

Growth of New India—the Nationalist

THE second half of the 19th century witnessed the full flowering
Movement 1858-1905

of national political consciousness and the growth of an organised national movement in India. In December 1885 was born the Indian National Congress under whose leadership Indians waged a prolonged and courageous struggle for independence from foreign rule, which India finally won on 15 August 1947.

Consequence of Foreign Domination

Basically, modern Indian nationalism arose to meet the challenge of foreign domination. The very conditions of British rule helped the growth of national sentiment among the Indian people. It was British rule and its direct and indirect consequences which provided the material, moral and intellectual conditions for the development of a national movement in India.

The root of the matter lay in the clash of the interests of the Indian people with British interests in India. The British had conquered India to promote their own interests and they ruled it primarily with that purpose in view, often subordinating Indian welfare to British gain. The Indians, realised gradually that their interests were being sacrificed to those of Lancashire manufacturers and other dominant British interests. They now began to recognise the evils of foreign rule. Many intelligent Indians saw that many of these evils could have been avoided and overcome if Indian and not foreign interests had guided the policies of the Indian Government.

The foundations of the Indian nationalist movement lay in the fact that increasingly British rule became the major cause of India's economic backwardness. It became the major barrier to India's further economic, social, cultural, intellectual, and political development. Moreover, this fact began to be recognised by an increasingly larger number of Indians.

Every class, every section of Indian society gradually discovered that its interests were suffering at the hands of the foreign rulers. The peasant saw that the Government took away a large part of his produce as land

revenue; that the Government and its machinery—the police, the courts, the officials—favoured and protected the zamindars and landlords, who rack-rented him, and the merchants and money-lenders, who cheated and exploited him in diverse ways and who took away his land from him. Whenever the peasant struggled against landlord, money-lender oppression, the police and the army suppressed him in the name of law and order.

The artisan or the handicraftsman saw that the foreign regime had helped foreign competition to ruin him and had done nothing to rehabilitate him.

Later, in the 20th century, the worker in modern factories, mines, and plantations found that, in spite of lip sympathy, the Government sided with the capitalists, especially the foreign capitalists. Whenever he tried to organise trade unions and to improve his lot through strikes, demonstrations, and other struggles, Government machinery was freely used against him. Moreover, he soon realised that the growing unemployment could be checked only by rapid industrialisation which only an independent government could bring about.

All these three classes of Indian society—the peasants, the artisans, the workers, constituting the overwhelming majority of Indian population—discovered that they had no political rights or powers, and that virtually nothing was being done for their intellectual or cultural improvement. Education did not percolate down to them. There were hardly any schools in villages and the few that were there were poorly run. The doors of higher education were barred to them in practice. Moreover, many of them belonged to the lower castes and had still to bear social and economic oppression by the upper castes.

Other sections of Indian society were no less dissatisfied. The rising intelligentsia—the educated Indians—used their newly acquired modern knowledge to understand the sad economic and political condition of their country. Those who had earlier, as in 1857, support'd British rule in the hope that, though alien, it would modernise and industrialise the country were gradually disappointed. Economically, they had hoped that British capitalism would help develop India's productive forces as it had done at home. Instead, they found that British policies in India, guided by the British capitalists at home, were keeping the country economically backward or underdeveloped and checking the development of its productive forces. In fact, economic exploitation by Britain was increasing India's poverty. They began to complain of the extreme costliness of the Indian administration, of the excessive burden of taxation especially on the peasantry, of the destruction of India's indigenous industries, of official attempts to check the growth of modern industries through a pro-British tariff policy, of the neglect of nation-building and welfare activities such as education, irrigation, sanitation, and health services. In brief, they could see that Britain was reducing India to the status of an economic colony, a source of raw materials for British industries, a market for British manufactures, and a field for the investment of British capital. Consequently, they began to realise that so long as imperialist control of the Indian economy continued, it would not be possible to develop it, especially so far as industrialisation was involved.

Politically, educated Indians found that the British had abandoned all previous pretensions of guiding India towards self-government. Most of the British officials and political leaders openly declared that the British were in India to stay. Moreover, instead of increasing the freedom of speech, of the press, and of the person, the Government increasingly restricted them. British officials and writers declared Indians to be unfit for democracy or self-government. In the field of culture, the rulers were increasingly taking a negative and even hostile attitude towards higher education and the spread of modern ideas.

Moreover, the Indian intelligentsia suffered from growing unemployment. The few Indians who were educated were not able to find employment and even those who did find jobs discovered that most of the better paid jobs were reserved for the English middle and upper classes, who looked upon India as a special pasture for their sons. Thus, educated Indians found that the economic and cultural development of the country and its freedom from foreign control alone could provide them with better employment opportunities.

