

The Influence of the Indian Freedom Movement on the Working of the Constituent Assembly (1946–1950)

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Abstract :-

The Indian Constituent Assembly, which worked between December 1946 and January 1950, was not just a group for writing the Constitution. It was the final stage of the long fight for freedom from British rule. The members, their ideas, and the way they worked were strongly shaped by the political values and culture of the freedom movement. This paper studies the historical and ideological link between the Indian freedom struggles and how the Constituent Assembly functioned. It focuses on how the fight for self-rule, civil rights, and social justice influenced the Constitution's rules and the style of debates. By looking at the Assembly's debates, reports, and writings of key leaders, this paper argues that the Assembly was a continuation of the freedom movement in a new form, putting its goals into the foundation of independent India.

Keywords: Indian freedom struggle, Constituent Assembly, nationalism, constitutional development, democracy, social justice

1. Introduction

The making of the Constitution of India was a historic and meaningful act. The Constituent Assembly began its work on 9 December 1946 and worked in a time of both hope and challenge – the joy of coming independence, the pain of Partition, and the urgent need to build a new nation.

The freedom movement was not only about removing British rule. It was also a school of democracy, negotiation, and new political ideas. Leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabhbhai Patel, B.R. Ambedkar, Rajendra Prasad, and Maulana Azad developed their political skills during years of struggle. They learned how to lead, compromise, and unite people from different backgrounds.

This paper argues that the Constituent Assembly cannot be separated from the history of the freedom movement. The struggle gave the Assembly moral authority, a shared political language, and a vision for India's future. By studying this connection, we can see how the Constitution became the true political outcome of the freedom struggle.

2. Literature Review

There is a lot of research on the Constituent Assembly. Most of it falls into two types:

1. Institutional-legal studies – focus on the process of drafting, the text of the Constitution, and comparison with other countries.
2. Political-historical studies – focus on the Assembly's link with the nationalist movement and politics of the 1940s.

Granville Austin's *The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation* (1999) is a key work. Austin says the Constitution reflected three main goals :- democracy, social change, and national unity ,all based on the ideals of the freedom struggle.

Bipan Chandra in *India's Struggle for Independence* (1989) and *India since Independence* (2008) shows how the culture of consensus, diversity, and mass mobilization shaped the Assembly's work. He also notes the moral authority of leaders who had sacrificed much for freedom.

A.G. Noorani (2010) points out that the Assembly debates continued earlier arguments on communal representation, federalism, and rights , debates that were part of Congress sessions, Round Table Conferences, and civil disobedience movements.

Subhash Kashyap (2009) and Siddharth Mallavarapu (2016) say that while nationalist ideals shaped the Assembly, compromises like accepting Partition and keeping some colonial systems also limited its work.

However, there is still less research that directly links specific phases of the freedom movement, like the Non-Cooperation Movement, Civil Disobedience Movement, and Quit India Movement to the Assembly's debates and working style. This paper tries to fill that gap.

3. The Freedom Struggle as the Ideological Foundation

The Assembly's ideas came directly from the values of the freedom movement. Each phase of the struggle added something to the later Constitution.

3.1 Swaraj and Democratic Self-Governance

The idea of Swaraj (self-rule) became a clear demand in the early 1900s and gained mass support during the Non-Cooperation Movement (1920–22). Leaders learned how to organize, persuade, and lead peaceful resistance. These skills were later used in the Assembly's complex negotiations.

The Constitution's ideas of parliamentary democracy, responsible government, and adult voting rights came from decades of demand for representative institutions (Chandra et al., 1989).

3.2 Civil Liberties and Fundamental Rights

Under British rule, freedoms like speech, press, and assembly were often taken away. The Civil Disobedience Movement (1930–34) strongly defended these rights.

In the Assembly, this experience led to strong protection for Fundamental Rights in Part III of the Constitution. As K.M. Munshi said in the debates, the Constitution had to guarantee "what the people of India have fought for during generations" (CAD, Vol. 7, p. 4).

3.3 Social Justice and Equality

Gandhi's work for the poor, Ambedkar's fight for Dalit rights, and many peasant and worker movements all shaped the Assembly's focus on social justice. Article 17's ban on untouchability, policies for disadvantaged groups, and the Directive Principles for fair economic growth all came from these struggles.

4. Leadership Continuity: From Freedom Fighters to Constitution-Makers

Most members of the Assembly were leaders from the freedom struggle. Their authority came from years of activism, imprisonment, and service.

- Jawaharlal Nehru: His socialist and secular vision came from his role in the international and anti-imperialist movements. He introduced the Objectives Resolution.
- Vallabhbhai Patel: His work to unite princely states grew from his skills in organizing movements like Bardoli Satyagraha.
- B.R. Ambedkar: Though outside the Congress, his long fight for Dalit rights strengthened the focus on equality.
- Maulana Azad: His campaigns for communal harmony guided his defense of minority rights in the Assembly.

5. Consensus-Building in the Assembly

The Assembly's way of handling differences came from the Congress's tradition of debate and compromise. Just as the freedom movement had united moderates and radicals, the Assembly united different political visions.

The use of committees, informal talks, and revised drafts before public debates came from Congress working styles. Even tough issues like language and minority rights were solved through patient talks, similar to the 1916 Lucknow Pact.

6. Translation of Movement Ideals into Constitutional Provisions

The freedom struggle's legacy appeared in many parts of the Constitution:

- Preamble: Based on the Objectives Resolution, which itself reflected earlier Congress declarations like the Karachi Resolution (1931).
- Fundamental Rights: Directly answered colonial repression and built on earlier drafts like the 1928 Nehru Report.
- Directive Principles: Reflected Gandhian and socialist visions for rural welfare, social justice, and fair use of resources.
- Federal Structure: Combined strong central power with state autonomy, influenced by the Congress's federal demands in the 1930s and post-Partition needs.

7. Challenges and Limitations

While the freedom struggle gave strong direction, the Assembly faced some limits:

- Partition's violence reduced scope for broad minority protections.
- Some colonial systems, like the all-India services, were kept for stability.
- The short time (less than three years) led to compromises that weakened some ideals.

This shows the Assembly was both a continuation of the freedom struggle and a practical response to the challenges of 1947–50.

8. Conclusion

The Constituent Assembly grew directly out of the Indian freedom movement. Its members carried the ideals, skills, and habits of the struggle into their work. Democracy, rights, social justice, and unity in the Constitution were not just ideas from books, they were lessons from real political battles.

By putting the spirit of the freedom movement into the Constitution, the Assembly made sure India's foundation was not only legal but also a living record of its struggle for independence.

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