



ROLE OF EARLY NATIONALISTS IN INDIAN NATIONAL MOVEMENT

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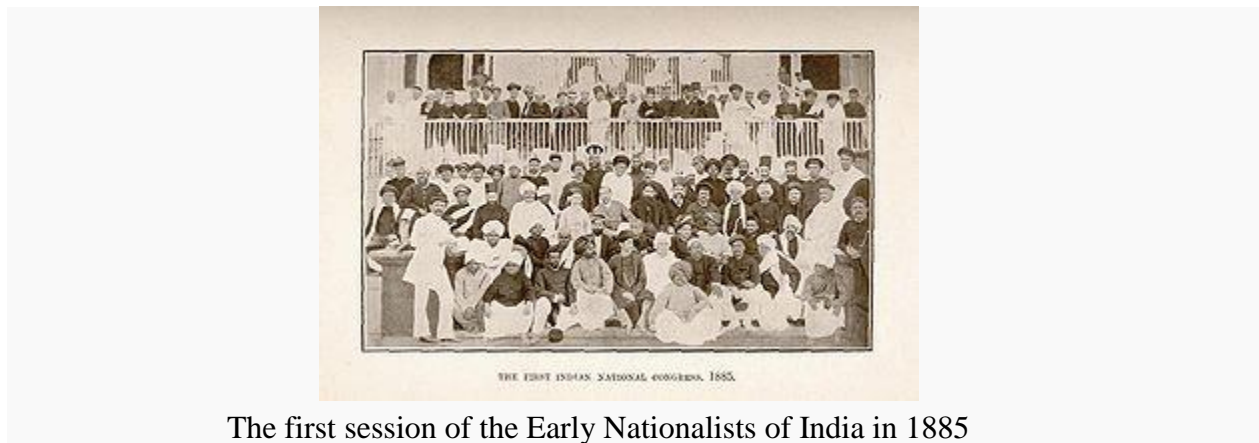
The **Early Nationalists**,^[3] also known as the **Moderates**,^[4] were a group of political leaders in India active between 1885 and 1905. Their emergence marked the beginning of the organised national movement in India.^[5] With members of the group drawn from educated middle-class professionals including lawyers, teachers and government officials, many of them were educated in England. They have become known as "Early Nationalists" because they believed in demanding reforms while adopting constitutional and peaceful means to achieve their aims.^{[6][7]} The Early Nationalists had full faith in the British sense of justice, fair play, honesty, and integrity while they believed that British rule was a boon for India.^[8] The Early Nationalists were staunch believers in open-minded and moderate politics.^{[9][10]}



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Their successors, the "Assertives", existed from 1905 to 1919 and were followed by nationalists of the Gandhian era, which existed from 1919 until Indian Independence in 1947.

Origins of the name "Moderates"



The first session of the Early Nationalists of India in 1885

Focusing on demands for reform, the Early Nationalists adopted a constitutional and peaceful approach to achieve their objectives. They remained friendly towards the then British rulers but believed that Indians should have a proper and legitimate role in the government of the country. Although they asked for constitutional and other reforms within the framework of British rule, they had full faith in that nation's sense of justice and fair play.^[11] They further believed that continuation of the British connection with India was in the interests of both countries. At an early stage, the nationalists considered their association with England an advantage. British rule had done much good by removing various cultural anomalies including the caste system and the abolition of the practice of sati or "widow sacrifice" that had previously pervaded Indian society. Influenced by western thought, culture, education, literature and history, the demands of the early nationalists were not considered extreme but of a relatively moderate nature.^{[6][8]}



Methodology

The Early Nationalists believed in patience and conciliation rather than confrontation, adopting orderly progress and constitutional means to realise their aims. To educate the people, to arouse political consciousness, and to create powerful public opinion in favour of their demands they organised annual sessions. Processions and meetings were held, speeches delivered and discussions held on various economic, social and political questions. Following these discussions, resolutions were adopted. They also drafted petitions and memorandums before submitting them to the government. The Early Nationalists wanted to convey their feelings to the government, so as to gradually bring the authorities around to their viewpoint. To influence the British government and to enlighten the British public and its political leaders, the Early Nationalists sent deputations of leading Indian leaders to England. In 1889, a British Committee of the Indian National Congress was founded and followed by a journal called *India* started by the Committee in 1890.^[10]

