

## **Era of Militant Nationalism (1905-1909)**

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### **Growth of Militant Nationalism**

A radical trend of a militant nationalist approach to political activity started emerging in the 1890s and it took a concrete shape by 1905. As an adjunct to this trend, a revolutionary wing also took shape.

#### **■ Why Militant Nationalism Grew**

Many factors contributed to the rise of militant nationalism.

#### **Recognition of the True Nature of British Rule**

Having seen that the British government was not conceding any of their important demands, the more militant among those politically conscious got disillusioned and started looking for a more effective mode of political action. Also, the feeling that only an Indian government could lead India on to a path of progress started attracting more and more people. The economic miseries of the 1890s further exposed the exploitative character of colonial rule. Severe famines killed 90 lakh persons between 1896 and 1900. Bubonic plague affected large areas of the Deccan. There were large-scale riots in the Deccan.

The nationalists were wide awake to the fact that instead of giving more rights to the Indians, the government was taking away even the existing ones.

- 1892 — The Indian Councils Act was criticised by nationalists as it failed to satisfy them.
- 1897 — The Nahu brothers were deported without trial and Tilak and others, imprisoned on charges of sedition.
- 1898 — Repressive laws under IPC Section 124 A were further amplified with new provisions under IPC Section 156 A
- 1899 — Number of Indian members in Calcutta Corporation were reduced.
- 1904 — Official Secrets Act curbed freedom of press.
- 1904 — Indian Universities Act ensured greater government control over universities, which it described as factories producing political revolutionaries.

Also, British rule was no longer progressive socially and culturally. It was suppressing the spread of education, especially mass and technical education.

### **Growth of Confidence and Self-Respect**

There was a growing faith in self-effort. Tilak, Aurobindo and Bipin Chandra Pal repeatedly urged the nationalists to rely on the character and capacities of the Indian people. A feeling started gaining currency that the masses had to be involved in the battle against colonial government as they were capable of making the immense sacrifices needed to win freedom.

### **Growth of Education**

While, on the one hand, the spread of education led to an increased awareness among the masses, on the other hand, the rise in unemployment and underemployment among the educated drew attention to poverty and the underdeveloped state of the country's economy under colonial rule. This added to the already simmering discontent among the more radical nationalists.

### **International Influences**

Remarkable progress made by Japan after 1868 and its emergence as an industrial power opened the eyes of Indians

### **Views**

If there is a sin in the world, it is weakness; avoid all weakness, weakness is sin, weakness is death.

**Swami Vivekananda**

The Extremists of today will be the Moderates of tomorrow, just as the Moderates of today were the Extremists of yesterday.

**B.G. Tilak**

What one Asiatic has done, others can do... if Japan can drub Russia, India can drub England with equal ease... let us drive the British into the sea and take our place side by side with Japan among the great powers of the world.

**Karachi Chronicle** (June 18, 1905)

to the fact that economic progress was possible even in an Asian country without any external help. The defeat of the Italian army by Ethiopians (1896), the Boer wars (1899-1902) where the British faced reverses and Japan's victory over Russia (1905) demolished myths of European invincibility. Also, the nationalists were inspired by the nationalist movements worldwide—in Ireland, Russia, Egypt, Turkey, Persia and China. The Indians realised that a united people willing to make sacrifices could take on the mightiest of empires.

### **Reaction to Increasing Westernisation**

The new leadership felt the stranglehold of excessive westernisation and sensed colonial designs to submerge the Indian national identity in the British Empire. The intellectual and moral inspiration of the new leadership was Indian. Intellectuals like Swami Vivekananda, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and Swami Dayananda Saraswati inspired many young nationalists with their forceful and articulate arguments, painting India's past in brighter colours than the British ideologues had. These thinkers exploded the myth of western superiority by referring to the richness of Indian civilisation in the past. Dayananda's political message was 'India for the Indians'.

**Dissatisfaction with Achievements of Moderates**

The younger elements within the Congress were dissatisfied with the achievements of the Moderates during the first 15-20 years. They were strongly critical of the methods of peaceful and constitutional agitation, popularly known as the “Three ‘P’s”—prayer, petition and protest—and described these methods as ‘political mendicancy’.

**Reactionary Policies of Curzon**

A sharp reaction was created in the Indian mind by Curzon’s seven-year rule in India which was full of missions, commissions and omissions. He refused to recognise India as a nation, and insulted Indian nationalists and the intelligentsia by describing their activities as “letting off of gas”. He spoke derogatorily of Indian character in general. Administrative measures adopted during his rule—the Official Secrets Act, the Indian Universities Act, the Calcutta Corporation Act and, above all, the partition of Bengal—left no doubt in Indian minds about the basically reactionary nature of British rule in India.

**Existence of a Militant School of Thought**

By the dawn of the twentieth century, a band of nationalist thinkers had emerged who advocated a more militant approach to political work. These included Raj Narain Bose, Ashwini Kumar Datta, Aurobindo Ghosh and Bipin Chandra Pal in Bengal; Vishnu Shastri Chiplunkar and Bal Gangadhar Tilak in Maharashtra; and Lala Lajpat Rai in Punjab. Tilak emerged as the most outstanding representative of this school of thought.

