

Indian National Congress

Predecessors of the Indian National Congress

The zamindars in the neighbourhood of Calcutta set up the 'Zamindars Association' in 1838 to protect the interest of the zamindars of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. However it came to an end after a few years because it had narrow aims and program.

'The Bengal British India Society' was founded in 1843 to protect and promote the interest of all the classes. Though it could not become popular, it educated the people and roused the political consciousness among them.

Besides these two organisations there were many other small associations formed like, The British India Association 1851, Bombay Association and Madras Native Association in 1852. These were local in character and lacked national outlook. The discontented educated Indians began to criticise the policies of the British government more vehemently and accelerated political activities.

East India Association

The East India Association was founded by "The Grand Old Man of India", Dadabhai Naoroji in 1866, in collaboration with Indians and retired British officials in London superseded the London Indian Society and was a platform for discussing matters and ideas about India, and to provide presentation for Indians to the government. The association provided information on all India subjects to the British citizens and members of parliament. It presented the grievances of Indians and suggested remedial measures.

Indian National Congress

Indian National congress was formed in 1885, its founding members proposed economic reforms and wanted a larger role in the making of British policy for India. It was presided over by W.C Banerjee and attended by 72 delegates. A.O. Hume played an instrumental role in

the foundation of INC with an aim to provide Safety valve to the British government. A.O Hume, a retired ICS officer was instrumental in the formation of Indian National Congress. He wrote an open letter to the students of Calcutta university asking at least fifty among them to be ready for making sacrifices for the cause of the mother land. Mr. Hume met Lord Dufferin, the then governor general of India and decided to form an association which might function on the model of the opposition party of Britain. This association could be consulted by the British government to assess the Indian public opinion on various issues of national interest. Moreover, this all India forum would work as "Safety Valve" for the escape of great forces generated due to the British rule in India. Hume invited eminent Indians from different parts of the country to meet at Poona from 25th to 28th December 1885. But the venue of the meeting was shifted to Bombay as Poona became infected with Cholera. The first session of All India Congress began on 28th December 1885 at Gokuldas Tejpal Sanskrit College. Eminent barrister of Calcutta, Mr. Woomesh Chandra Banerjee presided over it. Seventy - two invited delegates from different parts India assembled in this first session. Mr. Hume was elected as the first general secretary of Indian national Congress. Nine resolutions were passed in this first session.

By 1907, however the Congress had split into a moderate group led by Gopal Krishna Gokhale, who sought dominion status for India, and a militant faction under Bal Gangadhar Tilak, who demanded self -rule. In 1920, the Congress began a campaign of passive resistance led by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, against restrictions on the press and political activities.

Moderate Phase (1885-1905)

Moderate phase of the Congress (or the national movement) was dominated by the "moderates". They were people who believed in British justice and were loyal to them. Dadabhai Naoroji, W.C Banerjee, G Subramanya Aiyer, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Surendranath Banerjee, R C Dutt, Pherozeshah Mehta, P R Naidu, Madan Mohan Malaviya, Ananda Charlu, S. Subramania Iyer were the important moderate leaders.

Successes of the moderates

- a Indian Councils Act of 1892 was the first achievement of the INC.
- b They popularized ideals like democracy, liberty, and equality.
- c They exposed many draining economic policies of the British.
- d Leaders like Gopal Krishna Gokhale and M G Ranade were social reformers too and opposed child marriage and imposed widowhood.

Limitations of Moderates

- a This phase of national movement excluded the masses and only the educated elites participated in it.
- b They did not demand complete independence from foreign rule.
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- d They did not understand the power of mass movement of people unlike Gandhi who used this power.
- e. Drew most of their ideas from western political thinking which further alienated them from the people.

Drain Theory

Dadabhai Naoroji was the first man to say that internal factors were not the reasons of poverty in India but poverty was caused by the colonial rule that was draining the wealth and prosperity of India. In 1867, Dadabhai Naoroji put forward the drain of wealth theory in which he stated that the Britain was completely draining India. He mentioned this theory in his book "Poverty and Un British Rule in India. On the footsteps of Dadabhai Naoroji considered it as a major evil of British in India. Dadabhai Naoroji was a greater supporter of free education especially to women and children in India. He also wanted to uplift the condition of women in India. He laid the foundation of Gyan Prasarak Mandal, the only girls high School in Bombay. His contribution to politics were also immense. He was the founder of Bombay Association and established it in 1852.

Extremists Phase (1906-1918)

Ideological Basis of Extremism

The nationalist ideas behind the Revolt of 1857, according to the Extremists, were Sudharma and Swaraj. Attachment to rationalism and western ideals had almost alienated the 'Liberal' (Moderate) school from the masses in India. That is why despite their high 'idealism, they failed to make any effective impact on the people. In due course a section was bound to come to fill this gap. In the place of adoration and imitation of all things Western, there was a movement by the eighties of the nineteenth century urging people to look to their ancient civilisation. An under-current of this type had existed earlier but during the Revolt of 1857 it had suddenly burst into open. However, the English educated community by and large had kept itself aloof from the main current of Indian life and remained untouched by this trend. The historic task of bridging the gulf between the educated few and the general people was accomplished by Ramakrishna Paramhansa and his English educated disciple, Swami Vivekananda. Swami Dayananda, who was well-versed in Vedic literature and the Arya Samaj founded by him also played a vital role in this direction. The Theosophical Society of Annie Besant too made a contribution. These social reform movements gave impetus to political radicalism. There was instinctive attachment to native culture, religion and polity. The political radicals who derived inspiration from their traditional cultural values were ardent nationalists who wanted to have relations with other countries in terms of equality and self respect. They had tremendous sense of self respect and wanted to keep their heads high. They opposed the moderates who were considered by them to be servile and respectful to the British. To the Extremists, emancipation meant something much deeper and wider than politics. To them it was a matter of invigorating and energising all walks of life. They thought that a trial of strength between the ruler and the ruled was inevitable, and argued for building a new India of their dreams in which the British had no contribution to make.

There were three groups of the Extremists-**the Maharashtra group, headed by B.G. Tilak, the Bengal group represented by B.C. Pal and Aurobindo and the Punjab group led by Lala Lajpat Rai.** The Bengal Extremists were greatly influenced by the ideas of Bankim Chandra, who was a liberal conservative like Edmund Burke. He wanted no break with the past which, he thought, might create more problems than it would solve. He was opposed to precipitate reforms imposed from above. In his view, reforms should wait on moral and religious regeneration which should be based on fundamentals of religion. Bankim blazed the trail for the Extremists in his contemptuous criticism of the Moderates. This nationalism of the Extremists was emotionally charged. The social, economic and political ideals were all blended in this inspiring central conception of nationalism. Carrying this message to the West Vivekananda generated tremendous self-confidence and will - power. Aurobindo even raised patriotism to the pedestal of mother worship. He said in a lever, "I know my country as my mother. I adore her. I worship her." Aurobindo was very much attracted by the teachings of Dayananda who was hardly influenced by any ideas from the West. He credited Dayananda with more definite work for .the nation than any other reformer. Bankim Chandra, Dayananda and Vivekananda had thus prepared the ideological ground on the basis of which the Extremists drew up their political programme. The popular extremist leaders **Lal-Bal-Pal** were a triumvirate of assertive nationalism in the early 20th century.

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