The rising Indian capitalist class was slow in developing a national political consciousness. But it too gradually saw that it was suffering at the hands of imperialism. Its growth was severely checked by the government trade, tariff, taxation, and transport policies. As a new and weak class it needed active government help to counterbalance many of its weaknesses. But no such help was given. Instead, the Government and its bureaucracy favoured foreign capitalists who came to India with their vast resources and appropriated the limited industrial field. The Indian capitalists were particularly opposed to the strong competition from foreign capitalists. In the 1940's many of the Indian industrialists demanded that "all British investments in India be repatriated." And, in 1945, M.A. Master, President of the Indian Merchants' Chamber warned: "India would prefer to go without industrial development rather than allow the creation of new East India Companies in this country, which would not only militate against her economic independence but would also effectively prevent her from acquiring her political freedom." The Indian capitalists too therefore realised that there existed a contradiction between imperialism and their own independent growth, and that only a national government would create conditions for the rapid development of Indian trade and industries.

As we have seen in an earlier chapter, the zamindars, landlords, and princes were the only section of Indian society whose interests coincided with those of the foreign rulers and who, therefore, on the whole supported foreign rule to the end. But even from these classes, many individuals joined the national movement. In the prevailing nationalist atmosphere, patriotism made an appeal to many. Moreover, policies of racial dominance and discrimination appalled and aroused every thinking and self-respecting Indian to whichever class he might belong. Most of all, the foreign character of the British regime in itself produced a nationalist reaction, since foreign domination invariably generates patriotic sentiments in the hearts of a subject people.

To sum up, it was as a result of the intrinsic nature of foreign imperialism and of its harmful impact on the lives of the Indian people that a powerful anti-imperialist movement gradually arose and developed in India. This movement was a national movement because it united people from different classes and sections of the society who sank their mutual differences to unite against the common enemy.

Administrative and Economic Unification of the Country

Nationalist sentiments grew easily among the people because India was unified and welded into a nation during the 19th and 20th centuries. The British had gradually introduced a uniform and modern system of government throughout the country and thus unified it administratively. The destruction of the rural and local self-sufficient economy and the introduction of modern trade and industries on an all-India scale had increasingly made India's economic life a single whole and inter-linked the economic life of people living in different parts of the country. For example, if famine or scarcity occurred in one part of India, prices and availability of foodstuffs were affected in all other parts of the country too. This was not usually the case before the 19th century. Similarly, the products of a factory in Bombay were sold far north in Lahore or Peshawar. The lives of the workers and capitalists in Madras, Bombay, or Calcutta were closely linked with the lives of the countless peasants in rural India. Furthermore, introduction of the railways, telegraphs, and unified postal system had brought the different parts of the country together and promoted mutual contact among the people, especially among the leaders.

Mere again, the very existence of foreign rule acted as a unifying factor. All over the country people saw that they were suffering at the hands of the same enemy—British rule. Thus anti-imperialist feeling was itself a factor in the unification of the country and the emergence of a common national outlook.

Western Thought and Education

As a result of the spread of modern western education and thought during the 19th century, a large number of Indians imbibed a modern rational, secular, democratic, and nationalist political outlook. They also began to study, admire, and emulate the contemporary nationalist movements of European nations. Rousseau, Paine, John Stuart Mill, and other western thinkers became their political guides, while Mazzini, Garibaldi, and Irish nationalist leaders became their political heroes.

These educated Indians were the first to feel the humiliation of foreign subjection. By becoming modern in their thinking, they also acquired the ability

to study, the evil effects of foreign rule. They were inspired by the dream of a modern, strong, prosperous, and united India. In course of time, the best among them became the leaders and organisers of the national Movement.

It should be clearly understood that it was not the modern educational system that created the national movement which was the product of the conflict of interests between Britain and India. That system only enabled the educated Indians to imbibe western thought and thus to assume the leadership of the national movement and to give it a democratic and modern direction. In fact, in the schools and colleges, the authorities tried to inculcate notions of docility and servility to foreign rule. Nationalist ideas were a part of the general spread of modern ideas. In other Asian countries such as China and Indonesia, and all over Africa, modern and nationalist ideas spread even though modern schools and colleges existed on a much smaller scale.