The basic tenets of this school of thought were:

- hatred for foreign rule; since no hope could be derived from it, Indians should work out their own salvation;
- swaraj to be the goal of national movement;
- direct political action required;

- belief in capacity of the masses to challenge the authority;
- personal sacrifices required and a true nationalist to be always ready for it.

**Emergence of a Trained Leadership**

The new leadership could provide a proper channelisation of the immense potential for political struggle which the masses possessed and, as the militant nationalists thought, were ready to give expression to. This energy of the masses got a release during the movement against the partition of Bengal, which acquired the form of the swadeshi agitation.

**The Swadeshi and Boycott Movement**

The Swadeshi Movement had its genesis in the anti-partition movement which was started to oppose the British decision to partition Bengal.

**■ Partition of Bengal to Divide People**

The British government's decision to partition Bengal had been made public in December 1903. The idea was to have two provinces: Bengal comprising Western Bengal as well as the provinces of Bihar and Orissa, and Eastern Bengal and Assam. Bengal retained Calcutta as its capital, while Dacca became the capital of Eastern Bengal. The official reason given for the decision was that Bengal with a population of 78 million (about a quarter of the population of British India) had become too big to be administered. It was also stated that partition would help in the development of Assam if it came under the direct jurisdiction of the government. This was true to some extent, but the real motive behind the partition plan was seen to be the British desire to weaken Bengal, the nerve centre of Indian nationalism. This it sought to achieve by putting the Bengalis under two administrations by dividing them:

- (i) on the basis of language, thus reducing the Bengalis

**View**

Bengal united is a power. Bengal divided will pull in several different ways..... One of our main objects is to split up and thereby to weaken a solid body of opponents to our rule.

—**Risley** (home secretary to the Government of India, 1904)

to a minority in Bengal itself (as in the new proposal Bengal proper was to have 17 million Bengalis and 37 million Hindi and Oriya speakers); and

- (ii) on the basis of religion, as the western half was to be a Hindu majority area (42 million out of a total 54 million) and the eastern half was to be a Muslim majority area (18 million out of a total of 31 million).

Trying to woo the Muslims, Curzon, the viceroy at that time, argued that Dacca could become the capital of the new Muslim majority province, which would provide them with a unity not experienced by them since the days of old Muslim viceroys and kings. Thus, it was clear that the government was up to its old policy of propping up Muslim communalists to counter the Congress and the national movement.

### ■ Anti-Partition Campaign Under Moderates (1903-05)

In the period 1903-1905, the leadership was provided by men like Surendranath Banerjea, K.K. Mitra and Prithwishchandra Ray. The methods adopted were petitions to the government, public meetings, memoranda, and propaganda through pamphlets and newspapers such as *Hitabadi*, *Sanjibani* and *Bengalee*. Their objective was to exert sufficient pressure on the government through an educated public opinion in India and England to prevent the unjust partition of Bengal from being implemented.

Ignoring a loud public opinion against the partition proposal, the government announced partition of Bengal in

July 1905. Within days, protest meetings were held in small towns all over Bengal. It was in these meetings that the pledge to boycott foreign goods was first taken. **On August 7, 1905, with the passage of the Boycott Resolution in a massive meeting held in the Calcutta Townhall, the formal proclamation of Swadeshi Movement was made.** After this, the leaders dispersed to other parts of Bengal to propagate the message of boycott of Manchester cloth and Liverpool salt.

October 16, 1905, the day the partition formally came into force, was observed as a day of mourning throughout Bengal. People fasted, bathed in the Ganga and walked barefoot in processions singing *Bande Mataram* (which almost spontaneously became the theme song of the movement). '*Amar Sonar Bangla*', the national anthem of present-day Bangladesh, was composed by Rabindranath Tagore, and was sung by huge crowds marching in the streets. People tied *rakhis* on each other's hands as a symbol of unity of the two halves of Bengal. Later in the day, Surendranath Banerjee and Ananda Mohan Bose addressed huge gatherings (perhaps the largest till then under the nationalist banner). Within a few hours of the meeting, Rs 50,000 was raised for the movement.

Soon, the movement spread to other parts of the country—in Poona and Bombay under Tilak, in Punjab under Lala Lajpat Rai and Ajit Singh, in Delhi under Syed Haider Raza, and in Madras under Chidambaram Pillai.

### ■ The Congress's Position

The Indian National Congress, meeting in 1905 under the presidentship of Gokhale, resolved to (i) condemn the partition of Bengal and the reactionary policies of Curzon, and (ii) support the anti-partition and Swadeshi Movement of Bengal.