Achievement

A. O. Hume, the founder of Indian National Congress (Moderates)

In spite of their role as the most progressive force of the time, the Early Nationalists received widespread criticism over their lack of success. They were treated with contempt by their British rulers and their demands were not fulfilled.^[12]

In spite of such criticism, the Early Nationalists did achieve some of their goals. They created a national awakening among the people that made Indians conscious of the bonds of common political, economic, and cultural interests that united them. They also trained people in politics by popularising the ideas of democracy, civil liberties, secularism and nationalism. The Early Nationalists did pioneering work by exposing the true nature of British rule in India. They made the people realise the economic content and character of British imperialism. In doing so, they weakened the foundations of British rule in India. Their political and economic programmes established the idea that India must be ruled in the interest of the Indians. The efforts of the Early Nationalists also led to the implementation of various social reforms such as the appointment of a Public Service Commission. A resolution of the House of Commons (1893) allowing for simultaneous examination for the Indian Civil Service in London and India. Appointment of the Welby Commission on Indian Expenditure (1895). They also passed The Indian Councils Act of 1892.^[13] These achievements served as the basis for nationalist movements in later years by extremist leaders.^[14]

Demands

The Early Nationalists wanted certain political and economic reforms with the view to unify the people of India.

Constitutional reforms



Believing that India should eventually move towards democratic self-government, the Early Nationalists wanted a larger share in the governing of India. They did not seek immediate attainment of their goal as they feared that the government would suppress their activities. Instead they aimed at winning freedom through a gradual process.^[15]

Their constitutional demands were:

1. Abolition of the India Council Act.
2. Expansion of the legislative council and Legislative Assemblies, both Central and Provincial.
3. Increase in the membership of Indians by including some members elected by local bodies like chambers of commerce, universities, etc. in these councils and by giving greater powers to them. They demanded Indian control over the public purse and raised the slogan "No taxation without representation".
4. By the beginning of the 20th century, they demanded for Swaraj (self-rule) within the British Empire similar to the self-governing colonies in Canada and Australia.
5. Adequate representation of Indians in the executive council of the Viceroy and those of the governors.^[11]

Economic reforms

The economic issues raised by the Early Nationalists were:

1. Reduction in land revenue and protection of peasants against unjust demands of the zamindars (hereditary land owners).
2. Reduction in expenditure on the army, and the money thus saved to be spent on welfare activities such as health and education.
3. An enquiry into India's growing poverty and famines.
4. Availability of cheap credit to peasants through agricultural banks.
5. Development of banking, irrigation, medical and health facilities for the people.
6. Industrial growth through trade protection. That meant that a heavy tax should be imposed on imported goods and the government should give loans for the development of iron, coal, paper and sugar industries in India.
7. Total abolition of the salt tax and the duty on sugar.^{[6][11]}

Administrative demands

The Moderates made the following demands in the administrative sphere:

1. Demand for simultaneous Indian Civil Service examinations in England and India.
2. Complete separation of the executive and the judiciary. They made this demand to protect Indians from arbitrary acts by the police and the bureaucracy.
3. Increase in the powers of the municipal bodies and reduction of official control over them.
4. Repeal of the Arms Act and Licence Act.
5. Wider employment of Indians in the higher grades of administrative services.
6. Spread of primary education among the masses.



7. Improvement of the police system to make it honest, efficient and popular.^[11]

Defence of civil rights

The Early Nationalists defended civil rights whenever the British government tried to curtail them. Their struggle for freedom became an integral part of the national movement from the very beginning. In 1897, Tilak and many other leaders were arrested and tried for making provocative speeches.^{[8][11]} The Early Nationalists demanded the Abolition of the Preventive Detention Act and restoration of individual liberties and right to assemble and to form associations. They also wanted the Removal of the restrictions imposed by the British Government on the freedom of speech, and the freedom of the press.^[8]

Criticism

The methods used by the Early Nationalists of passing resolutions and sending petitions were seen as inadequate by critics who argued that they depended on the generosity of the British instead of relying on their own strength and challenging the imperialist might. They failed to realise that British and Indian interests clashed with each other and that Britain was using India's resources to increase its wealth.^{[6][8]} The Early Nationalists failed to draw the masses into the mainstream of the national movement such that their area of influence remained limited to urban educated Indians. In particular, their leadership comprised only members of professional groups such as lawyers,^[16] doctors, journalists and teachers.