Modern education also created a certain uniformity and community of outlook and interests among the educated Indians. The English language played an important role in this respect. It became the medium for the spread of modern ideas. It also became the medium of communication and exchange of ideas between educated Indians from different linguistic regions of the country. This point should not, however, be over-emphasised. After all the educated Indians of the past also possessed a common language in the form of Sanskrit and later on Persian as well. Still, English was essential for the acquisition of modern scientific knowledge and thought. Other countries of Asia such as Japan and China were able to do so through translations into their own languages. In fact, English soon became a barrier to the spread of modern knowledge among the common people. It also acted as a wall separating the educated urban people from the common people, especially in the rural areas. Consequently, it came about that modern ideas spread faster and deeper in many countries where they were propagated through indigenous languages than in India where emphasis on English confined them to a narrow urban section. This fact was fully recognised by the Indian political leaders. From Dadabhai Naoroji, Sayyid Ahmed Khan, and Justice Ranade to Tilak and Gandhiji, they agitated for a bigger role for the Indian languages in the educational system. In fact, so far as the common people were concerned, the spread of modern ideas occurred through the developing Indian languages, the growing literature in them, and most of all the popular Indian language press. More important than a common language was the fact that modern education introduced identical courses of study all over the country. The books prescribed in the new schools and colleges tended to give the students a common political and economic outlook. Consequently, educated Indians tended to have common views, feelings, aspirations and ideals.

The Role of the Press and Literature

The chief instrument through which the nationalist-minded Indians spread the message of patriotism and modern economic, social and political ideas and created an all-India consciousness was the press. Large numbers of nationalist newspapers made their appearance during the second half of the 19th century. In their columns, the official policies were constantly criticised; the Indian point of view was put forward; the people were asked to unite and work for national

welfare; and ideas of self-government, democracy, industrialisation, etc., were popularised among the people. The press also enabled nationalist workers living in different parts of the country to exchange views with one another. Some of the prominent nationalist newspapers of the period were the *Hindu Patriot*, the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, the *Indian Mirror*, the *Bengalee*, the *Som Prakash* and the *Sanjivani* in Bengal; the *Rast Goftar*, the *Native Opinion*, the *Indu Prakash*, the *Mahratta*, and the *Kesari* in Bombay; the *Hindu*, the *Swadcsamitran*, the *Andhra Prakashika*, and the *Kerala Palrika* in Madras; the *Advocate*, the *Hindustani*, and the *Azad* in U. P.; and the *Tribune*, the *Akhbar-i-Am*, and the *Kofhi-Noor* in the Punjab. National literature in the form of novels, essays, and patriotic poetry also played an important role in arousing national consciousness. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and Rabindranath Tagore in Bengali, Lakshminath Bezbarua in Assamese; Vishnu Shastri Chiplunkar in Marathi, Subramanya Bharati in Tamil; Bharatendu Harishchandra in Hindi; and Altaf Husain Hall in Urdu were some of the prominent nationalist writers of the period.

Rediscovery of India's Past Many Indians had fallen so low as to have lost confidence in their own capacity for self-government. Moreover, many British officials and writers of the time constantly advanced the thesis that Indians had never been able to rule themselves in the past, that Hindus and Muslims had always fought one another, that Indians were destined to be ruled by foreigners, that their religion and social life were degraded and uncivilised making them unfit for democracy or even self-government. Many of the nationalist leaders tried to arouse the self-confidence and self-respect of the people by countering this propaganda. They pointed to the cultural heritage of India with pride and referred the critics to the political achievements of rulers like Asoka, Chandragupta Vikramaditya, and Akbar. In this task they were helped and encouraged by the work of European and Indian scholars in rediscovering our national heritage in art, architecture, literature, philosophy, science, and politics. Unfortunately, some of the nationalists went to the other extreme and began to glorify India's past uncritically ignoring its weakness and backwardness. Great harm was done, in particular, by the tendency to look up only to the heritage of ancient India while ignoring the equally great achievements of the medieval period. This encouraged the growth of communal sentiments among the Hindus and the counter tendency among the Muslims of looking to the history of the Arabs and the Turks for cultural and historical inspiration. Moreover, in meeting the challenge of cultural imperialism of the West, many Indians tended to ignore the fact that in many respects the people of India were culturally backward. A false sense of pride and smugness was produced which tended to prevent Indians from looking critically at their society. This weakened the struggle against social and cultural backwardness, and led many Indians to turn away from healthy and fresh tendencies and ideas from other peoples,

Racial Arrogance of the Rulers

An important though secondary factor in the growth of national sentiments in India was the tone of racial superiority adopted by many Englishmen in their dealings with Indians. Many Englishmen openly insulted even educated Indians and sometimes even assaulted them. A particularly odious and frequent form taken by racial arrogance was the failure of justice whenever an Englishman was involved in a dispute with an Indian. Indian newspapers often published instances in which an Englishman had hit and killed an Indian but escaped -very lightly, often with a mere fine. This was not only because of conscious partiality by the judges and administrators but even more because of racial prejudice. As G.O. Trevelyan pointed out in 1864: "The testimony of a single one of our countrymen has more weight with the court than that of any number of Hindoos, a circumstance which puts a terrible instrument of power into the hands of an unscrupulous and grasping Englishman".

Racial arrogance branded all Indians irrespective of their caste, religion, province, or class with the badge of inferiority. They were kept out of exclusively European clubs and were often not permitted to travel in the same compartment in a train with the European passengers. This made them conscious of national humiliation, and led them to think of themselves as one people when facing Englishmen.

