion of safety valves as a political strategy in its dealings with the British authorities and its approach to colonial rule.
3) Analyze how the concept of safety valves has influenced the legislative agenda, leadership, and decision-making in Congress, as well as its achievements and failures.
4) Consider the Indian National Congress's impact on Indian politics and the significance of the safety-valve concept in light of India's political past and present.

III. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1) What were the historical, social, and political factors that led to the establishment of the Indian National Congress in 1885?
2) How did the Indian National Congress evolve in its goals and strategies from its inception to independence in 1947?
3) What was the role of the principle of "safety valves" in the Indian National Congress's approach to colonial governance, and how did it shape the party's relationship with the British authorities?
4) To what extent did the principle of "safety valves" contribute to the success or failure of the Indian National Congress in achieving its political objectives during the colonial period?

IV. HYPOTHESIS

1) To establish that the idea to develop "safety valves" inform the early political strategies and tactics of the Indian National Congress.
2) To establish that early Congress leaders like Allan Octavian Hume and his brother A.O. Hume were closely aligned with colonial authority and advocated for gradualist approaches to political reform over more radical calls for independence or self-rule.
3) To establish that the Congress was established to channel nationalist feelings and demands for political representation, but also to contain discontent and prevent the growth of more radical, disruptive groups.

V. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

One of India's longest-standing political organisations, the Indian National Congress (INC) was founded in 1885. The British colonial government's goal of incorporating the Indian elite into the political system through the notion of safety valves played a significant role in the organization's inception.

The Congress was founded in 1885, and one of the oldest writings on the subject is A.C. Banerjee's "The Indian National Congress: Its Origins and Early Years" (1917). Banerjee claims that the Congress's origins may be traced back to an effort by India's upper-class citizens to air their discontent with the colonial administration. The Congress first served as a forum for political debate, but as Indian nationalism rose in strength, it eventually became a tool for combating British colonial control.

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B.R. Nanda's "The Indian National Congress and the Early Phase of the National Movement" (1957) is another essential tome on the subject. Nanda explains how the Congress went from being an advocacy organisation to a political party, and how it influenced the development of Indian nationalism. He elaborates on how the Congress was used by the British administration as a pressure release valve to keep dissent under control and the colonies under British rule.

Bipan Chandra, in his 1986 book titled "Congress and Indian Nationalism: The Pre-Gandhian Period," analyses the Congress's involvement in the national movement before to the rise of Mahatma Gandhi. According to Chandra, the original goal of the Congress, led by figures like Dadabhai Naoroji and Gopal Krishna Gokhale, was to ensure that Indians had a voice in the political process within the framework of the colonial government. Yet, over time, Congress demands grew more extreme, ultimately leading to a demand for total independence from British sovereignty.

Subhas Chandra Bose's "The Indian Fight, 1920–1942" (1989) is another classic on the subject. Bose was a major figure in the Indian independence movement who opposed the Congress and called for a more violent strategy. Bose, in his book, attacks the Congress for its moderation and its preference for peaceful protest. The Congress's role in the British government's plan to use it as a "safety valve" to stifle dissent is also addressed.

A more nuanced picture of the Indian independence movement and the intricate interactions between the Congress, the British colonial authority, and the Indian people has emerged from the literature on the Congress's founding and the notion of safety valves. These works both celebrate the Congress's influence on Indian nationalism and expose the British government's manipulation of the party to keep colonial power.

VI. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology adopted in this paper is a descriptive study and the research has relied on secondary data for the research. The research has referred to journal, article on the internet for gathering reliable information. The purpose of the present research is to use secondary sources to examine the formation of the Indian National Congress and the concept of safety valves. To put it simply, secondary data is information that has already been gathered, evaluated, and made available to the public by other researchers or institutions. For this paper, the researcher plans to consult a variety of secondary materials that cover the Indian National Congress and the concept of safety valves. No primary data has been utilized for the research

A. Safety Valve Theory and Lala Lajpat Rai

The Indian National Congress, founded in 1885, was instrumental in India's freedom struggle. Congress fought British control in India. Gandhi, Nehru, and Patel led the movement. Lala Lajpat Rai helped found the Congress. He was a patriot who supported Congress' "safety valve" approach. Safety valve theory, proposed by Lala Lajpat Rai, is important to Indian politics. Lala Lajpat Rai was crucial to Indian freedom. He influenced Swadeshi and the Indian National Congress. Lajpat Rai valued the Congress for India's independence. He says the Congress released Indians' rage at colonial tyranny. (RAI, 1917). Lajpat Rai was right—the Congress was a venue for Indians to vent. He asserted that without the Congress, Indians would have rebelled. However, the Congress allowed individuals to voice their concerns peacefully and democratically. The Congress released fury, preventing violence. The Congress safety valve notion was introduced by Indian independence leader Lala Lajpat Rai. According to this interpretation, the Indian National Congress was a pressure release valve that prevented Indians from rebelling against British rule. The Past In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, British dominance in India led to economic exploitation, political captivity, and other forms of persecution. Indian discontent and unrest were caused by poverty, famine, and social inequity. The Indian National Congress, founded in 1885, became a hub for Indian nationalist movements, allowing Indians to voice their problems and seek justice. Lala Lajpat Rai's Congress Safety Valve Theory Lala Lajpat Rai, the "Punjab Kesari," was a renowned Indian freedom fighter. He believed India could overthrow Britain. He believed the British had a plot to prevent a popular uprising. Lala Lajpat Rai argued that the British administration recognised the Indian National Congress as a legitimate venue for Indians to express their concerns and hopes. British rulers created Congress to control Indian nationalist movements. Lala Lajpat Rai argued that the British administration understood the Congress was not a revolutionary party. Instead, it let Indians vent their displeasure peacefully.