The militant nationalists led by Tilak, Lajpat Rai, Bipin Chandra Pal and Aurobindo Ghosh wanted the movement to

be taken outside Bengal to other parts of the country and go beyond a boycott of foreign goods to become a full-fledged political mass struggle with the goal of attaining swaraj. But the Moderates, dominating the Congress at that time, were not willing to go that far. However, a big step forward was taken at the Congress session held at Calcutta (1906) under the presidentship of Dadabhai Naoroji, where it was declared that the goal of the Indian National Congress was “self-government or swaraj like the United Kingdom or the colonies” of Australia or Canada. The Moderate-Extremist dispute over the pace of the movement and techniques of struggle reached a deadlock at the Surat session of the Indian National Congress (1907) where the party split with serious consequences for the Swadeshi Movement.

### **The Movement under Extremist Leadership**

After 1905, the Extremists acquired a dominant influence over the Swadeshi Movement in Bengal. There were three reasons for this:

(i) The Moderate-led movement had failed to yield results.

(ii) The divisive tactics of the governments of both the Bengals had embittered the nationalists.

(iii) The government had resorted to suppressive measures, which included atrocities on students—many of whom were given corporal punishment; ban on public singing of *Vande Mataram*; restriction on public meetings; prosecution and long imprisonment of swadeshi workers; clashes between the police and the people in many towns; arrests and deportation of leaders; and suppression of freedom of the press.

### **■ The Extremist Programme**

Emboldened by Dadabhai Naoroji’s declaration at the Calcutta session (1906) that self-government or swaraj was to be the



goal of the Congress, the Extremists gave a call for passive resistance in addition to swadeshi and boycott which would include a boycott of government schools and colleges, government service, courts, legislative councils, municipalities, government titles, etc. The purpose, as Aurobindo put it, was to “make the administration under present conditions impossible by an organised refusal to do anything which will help either the British commerce in the exploitation of the country or British officialdom in the administration of it”.

The militant nationalists tried to transform the anti-partition and Swadeshi Movement into a mass struggle and gave the slogan of India’s independence from foreign rule. “Political freedom is the lifebreath of a nation,” declared Aurobindo. Thus, the Extremists gave the idea of India’s independence the central place in India’s politics. The goal of independence was to be achieved through self-sacrifice.

### ■ **New Forms of Struggle**

The militant nationalists put forward several fresh ideas at the theoretical, propaganda and programme levels. Among the several forms of struggle thrown up by the movement were the following.

#### **Boycott of Foreign Goods**

Boycott included boycott and public burning of foreign cloth, boycott of foreign-made salt or sugar, refusal by priests to ritualise marriages involving exchange of foreign goods, refusal by washermen to wash foreign clothes. This form of protest met with great success at the practical and popular level.

#### **Public Meetings and Processions**

Public meetings and processions emerged as major methods of mass mobilisation. Simultaneously they were forms of popular expression.

**Corps of Volunteers or ‘Samitis’**

Samitis such as the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti of Ashwini Kumar Dutta (in Barisal) emerged as a very popular and powerful means of mass mobilisation. In Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu, V.O. Chidambaram Pillai, Subramania Siva and some lawyers formed the Swadeshi Sangam which inspired the local masses. These samitis generated political consciousness among the masses through magic lantern lectures, swadeshi songs, providing physical and moral training to their members, social work during famines and epidemics, organisation of schools, training in swadeshi crafts and arbitration courts.

**Imaginative use of Traditional Popular Festivals and Melas**

The idea was to use traditional festivals and occasions as a means of reaching out to the masses and spreading political messages. For instance, Tilak’s Ganapati and Shivaji festivals became a medium of swadeshi propaganda not only in western India, but also in Bengal. In Bengal also, the traditional folk theatre forms were used for this purpose.

**Emphasis given to Self-Reliance**

Self-reliance or ‘*atma shakti*’ was encouraged. This implied re-assertion of national dignity, honour and confidence and social and economic regeneration of the villages. In practical terms, it included social reform and campaigns against caste oppression, early marriage, dowry system, consumption of alcohol, etc.

**Programme of Swadeshi or National Education**

Bengal National College, inspired by Tagore’s Shantiniketan, was set up with Aurobindo Ghosh as its principal. Soon national schools and colleges sprang up in various parts of the country. On August 15, 1906, the National Council of Education was set up to organise a system of education—literary, scientific and technical—on national lines and under national control. Education was to be imparted through the

### **Views**

Swaraj or self-government is essential for the exercise of swadharma. Without swaraj there could be no social reform, no industrial progress, no useful education, no fulfilment of national life. That is what we seek, that is why God has sent us to the world to fulfil Him.

—B.G. Tilak

Swadeshism during the days of its potency coloured the entire texture of our social and domestic life.

—Surendranath Banerjea

Swaraj is the fulfilment of the ancient life of India under modern conditions, the return of *satyuga* of national greatness, the resumption by her of her great role of the teacher and guide, self-liberation of the people for final fulfilment of the Vedantic idea in politics, that is the true swaraj for India.

—Aurobindo Ghosh

vernacular medium. A Bengal Institute of Technology was set up for technical education and funds were raised to send students to Japan for advanced learning.