Immediate Factors

By the 1870's it was evident that Indian nationalism had gathered enough strength and momentum to appear as a major force on the Indian political scene. However, it required the reactionary regime of Lord Lytton to give it visible form and the controversy around the Ilbert Bill to make it take up an organised form.

During Lytton's viceroyalty from 1876-80 most of the import duties on British textile imports were removed to please the textile manufacturers of Britain. This action was interpreted by Indians as proof of the British desire to ruin the small but growing textile industry of India. It created a wave of anger in the country and led to widespread nationalist agitation. The Second War against Afghanistan aroused vehement agitation against the heavy cost of this imperialist war which the Indian Treasury was made to bear. The Arms Act of 1878, which disarmed the people, appeared to them as an effort to emasculate the entire nation. The Vernacular Press Act of 1878 was condemned by the politically conscious Indians as an attempt to suppress the growing nationalist criticism of the alien government. The holding of the Imperial Durbar at Delhi in 1877 at a time when the country was suffering from a terrible famine led people to believe that their rulers cared very little even for their lives. In 1878, the government announced new regulations reducing the maximum age limit for sitting in the Indian Civil Service Examination from 21 years to 19. Already Indian students had found it difficult to compete with English boys since the examination was conducted in England and in English. The new regulations further reduced their chances of entering the Civil Service. The Indians now realised that the British had no intention of relaxing their near-total monopoly of the higher grades of services in the administration.

Thus, Lytton's viceroyalty helped intensify discontent against foreign rule. We may quote in this respect the words of Surendranath Banerjee, one of the founders of the national movement:

The reactionary administration of Lord Lytton had aroused the public from its attitude of indifference and had given a stimulus to public life. In the evolution of political progress, bad rulers are often a blessing in disguise. They help to stir a community into life, a result that years of agitation would perhaps have failed to achieve.

If Lytton fed the smouldering discontent against British rule, the spark was provided by the Ilbert Bill controversy. In 1883, Ripon, who succeeded Lytton as the Viceroy, tried to pass a law to enable Indian district magistrates and session judges to try Europeans in criminal cases. It was a very meagre effort to remove a glaring instance of racial discrimination. Under the existing law even Indian members of the Indian Civil Service were not authorised to try Europeans in their courts. The Europeans in India organised a vehement agitation against this Bill which came to be known after Ilbert, the Law Member. They poured abuse on Indians and their culture and character. They declared that even the most highly educated among the Indians were unfit to try a European. Some of them even organised a conspiracy to kidnap the Viceroy and deport him to England. In the end, the Government of India bowed before the Europeans and amended the Bill to meet their criticism.

The Indians were horrified at the racial bitterness displayed by the critics of the Bill. They also became more fully conscious of the degradation to which foreign rule had reduced them. They organised an all-India campaign in favour of the Bill. And, most of all, they learnt the useful lesson that to get their demands accepted by the Government they too must organise themselves on a national scale and agitate continuously and unitedly.

Predecessors of the Indian National Congress

The Indian National Congress, founded in December 1885, was the first organised expression of the Indian National Movement on an all-India scale. It had, however, many predecessors.

As we have seen in an earlier chapter, Raja Rammohun Roy was the first Indian leader to start an agitation for political reforms in India. The earliest public association in modern India was the Landholders' Society—an association of the landlords of Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa, founded in 1837 with the purpose of promoting the class interests of the landlords. Then, in 1843, was organised the Bengal British Indian Society to protect and promote general public interests. These two organisations merged in 1851 to form the British India Association. Similarly, the Madras Native Association and the Bombay Association were established in 1852. Similar, though lesser known clubs and associations, such as the Scientific Society founded by Sayyid Ahmad Khan, were established in different towns and parts of the country. All these associations were dominated by wealthy and aristocratic elements—called in those days 'prominent persons'—and were provincial or local in character. They worked for reform of

administration, association of Indians with the administration, and spread of education, and sent long petitions, putting forward Indian demands, to the British Parliament.

The period after 1858 witnessed a gradual widening of the gulf between the educated Indians and the British Indian administration. As the educated Indians studied the character of British rule and its consequences for the Indians, they became more and more critical of British policies in India. The discontent gradually found expression in political activity. The existing associations no longer satisfied the politically-conscious Indians.

In 1866, Dadabhai Naoroji organised the East India Association in London to discuss the Indian question and to influence British public men to promote Indian welfare. Later he organised branches of the Association in prominent Indian cities. Born in 1825, Dadabhaj devoted his entire life to the national movement and soon came to be known



Dadabhai Naoroji with Annie Besant and others (Courtesy: Jehn Manorial Museum and Library)

as the Grand Old Man of India. He was also India's first economic thinker. In his writings on economics he showed that the basic cause of India's poverty lay in the British exploitation of India and the drain of its wealth. Dadabhai was honoured by being thrice elected president of the Indian National Congress. In fact he was the first of the long line of popular nationalist leaders of India whose very name stirred the hearts of the people.