Government's attitude

In the beginning, the British Government looked upon the actions of the Early Nationalists favourably, and expressed no animosity towards them. Furthermore, a few government officials attended the first session of the Early Nationalists and took part in its deliberations. The Nationalists were invited to a garden party held by the Viceroy, Lord Dufferin in Calcutta in 1886 and another hosted by the Governor of Chennai in 1887.^[17] Official attitudes soon changed; Lord Dufferin tried to divert the National Movement by suggesting to Hume that the Early Nationalists should devote themselves to social rather than political affairs. However, rather than emerging as a tool in the hands of the authorities, the Early Nationalists gradually became the focus of Indian nationalism.^[6]

In 1887, Dufferin attacked the Early Nationalists in a speech and ridiculed it as representing only a microscopic minority of the people. British officials criticised the Nationalists and branded its leader as "disloyal babus" and "violent villains".^[17]

In 1890, Government employees were forbidden to participate in deliberations with the Early Nationalists or attend their meetings. Realising that the growing unity of the Indians posed a major threat to their rule, the British pushed their policy of divide and rule further. They encouraged Sayyid Ahmed Khan, Raja Shiva Prasad of Benaras (now Varanasi), and other pro-British individuals to start an anti-Early Nationalist movement. They sowed seeds of communalism between the Hindus and the Muslims on the one hand and between the Indian masses and their leaders on the other. They followed a policy of granting minor concessions to put down the growth of nationalism. However, their policy of repression and hostility only served to make the Early Nationalists more powerful.^[6]



Failure

Some of the younger elements within the Indian National Congress were dissatisfied with the achievements of the Early Nationalists and vociferous critics of the methods of peaceful constitutional agitation that they promulgated.^[9] Young members advocated the adoption of European revolutionary methods to counter British imperialism while mainstream Early Nationalists remained loyal to the crown, with their desire to regain self-government lacking conviction. The Early Nationalists failed to attain their objectives, giving rise to another group of leaders known as Assertive or Extremist Nationalists.^{[6][8]} The most prominent leaders of the Assertive Nationalists were Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Lala Lajpat Rai and Bipin Chandra Pal, who are known collectively as the Lal-Bal-Pal trio.^[18]

Prominent leaders

Surendranath Banerjee

To create an all-India political organisation, Banerjee convened the Indian National Conference in 1883 at Kolkata. Banerjee merged the Indian National Conference with the Indian National Congress in 1886 as both organisations had similar objectives. He presided over two sessions of the Congress in 1895 and 1902.^[6]

Gopal Krishna Gokhale

Gopal Krishna Gokhale, known as "*The Political Guru of Gandhi*", was one of the social and political leaders during the Indian Independence Movement against the British Empire in India. Gokhale was a senior leader of the Indian National Congress and founder of the Servants of India Society. Through the Society as well as the Congress and other legislative bodies he served in, Gokhale campaigned for Indian self-rule and also social reform. He was the leader of the moderate faction of the Congress party that advocated reforms by working with existing government institutions.

A. O. Hume

While the Early Nationalists moved towards the formation of an all-India political body, Englishman A. O. Hume, a retiree from the Indian Civil Service, saw the need for an organisation that would draw the government's attention to current administrative drawbacks and suggest the means to rectify them. In 1884 Hume, in consultation with the Indian leaders, laid the foundations of Indian National Union but it was postponed due to an outbreak of plague in Pune. Later on, at the suggestion of Dadabhai Naoroji, the name was changed to "Indian National Congress" and the foundation of the organisation laid on 28 December 1885.^[17]

Dadabhai Naoroji

Dadabhai Naoroji, popularly known as the "Grand Old Man of India",^[19] took an active part in the foundation of the Indian National Congress and was elected its President thrice, in 1886, 1893 and after the Moderate phase in 1906.^{[6][20]} He spent a major part of his life in Britain to create awareness among British people and politicians about the plight of Indians.