### **Swadeshi or Indigenous Enterprises**

The swadeshi spirit also found expression in the establishment of swadeshi textile mills, soap and match factories, tanneries, banks, insurance companies, shops, etc. These enterprises were based more on patriotic zeal than on business acumen. V.O. Chidambaram Pillai's venture into a national shipbuilding enterprise—Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company—at Tuticorin, however, gave a challenge to the British Indian Steam Navigation Company.

### **Impact in the Cultural Sphere**

The nationalists of all hues took inspiration from songs written by Rabindranath Tagore, Rajnikant Sen, Dwijendralal Ray, Mukunda Das, Syed Abu Mohammad and others. Tagore's *Amar Sonar Bangla* written on this occasion was later to inspire the liberation struggle of Bangladesh and was adopted by it as its national anthem. In Tamil Nadu, Subramania Bharati wrote *Sudesh Geetham*.

In painting, Abanindranath Tagore broke the domination of Victorian naturalism over the Indian art scene and took inspiration from Ajanta, Mughal and Rajput paintings. Nandalal Bose, who left a major imprint on Indian art, was the first recipient of a scholarship offered by the Indian Society of Oriental Art, founded in 1907.

In science, Jagdish Chandra Bose, Prafullachandra Roy and others pioneered original research which was praised the world over.

### ■ Extent of Mass Participation

**Students** Students came out in large numbers to propagate and practise *swadeshi*, and to take a lead in organising picketing of shops selling foreign goods. Student participation was visible in Bengal, Maharashtra, especially in Poona, and in many parts of the South—Guntur, Madras, Salem. Police adopted a repressive attitude towards the students. Schools and colleges whose students participated in the agitation were to be penalised by disaffiliating them or stopping of grants and privileges to them. Students who were found guilty of participation were to be disqualified for government jobs or for government scholarships, and disciplinary action—fine, expulsion, arrest, beating, etc.—was to be taken against them.

**Women** Women, who were traditionally home-centred, especially those of the urban middle classes, took active part in processions and picketing. From now onwards, they were to play a significant role in the national movement.

**Stand of Muslims** Some of the Muslims participated—Barrister Abdul Rasul, Liaquat Hussain, Guznavi, Maulana Azad (who joined one of the revolutionary terrorist groups); but most of the upper and middle class Muslims stayed away or, led by Nawab Salimullah of Dacca, supported the partition on the plea that it would give them a Muslim-majority East Bengal. To further government interests, the All India Muslim League was propped up on December 30, 1905 as an anti-

Congress front, and reactionary elements like Nawab Salimullah of Dacca were encouraged. Also, the nature of the Swadeshi Movement, with leaders evoking Hindu festivals and goddesses for inspiration, tended to exclude the Muslims.

**Labour Unrest and Trade Unions** In the beginning, some strikes were organised on the issue of rising prices and racial insult, primarily in the foreign owned companies. In September 1905, more than 250 Bengali clerks of the Burn Company, Howrah, walked out in protest against a derogatory work regulation. In July 1906, a strike of workers in the East Indian Railway, resulted in the formation of a Railwaymen's Union. Between 1906 and 1908, strikes in the jute mills were very frequent, at times affecting 18 out of 18 mills. Subramania Siva and Chidambaram Pillai led strikes in Tuticorin and Tirunelveli in a foreign-owned cotton mill. In Rawalpindi (Punjab), the arsenal and railway workers went on strike led by Lala Lajpat Rai and Ajit Singh. However, by summer of 1908, the labour unrests subsided under strict action.

Thus, the social base of the movement expanded to include certain sections of the zamindari, the students, the women, and the lower middle classes in cities and towns. An attempt was also made to give political expression to economic grievances of the working class by organising strikes. But the movement was not able to garner support of the Muslims, especially the Muslim peasantry, because of a conscious government policy of divide and rule helped by overlap of class and community at places.

### ■ All India Aspect

Movements in support of Bengal's unity and the swadeshi and boycott agitation were organised in many parts of the country. Tilak, who played a leading role in the spread of the movement outside Bengal, saw in this the ushering in of a new chapter in the history of the national movement. He realised that here was a challenge and an opportunity to

organise popular mass struggle against the British rule to unite the country in a bond of common sympathy.

### **Annulment of Partition**

It was decided to annul the partition of Bengal in 1911 mainly to curb the menace of revolutionary terrorism. The annulment came as a rude shock to the Muslim political elite. It was also decided to shift the capital to Delhi as a sop to the Muslims, as it was associated with Muslim glory, but the Muslims were not pleased. Bihar and Orissa were taken out of Bengal and Assam was made a separate province.

### **Evaluation of the Swadeshi Movement**

#### **■ The Movement Fizzles Out**

By 1908, the open phase (as different from the underground revolutionary phase) of the Swadeshi and Boycott movement was almost over. This was due to many reasons—

- There was severe government repression.
- The movement failed to create an effective organisation or a party structure. It threw up an entire gamut of techniques that later came to be associated with Gandhian politics—non-cooperation, passive resistance, filling of British jails, social reform and constructive work—but failed to give these techniques a disciplined focus.
- The movement was rendered leaderless with most of the leaders either arrested or deported by 1908 and with Aurobindo Ghosh and Bipin Chandra Pal retiring from active politics.
- Internal squabbles among leaders, magnified by the Surat split (1907), did much harm to the movement.
- The movement aroused the people but did not know how to tap the newly released energy or how to find new forms to give expression to popular resentment.