B. Criticism of the Safety Valve Theory

Historians and academics have sharply criticised the safety-valve hypothesis. The hypothesis has been panned in part because it is seen as downplaying the contributions of Indian political figures and activists to the nationalist movement. Rather than being an invention of the British, the Congress emerged from the Indian independence movement. Indian independence was a cause dear to the hearts of the Congress leaders, and their demands hardened over time.

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In addition, the theory falsely assumes that the British controlled every aspect of the nationalist movement. There were many different factions and individuals involved in the Indian nationalist movement, all of whom wanted independence for their country. The nationalist movement was not something the British could completely manipulate or control, and their attempts to do so often backfired. Several academics disagree on whether or not the safety valve theory holds water. Critics of the idea say it oversimplifies and simplifies the many interrelated social and political elements that contributed to the rise of the INC. Some have argued that this interpretation ignores the fact that the INC was formed in reaction to the growing demands of Indian intellectuals and the Indian public for greater political representation, rather than as a direct result of British colonial policy. The safety valve theory has also been criticised for its alleged underestimation of the Indian nationalist movement's impact and its potential to undermine British colonial control. As a forum for Indian leaders to discuss their desires for governmental change and increased independence, the INC was an essential part of the Indian nationalist movement.

C. The Indian National Congress' Influence

Despite its origins in the 'Safety Valve' ideology, the Indian National Congress became the preeminent political organisation in India's war for independence. Despite the fact that it came into existence after the idea, this transpired. This occurred despite the fact that the precedent had already been set. Under the Congress's auspices, Indians from all throughout the country were able to meet and share their visions for a better future in terms of politics, economics, and social conditions. These get-togethers were held so that members could discuss their shared aspirations. The Congress was instrumental in the Indian independence movement by helping to organise protests, boycotts, and other forms of non-cooperation directed at the British administration. This was achieved by discouraging Indians from aiding the British government. This factored significantly towards the overall success of the campaign and should be highlighted for its importance. The Congress also played a significant role in promoting Indian culture, language, and customs, which contributed to the development of a distinct Indian identity. Several separate efforts brought about this result. The Congress party officials stressed the need to promote harmony between Hindus and Muslims, in addition to their other goals of secularism and tolerance. This was done while simultaneously making a case for secularism. Concurrently, they emphasised the need to encourage tolerance of others' perspectives while making their argument. The Congress was also instrumental in the formation of a coalition of leaders and activists across India who battled doggedly for freedom from British colonial control. This connection was vital in the struggle for freedom from British colonial domination. Because of this group's efforts, the independence movement was successful. Having this network in place was crucial to the overall victory of the independence movement. Demands for political reform from the Indian National Congress's early years were relatively moderate, including greater representation in legislative councils and the ability to run for public office. The Indian National Congress initially pushed for these goals. These sorts of demands were made frequently by early Indian National Congress members. These requirements were laid forth way back when the group was just getting started. Members of the Indian National Congress worked politically for the defence of Indian interests as well as the reduction of land revenue and the elimination of the salt tax. Both of these were among the more significant problems that arose during this exercise. (G. Samba Siva Reddy and A. Ramanjul Reddy, 2013)

VII. ANALYSIS

One of India's longest-standing political organisations is the Indian National Congress. In 1885, its founders formed the organisation to lobby the British colonial authorities for greater Indian political participation. The party has had a lasting impact on the political and social climate of India.

The idea of "safety valves" is fascinating because it explains how the Congress has changed over time. The Congress, according to this theory, has been a "safety valve" for popular unhappiness in India, allowing citizens to vent their frustrations without resorting to violence. The Congress's function as a check on the party's power dates back to its infancy. British colonial authorities were understandably concerned about the rise of Indian nationalism and did what they could to head off any major uprisings.

The Congress gave the Indian people a forum in which to voice their concerns and make legitimate requests for change. But, Congress's function as a check and balance has not been without controversy. Some have said the party has served as a tool for the elite to co-opt popular movements and quell more extreme forms of protest. In other words, Congress has been accused of relying on the safety-valve principle to prevent change rather than bring about necessary improvements.

The Congress has been criticised, but its significance in Indian politics cannot be denied. From the war for independence to the fight for social justice and equality, the party has been at the forefront of numerous significant social and political movements.