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2. **Jump up**^ Bevir, Mark (9 February 2013). "Theosophy and the Origins of the Indian National Congress". University of California, Berkeley. Retrieved 1 January 2003.
3. **Jump up**^ Ralhan, Om Prakash, ed. (1995). Encyclopedia of Political Parties – India – Pakistan – Bangladesh – National – Regional – Local. 23. Moderate phrase in India. New Dehli: Anmol Publications. pp. 29–36. The phase from 1885 to 1905 is known as the period of the Early Nationalists.
4. **Jump up**^ Porter, Robin J. (2001). "Imperial India, 1858–1914". Oxford History of the British Empire: The Nineteenth Century. pp. 345, 434.
5. **Jump up**^ Burke, S. M.; Al-Din, Salim (1997). The British Raj in India: An Historical Review. USA: Oxford University Press, USA. pp. 325–332. ISBN 978-0195-7773-45. One of the most distinguishing features of the second half of the 19th century was the birth of national awakening in India. It originated from the concepts of nationalism and right of self-determination initiated by the French Revolution, the socio-religious reform movement, the spread of western education and the reaction of Indians to British Raj. The political awareness generated by these trends gave birth to various political associations. This trend culminated in the establishment of the Early Nationalists in 1885, which was the starting point of the organised national movement in India
6. ^ Jump up to:^{a b c d e f g h i} Sequeira, Dolly Ellen; Raj, S. Irudaya (2009). History & Civics. Morning Star Publishers. pp. 27, 35–41, 45. ISBN 978-8131-7033-11.
7. **Jump up**^ Stein, Burton. A History of India I. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. pp. 254–255. ISBN 978-0-19-565446-2. Avoiding confrontations, the early Congress leaders were patient, moderate and conciliatory in their demands
8. ^ Jump up to:^{a b c d e f} Kundra, D. N. (2012). History & Civics PART II. Goyal Brothers Prakashan. pp. 91, 93, 98–106, 111.
9. ^ Jump up to:^{a b} Seth, Sanjay (1999). "Rewriting Histories of Nationalism; The politics of "Moderate Nationalism" in India". The American Historical Review **104** (1): 102, 115. JSTOR 2650182. (subscription required)
10. ^ Jump up to:^{a b} Ludden, David (2002). India and South Asia: a Short history. pp. 135–197.
11. ^ Jump up to:^{a b c d e} Bhattacharya, D. C.; Ghai, K. K. (2009). Indian History. Dayal publishers. pp. 55, 60–61, 88, 92.
12. **Jump up**^ James, Lawrence (2000). Raj: The Making and unmaking of British India I. St. Martin's Griffin. pp. 323–324. ISBN 0312263821.
13. **Jump up**^ Vohra, Ranbir (2001). The Making of India: A Historical Survey. M. E. Sharpe. p. 56. ISBN 9780765607126.
14. **Jump up**^ Guha, Ramachandra. India after Gandhi: The History of the World's largest Democracy. pp. 98–99. The achievements by the early Congress leaders urged the development and basic foundation of the extremist leaders.
15. ^ Jump up to:^{a b} Jim Masselos (1991). Indian Nationalism: An History. Bangalore: Sterling Publishers. pp. 122–123, 125–129, 157–158.
16. **Jump up**^ "Lawyers are drawn for the formation of Moderates".



17. ^ Jump up to:^{a b c} John F. Riddick (2006). *The history of British India: a chronology*. Greenwood Publishing Group. pp. 122 –123 and 55, 136. ISBN 0-313-32280-5{{inconsistent citations}}
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22. ^ Jump up to:^{a b} "Past Presidents of Indian National Congress". *Indian National Congress*.
23. **Jump up**[^] C. Hayavadana Rao, ed. (1915). *The Indian Biographical Dictionary*. Pillar & Co. pp. 460–61.
24. **Jump up**[^] "Presidents of Indian National Congress". 2009.
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26. **Jump up**[^] "Alfred Webb President – Madras, 1894". *Past presidents of Indian National Congress*. *Indian National Congress*.
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28. **Jump up**[^] "President of congress".
29. **Jump up**[^] "13th President of congress".
30. **Jump up**[^] "Ananda Mohan Bose". *Britannica.com*.
31. **Jump up**[^] "Former Justices". *Bombay High Court, Bombayry*.
32. **Jump up**[^] "Kamat's Potpourri: Presidents of INC".