Justice Ranade and others organised the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha in the 1870s. The Madras Mahajan Sabha was started in 1881 and the Bombay Presidency

Association in 1885. These organisations were mainly devoted to criticism of important administrative and legislative measures, The Poona Sarvajanik Sabha brought out a quarterly journal under the guidance of Justice Ranade, This journal became the intellectual guide of new India particularly on economic questions.

The most important of the pre-Congress nationalist organisations was 'the Indian Association of Calcutta. The younger nationalists of Bengal had been gradually getting discontented with the conservative and prolandlord policies of the British India Association. They wanted sustained political agitation on issues of wider public interest. They found a leader in Surendranath Banerjea who was a brilliant writer and orator. He was unjustly turned out of the Indian Civil Service as his superiors could not tolerate the presence of an independent-minded Indian in the ranks of this service. He began his public career in 1875 by delivering brilliant addresses on nationalist topics to the students of Calcutta. Led by Surendranath and Anandamohan Bose, the younger nationalists of Bengal founded the Indian Association in July 1876. The Indian Association set before itself the aims of creating a strong public opinion in the country on political questions and the unification of the Indian people on a common political programme. In order to attract large numbers of people to its banner, it fixed a low membership fee for the poorer classes.

The first major issue it took up for agitation was the reform of the Civil Service regulations and the raising of the age limit for its examination, Surendranath Banerjea toured different parts of the country during 1877-78 in an effort to create an all-India public opinion on this question.

■ The Indian Association also carried out agitation against the Arms Act and the Vernacular Press Act and in favour of protection of the tenants from oppression by the zamindars. During 1883-85 it organised popular demonstrations of thousands of peasants to get the Rent Bill changed in favour of the tenants, It also agitated for better conditions of work for the workers in the English-owned tea plantations where conditions of near-slavery prevailed. Many branches of the Association were opened in the towns and villages of Bengal and also in many towns outside Bengal.

The time was now ripe for the formation of an all-India political organisation of the nationalists who felt the need to unite politically against the common enemy—foreign rule and exploitation. The existing organisations had served a useful purpose but they were narrow in their scope and functioning. They dealt mostly with local questions and their membership and leadership were confined to a few people belonging to a single city or province. Even the Indian Association had not succeeded in becoming an all-Indian body.

The Indian Association sponsored an all-India National Conference at Calcutta in December 1883. This Conference was attended by several leaders from outside Bengal. It adopted a programme very similar to the one adopted by the Indian National Congress with which it merged

in 1886. It did not, however, succeed in becoming a representative body of political workers and leaders all over the country.

THE INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS Many Indians had been planning to form an all-India organisation of nationalist political workers. But the credit for giving the idea a concrete and final shape goes to A.O. Hume, a retired English Civil Servant. He got in touch with prominent Indian leaders and organised with their cooperation the first session of the Indian National Congress at Bombay in December 1885. It was presided over by W.C. Bonnerjee and attended by 72 delegates. The aims of the National Congress were declared to be the promotion of friendly relations between nationalist political workers from different parts of the country, development and consolidation of the feeling of national unity irrespective of caste, religion, or province, formulation of popular demands and their presentation before the Government, and, most important of all, the training and organisation of public opinion in the country.

One of the main aims of Hume in helping to found the National Congress was to provide an outlet—'a safety valve'—to the increasing popular discontent against British rule. Already in 1879, Wasudeo Balwant Phadke, a clerk in the commissariat department, had gathered a band of Ramoshi peasants and started an armed uprising in Maharashtra. Though this crude and ill prepared attempt was easily crushed, it was a portent of events to come. Hume as well as other English officials and statesmen were afraid that the educated Indians might provide leadership to the masses and organise a powerful rebellion against the foreign government. As Hume put it: "A safety valve for the escape of great and growing forces generated by our own action was urgently-needed." He believed that the National Congress would provide a peaceful and constitutional outlet to the discontent among the educated Indians and would thus help to avoid the outbreak of a popular revolt.

The 'safety valve' theory is, however, a small part of the truth. More than anything else, the National Congress represented the urge of the politically conscious Indians to set up a national organisation to work for their political and economic advancement. We have already seen above that a national movement was already growing in the country as a result of the working of powerful forces. No one man or group of men can be given credit for creating this movement. Even Hume's motives were mixed ones. He was also moved by motives nobler than those of the 'safety valve'. He possessed a sincere love for India and its poor cultivators. In any case, the Indian leaders, who cooperated with Hume in starting this National Congress, were patriotic men of high character who willingly **accepted** Hume's help **as** they did not want to arouse official

hostility towards their efforts at so early a stage of political activity.