- The movement largely remained confined to the upper and middle classes and zamindars, and failed to reach the masses—especially the peasantry.
- Non-cooperation and passive resistance remained mere ideas.
- It is difficult to sustain a mass-based movement at a high pitch for too long.

### ■ Movement a Turning Point

Despite its gradual decline into inactivity, the movement was a turning point in modern Indian history.

- It proved to be a “leap forward” in more ways than one. Hitherto untouched sections—students, women, workers, some sections of urban and rural population—participated. All the major trends of the national movement, from conservative moderation to political extremism, from revolutionary activities to incipient socialism, from petitions and prayers to passive resistance and non-cooperation, emerged during the Swadeshi Movement.
- The richness of the movement was not confined to the political sphere, but encompassed art, literature, science and industry also.
- People were aroused from slumber and now they learned to take bold political positions and participate in new forms of political work.
- The swadeshi campaign undermined the hegemony of colonial ideas and institutions.
- The future struggle was to draw heavily from the experience gained.

### Moderate Methods Give Way to Extremist Modes

With the coming of Swadeshi and Boycott Movement, it became clear that the Moderates had outlived their utility and their politics of petitions and speeches had become obsolete. They had not succeeded in keeping pace with time, and this

Differences between Moderates and Extremists	
Moderates	Extremists
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Social base—zamindars and upper middle classes in towns.</li> <li>2. Ideological inspiration—western liberal thought and European history.</li> <li>3. Believed in England's providential mission in India.</li> <li>4. Believed political connections with Britain to be in India's social, political and cultural interests.</li> <li>5. Professed loyalty to the British Crown.</li> <li>6. Believed that the movement should be limited to middle class intelligentsia; masses not yet ready for participation in political work.</li> <li>7. Demanded constitutional reforms and share for Indians in services.</li> <li>8. Insisted on the use of constitutional methods only.</li> <li>9. They were patriots and did not play the role of a comprador class.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Social base—educated middle and lower middle classes in towns.</li> <li>2. Ideological inspiration—Indian history, cultural heritage and Hindu traditional symbols.</li> <li>3. Rejected 'providential mission theory' as an illusion.</li> <li>4. Believed that political connections with Britain would perpetuate British exploitation of India.</li> <li>5. Believed that the British Crown was unworthy of claiming Indian loyalty.</li> <li>6. Had immense faith in the capacity of masses to participate and to make sacrifices.</li> <li>7. Demanded swaraj as the panacea for Indian ills.</li> <li>8. Did not hesitate to use extra-constitutional methods like boycott and passive resistance to achieve their objectives.</li> <li>9. They were patriots who made sacrifices for the sake of the country.</li> </ol>

was highlighted by their failure to get the support of the younger generation for their style of politics. Their failure to work among the masses had meant that their ideas did not take root among the masses. Even the propaganda by the Moderates did not reach the masses. No all-India campaigns of the scale of Swadeshi and Boycott Movement had been organised earlier by the Moderates and, in this campaign, they



discovered that they were not its leaders, which was rather natural.

The Extremist ideology and its functioning also lacked consistency. Its advocates ranged from open members and secret sympathisers to those opposed to any kind of political violence. Its leaders—Aurobindo, Tilak, B.C. Pal and Lala Lajpat Rai—had different perceptions of their goal. For Tilak, *swaraj* meant some sort of self-government, while for Aurobindo it meant complete independence from foreign rule. But at the politico-ideological level, their emphasis on mass participation and on the need to broaden the social base of the movement was a progressive improvement upon the Moderate politics. They raised patriotism from a level of ‘academic pastime’ to one of ‘service and sacrifice for the country’. But the politically progressive Extremists proved to be social reactionaries. They had revivalist and obscurantist undertones attached to their thoughts. Tilak’s opposition to the Age of Consent Bill (which would have raised the marriageable age for girls from 10 years to 12 years, even though his objection was mainly that such reforms must come from people governing themselves and not under an alien rule), his organising of Ganapati and Shivaji festivals as national festivals, his support to anti-cow killing campaigns, etc., portrayed him as a Hindu nationalist. Similarly B.C. Pal and Aurobindo spoke of a Hindu nation and Hindu interests. This alienated many Muslims from the movement.

Though the seemingly revivalist and obscurantist tactics of the Extremists were directed against the foreign rulers, they had the effect of promoting a very unhealthy relationship between politics and religion, the bitter harvests of which the Indians had to reap in later years.

### **The Surat Split**

The Congress split at Surat came in December 1907, around the time when revolutionary activity had gained momentum. The two events were not unconnected.