The Congress has had a tough time in recent years, what with new political parties emerging and its own support system weakening. Yet, the party's legacy lives on as a lesson in the efficacy of nonviolent protest and democratic action in India's political history.

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VIII. CONCLUSION

The study paper investigated that in 1885, the Indian National Congress was formed to advance Indian interests and fight for Indians' rights and freedoms while living under British colonial control. The Congress Party of India rose in prominence and importance over time, becoming a major factor in India's fight for independence. The "concept of safety valves" played a pivotal role in Congress's overall political strategy. To avoid a widespread uprising, the Congress agreed to work with the British colonial authority and make some modest political concessions. Nonetheless, there were many who felt the Congress was too receptive to compromise and not doing enough to challenge the British colonial regime, despite the fact that the notion of safety valves had helped the Congress secure some victories for Indians inside the colonial system. Yet, the Congress's tactical application of the safety-valve principle helped shape the trajectory of Indian politics and opened the path for India's independence in 1947. Historians and academics still argue and analyse the impact of the Indian National Congress and the safety-valve idea. Yet, the Congress's part in India's independence struggle will forever be remembered as a crucial chapter in the country's story and a source of motivation for those who continue to fight for democracy, justice, and freedom in the globe today.

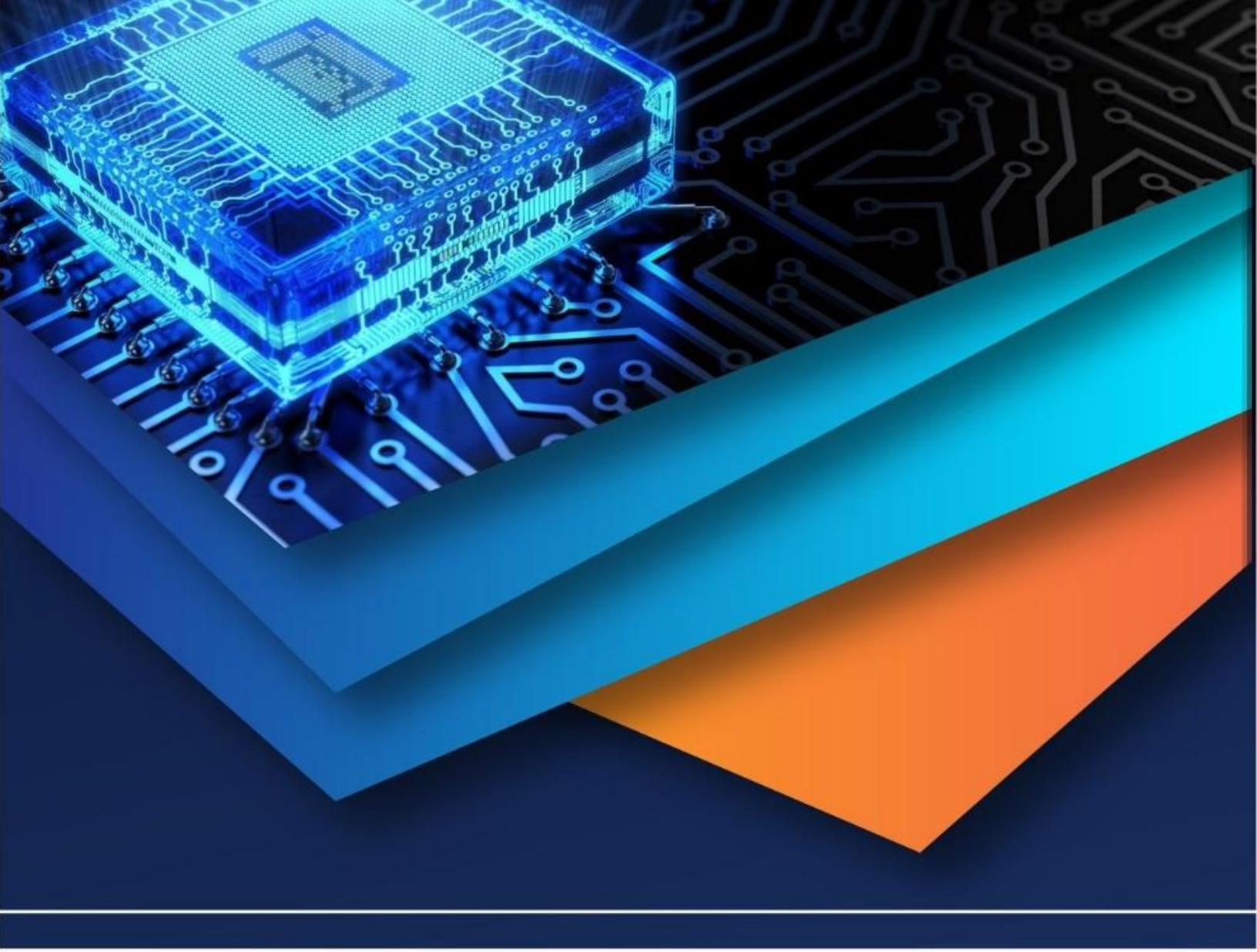
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