Thus with the foundation of the National Congress in 1885, the struggle for India's freedom from foreign rule was launched in a small but organised manner. The national movement was to grow and the country and its people were to know no rest till freedom was won.

Surendranath Bhaerjea and many other leaders of Bengal had not attended the first session of the National Congress as they were busy with the Second National Conference at Calcutta. In 1886 they merged their forces with those of the National Congress whose second session met in Calcutta in December 1886 under the presidentship of Dadabhai Naoroji. From this session the National Congress became 'the whole country's Congress'. Its delegates, numbering 436, were elected by different local organisations and groups. Hereafter, the National Congress met every year in December, in a different part of the country each time. The number of its delegates soon increased to thousands. Its delegates consisted mostly of lawyers, journalists, traders, industrialists, teachers, and landlords. In 1890, Kadambini Ganguli, the first woman graduate of Calcutta University, addressed the Congress session. This was symbolic of the fact that India's struggle for freedom would raise Indian women from the degraded position to which they had been reduced for centuries past.

The Indian National Congress was not the only channel through which

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Dadabhai Naoroji

stream of nationalism flowed.

Provincial conferences, provincial

local associations, and nationalist

newspapers were the other

prominent organs of the growing

nationalist movement. The press, in

particular, was a powerful factor in

developing nationalist opinion and

nationalist movement. Some of the

great presidents of the National Con-

gress during its early years were

Dadabhai Naoroji, Badruddin Tyabji,

Pherozeshah Mehta, P. Ananda

Charlu, Surendranath Bhaerjea,

Ramesh Chandra Dutt, Ananda

Mohan **Bose**, and Gopal Krishna

Gokhale. Other prominent **leaders of**

Congress and the national

movement during this period were

Mahadev Govind Ranade, Bal

Gangadhar Tilak, the brothers Sisir Kumar and Motilal Ghosh, Madari Mohan Malaviya, G. Subramaniya Iyer, C. Vijayaraghavachariar, and-Dinshaw E. Wacha.

The programme of the Indian national movement during its early phase (1885-1905) can be studied under various heads.

Constitutional Reforms

The early nationalists wanted a larger share in the government of their own country and made an appeal to the principle of democracy, But they did not ask for the immediate fulfilment of their goal. Their immediate demands were extremely moderate. They hoped to win freedom through gradual steps. They were also extremely cautious, lest the Government suppress their activities. From 1885 to 1892 they demanded the expansion and reform of the Legislative Councils. They demanded membership of the councils for elected representatives of the people and also an increase in the powers of the councils.

The British Government was forced by their agitation to pass the Indian Councils Act of 1892, By this Act the number of members of the Imperial Legislative Council as well as of the provincial councils was increased. Some of these members could be elected indirectly by Indians, but the officials' majority remained. The councils were also given the right to discuss the annual budgets though they could not vote on them

The nationalists were totally dissatisfied with the Act of 1892 and declared it to be a hoax. They demanded a larger share for Indians in the councils as also wider powers for them. In particular, they demanded Indian control over the public purse and raised the slogan that had earlier become the national cry of the American people during their War of Independence: 'No taxation without representation.'

By the beginning of the 20th century, the nationalist leaders advanced further and put forward the claim for *swarajya* or self-government within the British Empire on the model of self-governing colonies like Australia and Canada. This demand was made front the Congress platform by Gokhale in 1905 and by Dadabhai Naoroji in 1906.

Economic Reforms

In the economic field, the early nationalists complained of India's growing poverty and economic backwardness and the failure of modern industry and agriculture to grow; and they put the blame on the policies of the British rulers. Thus Dadabhai Naoroji declared as early as 1881 that British rule was "an everlasting, increasing, and every day increasing foreign invasion" that, was "utterly, though gradually, destroying the country." The nationalists' blamed the British for the destruction of India's indigenous industries: The chief remedy they suggested for the removal of India's poverty was the rapid development of modern industries. They wanted the government to promote modern industries through tariff protection and direct government aid. They popularised the idea of *swadeshi* or the use of Indian goods and the boycott of British goods as a means of promoting Indian industries. For example, students in Poona and in other towns of

Maharashtra publicly burnt foreign clothes in 1896 as part of the larger *swadeshi* campaign.