### ■ Run-up to Surat

In December 1905, at the Benaras session of the Indian National Congress presided over by Gokhale, the Moderate-Extremist differences came to the fore. The Extremists wanted to extend the Boycott and Swadeshi Movement to regions outside Bengal and also to include all forms of associations (such as government service, law courts, legislative councils, etc.) within the boycott programme and thus start a nationwide mass movement. The Extremists wanted a strong resolution supporting their programme at the Benaras session. The Moderates, on the other hand, were not in favour of extending the movement beyond Bengal and were totally opposed to boycott of councils and similar associations. They advocated constitutional methods to protest against the partition of Bengal. As a compromise, a relatively mild resolution condemning the partition of Bengal and the reactionary policies of Curzon and supporting the swadeshi and boycott programme in Bengal was passed. This succeeded in averting a split for the moment.

At the Calcutta session of the Congress in December 1906, the Moderate enthusiasm had cooled a bit because of the popularity of the Extremists and the revolutionaries and because of communal riots. Here, the Extremists wanted either Tilak or Lajpat Rai as the president, while the Moderates proposed the name of Dadabhai Naoroji, who was widely respected by all the nationalists. Finally, Dadabhai Naoroji was elected as the president and as a concession to the militants, the goal of the Indian National Congress was defined as 'swarajya or self-government' like the United Kingdom or the colonies of Australia and Canada. Also a resolution supporting the programme of swadeshi, boycott and national education was passed. The word swaraj was mentioned for the first time, but its connotation was not spelt out, which left the field open for differing interpretations by the Moderates and the Extremists.

The Extremists, encouraged by the proceedings at the Calcutta session, gave a call for wide passive resistance and boycott of schools, colleges, legislative councils, municipalities, law courts, etc. The Moderates, encouraged by the news that council reforms were on the anvil, decided to tone down the Calcutta programme. The two sides seemed to be heading for a showdown.

The Extremists thought that the people had been aroused and the battle for freedom had begun. They felt the time had come for the big push to drive the British out and considered the Moderates to be a drag on the movement. They decided that it was necessary to part company with the Moderates, even if it meant a split in the Congress.

The Moderates thought that it would be dangerous at that stage to associate with the Extremists whose anti-imperialist agitation, it was felt, would be ruthlessly suppressed by the mighty colonial forces. The Moderates saw in the council reforms an opportunity to realise their dream of Indian participation in the administration. Any hasty action by the Congress, the Moderates felt, under Extremist pressure was bound to annoy the Liberals, then in power in England. The Moderates were also ready to part company with the Extremists.

The Moderates failed to realise that the council reforms were meant by the government more to isolate the Extremists than to reward the Moderates. The Extremists did not realise that the Moderates could act as their front line of defence against state repression. And neither side realised that in a vast country like India ruled by a strong imperialist power, only a broad-based nationalist movement could succeed.

### ■ Split Takes Place

The Extremists wanted the 1907 session to be held in Nagpur (Central Provinces) with Tilak or Lajpat Rai as the president along with a reiteration of the swadeshi, boycott and national

education resolutions. The Moderates wanted the session at Surat in order to exclude Tilak from the presidency, since a leader from the host province could not be session president (Surat being in Tilak's home province of Bombay). Instead, they wanted Rashbehari Ghosh as the president and sought to drop the resolutions on swadeshi, boycott and national education. Both sides adopted rigid positions, leaving no room for compromise. The split became inevitable, and the Congress was now dominated by the Moderates who lost no time in reiterating Congress' commitment to the goal of self-government within the British Empire and to the use of constitutional methods only to achieve this goal.

### ■ Government Repression

The government launched a massive attack on the Extremists. Between 1907 and 1911, five new laws were brought into force to check anti-government activity. These legislations included the Seditious Meetings Act, 1907; Indian Newspapers (Incitement to Offences) Act, 1908; Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1908; and the Indian Press Act, 1910. Tilak, the main Extremist leader, was tried in 1909 for sedition for what he had written in 1908 in his *Kesari* about a bomb thrown by Bengal revolutionaries in Muzaffarpur, resulting in the death of two innocent European women.

Tilak had written: "This, no doubt, will inspire many with hatred against the people belonging to the party of rebels. It is not possible to cause British rule to disappear from this country by such monstrous deeds. But rulers who exercise unrestricted power must always remember that there is also a limit to the patience of humanity ... many newspapers had warned the government that if they resorted to Russian methods, then Indians too will be compelled to imitate the Russian methods".

In another article, Tilak wrote that the real means of stopping the bombs consisted in making a beginning towards

**View**

"...the mischief of the trial and condemnation of Tilak would be greater than if you left him alone".

—**John Morley**, Secretary of State for India in a letter to Sydenham, Governor of Bombay

the grant of rights of 'Swarajya' to the people. Tilak was judged guilty and sentenced to six years' transportation and a fine of Rs 1,000. He was sent to Mandalay (Burma) jail for six years. Aurobindo and B.C. Pal retired from active politics. Lajpat Rai left for abroad. The Extremists were not able to organise an effective alternative party to sustain the movement. The Moderates were left with no popular base or support, especially as the youth rallied behind the Extremists.