The nationalists complained that India's wealth was being drained to England, and demanded that this drain be stopped. They carried on persistent agitation for the reduction of land revenue in order to lighten the burden of taxation on the peasant. They also agitated for improvement in the conditions of work of the plantation labourers. They declared high taxation to be one of the causes of India's poverty and demanded abolition of the salt tax and reduction of land revenue. They condemned the high military expenditure of the Government of India and demanded its reduction. As time passed more and more nationalists came to the conclusion that economic exploitation and impoverishment of the country and the perpetuation of its economic backwardness by foreign imperialism more than outweighed some of the beneficial aspects of the alien rule. Thus, regarding the benefits of security of life and property, Dadabhai Naoroji remarked;

The *romance* is that there is security of life and property in India; the reality is that there is no such thing. There is security of life and property in one sense or way—i.e., the people are secure from any violence from each other or from Native despots But from England's own grasp there is no security of property at all and, as a consequence, no security for life India's property is not secure. What is secure, and well secure, is that England is perfectly safe and secure, and does so with perfect security, to carry away from India, and to eat up in India, her property at the present rate of £30,000,000 or £40,000,000 a year. I therefore venture to submit that India *does not* enjoy security of her property and life .. To millions in India life is simply 'half-feeding', or starvation, or famine and disease.

With regard to law and order, Dadabhai said:

There is an Indian saying. 'Fray strike on the back, but don't strike on (he belly.' Under the native despot the people keep and enjoy what they produce, though at times they suffer some violence on the back Under the British Indian despot the man is at peace, there is no violence; his substance is drained away, unseen, peaceably and subtly—he starves in peace and perishes in peace, with law and order 1

Administrative and other Reforms

The most important administrative reform the Indians desired at this time was Indianisation of the higher grades of administrative services. They put forward this demand on economic, political and moral grounds.

Economically, the European monopoly of the higher services was harmful on two grounds, (a) Europeans were paid at very high rates and this made Indian administration very costly—Indians of similar qualifications could be employed on lower salaries; (b) Europeans sent out of India a large part of their salaries and their pensions were paid in England. This added to the drain of wealth from India. Politically, the nationalists hoped that the Indianisation of these services would make the administration more responsive to Indian needs. The moral aspect, of the question was stated by Gopal Krishna Gokhale in 1897:

The excessive costliness of the foreign agency is not, however, its only evil. There is a moral evil which, if anything, is even greater. A kind of dwarfing or stunting of the Indian race is going on under the present system. We must live all the days of our life in an atmosphere of inferiority, and the tallest of us must bend. The full height of which our manhood is capable of rising can never be reached by us under the present system. The moral elevation which every self-governing people feel cannot be felt by us. Our administrative and military talents must gradually disappear, owing to sheer disuse, till at last our lot, as hewers of wood and drawers of water in our own country, is stereotyped.

The nationalists demanded separation of the judicial from executive powers. They opposed the curtailment of the powers of the juries. They opposed the official policy of disarming the people and asked the government to trust the people and grant them the right to bear arms and thus defend themselves and their country in times of need.

They urged the government to undertake and develop welfare activities of the state. They laid a great deal of emphasis on the spread of primary education among the masses. They also demanded greater facilities for technical and higher education.

They urged the development of agricultural banks to save the peasant from the clutches of the money-lender. They wanted the government to undertake a large-scale programme of extension of irrigation for the development of agriculture and to save the country from famines. They demanded extension of medical and health facilities and improvement of the police system to make it honest, efficient, and popular.

The nationalist leaders also spoke up in defence of Indian workers who had been compelled by poverty to migrate to foreign countries such as South Africa, Malaya, Mauritius, the West Indies and British Guiana in search of employment. In many of these foreign lands they were subjected to severe oppression and racial discrimination. This was particularly true of South Africa where Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was leading a popular struggle in defence of the basic human rights of the Indians.

Defence of Civil Rights

The early nationalists fully recognised the value of the freedoms of speech and the press and opposed all attempts to curtail them. In fact, the struggle for these freedoms became an integral part of the nationalist struggle for freedom. In 1897 the Bombay Government arrested B.G. Tilak and several other leaders and tried them for spreading disaffection against the government through their speeches and

writings, They were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment. At the same time two Poona leaders, the Nattu brothers, were deported without trial. The entire country protested against this attack on the liberties of the people. Tilak, hitherto known largely in Maharashtra, became over-night an all-India leader. The *Amrita Bazar Patrika* wrote: "There is scarcely a home in this vast country, where Mr. Tilak is not now the subject of melancholy talk and where his imprisonment is not considered as a domestic calamity." Tilak's arrest, in fact, galvanised the country and marked the beginning of a new phase of the nationalist movement.

Methods of Political Work

The Indian national movement up to 1905 was dominated by leaders who have often been described as moderate nationalists or Moderates. The political methods of the Moderates can be summed up briefly as constitutional agitation within the four walls of the law, and slow, orderly political progress. They believed that if public opinion was created and organised and popular demands presented to the authorities through petitions, meetings, resolutions, and speeches, the authorities would concede these demands gradually and step by step.