After 1908, the national movement as a whole declined for a time. In 1914, Tilak was released and he picked up the threads of the movement.

### **The Government Strategy**

The British government in India had been hostile to the Congress from the beginning. Even after the Moderates, who dominated the Congress from the beginning, began distancing themselves from the militant nationalist trend which had become visible during the last decade of the nineteenth century itself, government hostility did not stop. This was because, in the government's view, the Moderates still represented an anti-imperialist force consisting of basically patriotic and liberal intellectuals..

With the coming of Swadeshi and Boycott Movement and the emergence of militant nationalist trend in a big way, the government modified its strategy towards the nationalists. Now, the policy was to be of 'rallying them' (John Morley—the secretary of state) or the policy of 'carrot and stick'.

It may be described as a three-pronged approach of repression-conciliation-suppression. In the first stage, the Extremists were to be repressed mildly, mainly to frighten the Moderates. In the second stage, the Moderates were to be placated through some concessions, and hints were to be dropped that more reforms would be forthcoming if the distance from the Extremists was maintained. This was aimed at isolating the Extremists: With the Moderates on its side, the government could suppress the Extremists with its full might; the Moderates could then be ignored.

Unfortunately, neither the Moderates nor the Extremists understood the purpose behind the strategy. The Surat split suggested that the policy of carrot and stick had brought rich dividends to the British India government.

### **Morley-Minto Reforms—1909**

In October 1906, a group of Muslim elites called the **Simla Deputation**, led by the Agha Khan, met Lord Minto and demanded separate electorates for the Muslims and representation in excess of their numerical strength in view of ‘the value of the contribution’ Muslims were making “to the defence of the empire”. The same group quickly took over the Muslim League, initially floated by Nawab Salimullah of Dacca along with Nawabs Mohsin-ul-Mulk and Waqar-ul-Mulk in December 1906. The Muslim League intended to preach loyalty to the empire and to keep the Muslim intelligentsia away from the Congress.

Gopal Krishna Gokhale also went to England to meet the Secretary of State for India, John Morley, to put Congress demands of self-governing system similar to that in the other British colonies.

### **■ The Reforms**

The viceroy, Lord Minto, and the Secretary of State for India, John Morley, agreed that some reforms were due so as to

placate the Moderates as well as the Muslims. They worked out a set of measures that came to be known as the **Morley-Minto (or Minto-Morley) Reforms** that translated into the **Indian Councils Act of 1909**.

- The elective principle was recognised for the non-official membership of the councils in India. Indians were allowed to participate in the election of various legislative councils, though on the basis of class and community.

- For the first time, separate electorates for Muslims for election to the central council was established—a most detrimental step for India.

- The number of elected members in the Imperial Legislative Council and the Provincial Legislative Councils was increased. In the provincial councils, non-official majority was introduced, but since some of these non-officials were nominated and not elected, the overall non-elected majority remained.

- According to Sumit Sarkar, in the Imperial Legislative Council, of the total 69 members, 37 were to be the officials and of the 32 non-officials, 5 were to be nominated. Of the 27 elected non-officials, 8 seats were reserved for the Muslims under separate electorates (only Muslims could vote here for the Muslim candidates), while 4 seats were reserved for the British capitalists, 2 for the landlords and 13 seats came under general electorate.

- The elected members were to be indirectly elected. The local bodies were to elect an electoral college, which in turn would elect members of provincial legislatures, who in turn would elect members of the central legislature.

- Besides separate electorates for the Muslims, representation in excess of the strength of their population was accorded to the Muslims. Also, the income qualification for Muslim voters was kept lower than that for Hindus.

- Powers of legislatures—both at the centre and in

**Views**

Reforms may not save the Raj, but if they don't, nothing else will.

**Lord Morley**

The reforms of 1909 afforded no answer, and could afford no answer to Indian problems.

**Montford Report**

Political barrier was created round them, isolating them from the rest of India and reversing the unifying and amalgamating process which had been going on for centuries... The barrier was a small one at first, for the electorates were very limited, but with every extension of franchise it grew and affected the whole structure of political and social life like some canker which corrupted the entire system.

**Jawaharlal Nehru**

provinces—were enlarged and the legislatures could now pass resolutions (which may or may not be accepted), ask questions and supplementaries, vote separate items in the budget though the budget as a whole could not be voted upon.

- One Indian was to be appointed to the viceroy's executive council (Satyendra Sinha was the first Indian to be appointed in 1909).

**■ Evaluation**

The reforms of 1909 afforded no answer to the Indian political problem. Lord Morley made it clear that colonial self-government (as demanded by the Congress) was not suitable for India, and he was against the introduction of parliamentary or responsible government in India. He said, "If it could be said that this chapter of reforms led directly or indirectly to the establishment of a parliamentary system in India, I, for one, would have nothing at all to do with it."

The 'constitutional' reforms were, in fact, aimed at dividing the nationalist ranks by confusing the Moderates and at checking the growth of unity among Indians through the obnoxious instrument of separate electorates. The government



aimed at rallying the Moderates and the Muslims against the rising tide of nationalism. The officials and the Muslim leaders often talked of the entire community when they talked of the separate electorates, but in reality it meant the appeasement of just a small section of the Muslim elite.