Their political work had, therefore, a two-pronged direction.. Firstly, to build up a strong public opinion in India to arouse the political consciousness and national spirit of the people, and to educate and unite them on political questions. Basically, even the resolutions and petitions of the National Congress were directed towards this goal. Secondly, to persuade the British Government to introduce reforms along directions laid down by the nationalists. The moderate nationalists believed that the British people and Parliament wanted to be just to India but that they did not know the true state of affairs there. Therefore, next to educating Indian public opinion, the moderate nationalists worked to educate British public opinion. For this purpose, they carried on active propaganda in Britain. Deputations of leading Indians were sent to Britain to propagate the Indian view. In 1889, a British Committee of the Indian National Congress was founded. In 1890 this Committee started a journal called *India*, Padabhai Naoroji spent a major part of his life and income in England in popularising India's case among its people.

A student of the Indian national movement sometimes, gets confused when he reads loud professions of loyalty to British rule by prominent Moderate leaders. These professions do not at all mean that they were not genuine patriots or that they were cowardly men. They genuinely believed that the continuation of India's political connection with Britain was in the interests of India at that stage of history. They, therefore, planned not to expel the British but to transform British rule to approximate to national rule. Later, when they took note of the evils of British rule and the failure of the government to accept nationalist demands for reform, many of them stopped talking of loyalty to British rule and started demanding self-government for India. Moreover, many of them were Moderates because they felt that the time was not yet ripe to throw a direct challenge to the foreign rulers.

We should also remember that not all the nationalists of the period belonged to the moderate trend. Some of them had from the beginning no faith in the good

intentions of the British. They believed in depending on political action by, and the strength of, the Indian people themselves. They advocated a fighting political and economic programme. Tilak and numerous other leaders and newspaper editors represented this trend. These leaders later came to be known as Extremists or radical nationalists. Their work and outlook will be discussed in the next chapter,

Attitude of the Government

The British authorities were from the beginning hostile to the rising nationalist movement and had become suspicious of the National Congress. British officials from Dufferin downwards branded the nationalist leaders as 'disloyal babus', 'seditious *brahmins*' and 'violent villains'. But in the beginning this hostility was not openly expressed- It was perhaps hoped that Hume's leadership would make the national movement and its organ, the National Congress, harmless to British rule. In December 1886, the Viceroy even invited the delegates to the National Congress to a garden party. But it soon became apparent that the National Congress would not become a tool in the hands of the authorities and that it was gradually becoming a focus of Indian nationalism. British officials, now began to openly criticise and condemn the National Congress and other nationalist spokesmen. In 1887, Dufferin attacked the National Congress in a public speech and ridiculed it as representing only 'a microscopic minority of the people.' * In 1906, Lord Curzon told the Secretary of State that "the Congress is tottering to its fall, and on the fulfilment of my great ambitions, while in India, assist it to a peaceful demise". The British authorities also pushed further the policy of 'Divide and Rule'. They encouraged the rise of the Indian National Congress and other nationalist individuals to start an

struggle, however, in

the early stages of the nationalist movement.

Evaluation of the Early National Movement

According to some critics, the nationalist movement and the National Congress did not achieve much success in their early phase. Very few of the reforms for which the nationalists agitated were introduced by the government. Critics also point out that the national movement during these years had no roots among the masses.

There is a great deal of truth in this criticism. But the critics are not quite correct in declaring the early national movement a failure. It succeeded in creating a wide national awakening, in arousing among the people the feeling that they belonged to one common nation—the Indian nation. It trained people in the art of political work, popularised among them the ideas of democracy and nationalism, propagated among them a modern outlook and exposed before them the evil results of British rule. Most of all, it made people recognise the economic content and character of British imperialism—that Britain was making India a supplier of raw materials, a market for British manufacture, and a field for investment of British capital. It evolved a common political and economic programme around which the Indian people could gather and wage political struggles later on. It

established the political truth that India must be ruled in the interests of the Indians. It made the issue of nationalism a dominant one in Indian life. While its weaknesses were to be removed by the succeeding generations, its achievements were to serve as a base for a more vigorous national movement in later years.

EXERCISES

- 1 In what way was the national movement the result of the clash of the interests of the Indian people with the British interests in India ?
2. Critically examine the important factors which led to the rise of modern nationalism in India in the second half of the 19th century. Bring out clearly the role of foreign domination, administrative and economic unification of the country, western thought and education, the press, cultural heritage, racial arrogance of the rulers, and the administrations of Lytton and Ripon.
3. What did the national movement in its early phase (1885-1905) try to achieve? Why is this phase described as the moderate phase? What were the achievements of the Moderate leaders?
4. Write short notes on:
 - (a) Impact of the rediscovery of the past on nationalism and communalism,
 - (b) Ilbert Bill,
 - (c) Dadabhai Naoroji,
 - (d) The Indian Association,
 - (e) Foundation of the Indian National Congress
 - (f) Government's attitude towards the National Congress.