Besides, the system of election was too indirect and it gave the impression of “infiltration of legislators through a number of sieves”. And, while parliamentary forms were introduced, no responsibility was conceded, which sometimes led to thoughtless and irresponsible criticism of the government. Only some members like Gokhale put to constructive use the opportunity to debate in the councils by demanding universal primary education, attacking repressive policies and drawing attention to the plight of indentured labour and Indian workers in South Africa.

What the reforms of 1909 gave to the people of the country was a shadow rather than substance. The people had demanded self-government but what they were given was ‘benevolent despotism’.

### Summary

#### ● Why Militant Nationalism Grew

1. Realisation that the true nature of British rule was exploitative, and that the British India government, instead of conceding more, was taking away even what existed.
2. Growth of self-confidence and self-respect.
3. Impact of growth of education—increase in awareness and unemployment.
4. International influences and events which demolished the myth of white/European supremacy. These included
  - emergence of Japan—an Asian country—as an industrial power
  - Abyssinia's (Ethiopia) victory over Italy.
  - Boer Wars (1899-1902) in which the British faced reverses.
  - Japan's victory over Russia (1905).
  - nationalist movements worldwide.

5. Reaction to increasing westernisation.
6. Dissatisfaction with the achievements as well as the methods of the Moderates.
7. Reactionary policies of Curzon such as the Calcutta Corporation Act (1899), the Official Secrets Act (1904), the Indian Universities Act (1904) and partition of Bengal (1905).
8. Existence of a militant school of thought.
9. Emergence of a trained leadership.

- **The Extremist Ideology**

- (i) Hatred for foreign rule
- (ii) Belief in the capacity of the masses
- (iii) Swarajya as goal
- (iv) Advocacy of direct political action and self-sacrifice.

- **The Swadeshi and Boycott Movement**

\* **Began as a reaction to partition of Bengal** which became known in 1903, was formally announced in July 1905 and came into force in October 1905. The motive behind partition was to weaken Bengal which was the nerve centre of Indian nationalist activity; the official reason given for the partition was that Bengal had become too big to administer—which was true to some extent.

\* **Moderate-led anti-partition movement (1903-05)** was under Surendranath Banerjea, K.K. Mitra, Prithwishchandra Ray.

**Methods** included public meetings, petitions, memoranda, propaganda through newspapers and pamphlets.

\* **The movement under Extremists (1905-08)** was led by Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal, Lajpat Rai, Aurobindo Ghosh.

**Methods** included boycott of foreign cloth and other goods, public meetings and processions, forming corps of volunteers or samitis, use of traditional popular festivals and *melas* for propaganda, emphasis on self-reliance or *atma shakti*, launching programme of swadeshi or national education, swadeshi or indigenous enterprises, initiating new trends in Indian painting, songs, poetry, pioneering research in science and later calling for boycott of schools, colleges, councils, government service, etc.

\* **Extremists took over because of** the failure of the Moderates to achieve positive results, divisive tactics of governments of both Bengals, severe government repression.

\* **Extent of mass participation**—students, women, certain sections of zamindari, labour, some lower middle and middle classes in towns and cities participated for the first time while the Muslims generally kept away.

\* **Annulment of Partition** mainly to curb the 'menace' of revolutionary terrorism.

\* **Why Swadeshi Movement fizzled out by 1908**

Severe government repression.

Lack of effective organisation and a disciplined focus.

With arrest/deportation of all leaders, the movement left leaderless.

Split in nationalist ranks.

Narrow social base.

\* **Achievements**

"A leap forward" because hitherto untouched sections participated, major trends of later movement emerged; richness of the movement extended to culture, science and literature; people educated in bolder form of politics; colonial hegemony undermined.

● **Major Cause of Moderate-Extremist Split at Surat (1907)**

**Moderates** wanted to restrict the Boycott Movement to Bengal and to a boycott of foreign cloth and liquor.

**Extremists** wanted to take the movement to all parts of the country and include within its ambit all forms of association with the government through a boycott of schools, colleges, law courts, legislative councils, government service, municipalities, etc.

● **Government Acts for Repression of Swadeshi Movement**

Seditious Meetings Act (1907)

Criminal Law (Amendment) Act (1908)

Indian Newspapers (Incitement to Offences) Act (1908)

Explosive Substances Act (1908)

Indian Press Act (1910)

● **Morley-Minto Reforms**

Number of elected members in Imperial and Provincial Legislative Councils increased—elected non-officials still in minority.

Non-officials to be elected indirectly—thus elections introduced for the first time.

Separate electorates introduced for Muslims.

Legislatures could pass resolutions, ask questions and supplementaries, vote separate items of the budget.

One Indian to be on viceroy's executive council.

Aimed at dividing the nationalist ranks and at rallying the Moderates and the Muslims to the government's side.

No responsibility entrusted to legislators—this resulted in thoughtless criticism sometimes.

System of election was too indirect.

