Chapter

3 The Moderate Phase (1885–1905)

The period from 1885 to 1905 constituted the early phase of the Congress and is also referred to as the Moderate Phase or the Period of Tea-Party Politics or Political Mendicancy. This is because the early Congress leaders were firm followers of 'moderate' politics. They believed in a happy combination of liberalism and moderation. They were termed as moderates (or Sudharaks or soft faction or naram dal) to distinguish them from the 'extremists' (or hot faction or garam dal) of the early 20th century. The extremists were the neo-nationalists who believed in more radical methods of opposing the colonial rule. The differences between the moderates and the extremists later led to a split in the Congress in 1907.

Early Composition of the Congress

From 72 delegates in Bombay, the Congress swelled to 434 delegates in Calcutta session (1886). These delegates were elected form various local bodies from different parts of the country. Henceforth, they decided to meet every year in a different part of the country each time. The number of delegates soon increased to thousands.

In this way, the composition of the Congress was all-India in character with delegates belonging to different races, castes, professions, trades and provinces. Despite this, the Congress was largely a middle-class affair with the largest number of delegates coming from the affluent middle class intelligentsia, i.e. the lawyers, doctors, engineers, writers, journalists and teachers. The legal profession was most heavily represented among various professions, the Brahmins among various castes. The presidencies of Bombay, Calcutta and Madras were the most heavily represented among various provinces.

This educated middle-class leaders loved their titles and government jobs, they were mainly drawn from the cities and had no real contact with the masses.

There were a handful of women delegates as well. In 1890, Kadambini Ganguly, the first woman graduate of Bethune College, Calcutta University, addressed the Congress session. The participation of women in India's Freedom struggle later became the single most significant factor in elevating the role and status of women in Indian society.

Kadambini Ganguly (1861–1923): Kadambini Ganguly and Chandramukhi Basu were the first two female graduates from India. Ganguly was also the first South Asian female physician, trained in Western medicine. She was the daughter of a Brahmo reformer and wife of Dwarkanath Ganguly.

Kadambini Ganguly

Moderate Leaders and their Ideology

Gopal Krishna Gokhale

The moderates were the early leaders of the Congress, the prominent among them and those who also served as Presidents of the Congress were Womesh Chandra Banerjee, Dadabhai Naoroji, Badruddin Tayabji, Sir Pherozeshah Mehta, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Surendranath Banerjee, P Ananda Charlu, Romesh Chandra Dutt and Ananda Mohan Bose.

Other important leaders of the Congress and of the national movement during this time were-Sir Dinshaw Edulji Wacha, Mahadev Govind Ranade, the brothers Sisir Kumar and Motilal Ghosh, Madan Mohan Malviya, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, G Subramaniya Iyer and C Vijayaraghava Chariyar.

Dinshaw Edulji Wacha

These early leaders were of the following views:

- India was still a nation-in-making, and its nationhood needed to be carefully nurtured.
- They were powerfully attracted to democracy and modern civil rights. They believed that India should gradually move towards democratic self-governance.
- They felt that the time was not yet ripe for direct struggle for freedom and the British connect should be looked upon as a political necessity of the time.
- The Moderates were full of admiration for British culture; they had faith in the justice and goodness of the British people.
- In 1886, Calcutta session, Congress President Dadabhai Naoroji talked about the many 'Blessings of British Rule'. In 1898, Congress President Anand Mohan Bose declared, 'the educated classes were the friends and not the foes of England'. Hence, **loyalty to the British Empire was their political faith**.
- They believed that the British rule was much needed in India as it was the reason behind the peace and order in the country.
- They believed that the progress of the country was being hindered not because of the British rule but because of the socio-economic backwardness of the country and the oppressive bureaucracy.

- The Indians had certain grievances, but they would be addressed only if the British were made aware of them and justice would be done.

Note: The readers may get confused when they read about the loyalty of the Moderates to the British rule. Please remember that the Moderates only felt that the British connection of India was a necessary evil of that time. Their immediate plan was therefore to make the British rule as close to national rule. Later, when the British failed to accept nationalist demands, many of them abandoned British loyalty and started demanding self-rule.

Method of Work of the Moderates

The moderates relied on peaceful, constitutional agitation, within the four walls of law. They relied mainly on prayers and petitions, meetings, speeches and resolutions. They voiced their opinions through the press and through the Congress sessions. Many Congress leaders were editors of important newspapers and used the platform of press throughout the year to criticise government policy. At the Congress sessions, the members expressed opinions on all important measures of the government, protested against unpopular ones and passed resolutions. But the Congress sessions were held for only three days in a year and the Congress had no machinery to carry on its work throughout the year.

The intention of the moderates was to reach out to the people and government, in India as well as in Britain, and educate them about the concerns of the Indian people. For this, the following measures were taken:

- The memorials of the Congress were nominally addressed to the government, but their real aim was to educate the people. In the words of Justice Ranade, 'In reality, they (memorials) are addressed to the people, so that they may learn how to think in these matters. This work must be done for many years, without expecting any other results, because politics of this kind is all together new to this land.'
- The Congress sent deputations of Indian leaders to Britain to present the Indian view point.
- Dadabhai Naoroji spent a major part of his life and income in Britain for this work. He became a member of the British House of Commons and set up a strong Indian lobby there.
- In 1889, a British Committee of Indian National Congress was set up.
- In 1890, the weekly journal 'India' was started by this Committee to educate the British people about Indian issues.
- In 1892, a session of the INC was scheduled to be held in London to spread awareness about Indian grievances but the idea was postponed due to British elections and was never taken up again.

The outlook and the methods of the moderates may be summed up in the words of Dadabhai Naoroji- 'Nothing is more dear to the heart of England, than India's welfare; and if we only speak out loud enough and persistently enough, to reach that busy heart, we shall not speak in vain.'

The Demands of the Moderates and the Congress Program during 1885–1905

The demands of the moderates (or the Congress program) during 1885–1905 were very modest. They believed that a direct struggle for freedom was not yet on the agenda of history. What was on the agenda was the arousal of national feeling, consolidation of this feeling, stirring up a large number of Indian people out of political dormancy and training them in political agitation.

For this, they needed to arouse public interest on political questions, formulate demands on a pan-India basis and create national unity. The early Congress leaders were aware of the fact that India was a nation-in-making and its nationhood had to be carefully nurtured. Thus, the demands of the early nationalists were formulated with the aim of uniting the Indian people around a common political, social and economic program.

They mainly demanded increased representation of Indians in government and government services, constitutional-economic-military reforms and civil rights. For instance, some of the important demands were:

Political Demands

- Expansion of Legislative Councils with more powers and more representation of Indians in them
- Representation of Indians in the Secretary of State Council, Viceroy's Executive Council and Governor's Executive Councils
- Separation of judiciary from the executive work to protect people from arbitrary acts of bureaucracy and the police
- Formation of provincial councils
- Abolition of Indian Council
- More opportunities for Indians in Civil Service and simultaneous examinations for ICS in London and in India
- End of aggressive foreign policy against India's neighbours
- The agenda of the Congress during this time also included arousal and consolidation of national sentiment, educating and uniting Indians on political questions

Economic Demands

- End of economic drain
- Enquiry into the economic and industrial condition of the country
- Reduction of land revenue
- Abolition of salt tax
- Encouragement to modern industry through direct government aid
- Development of agricultural banks to end the atrocities of moneylenders
- Extension of irrigation facilities to save the people from famines
- Introduction of Permanent Settlement in other parts of the country

Military Demands

- Repeal of Arms Act
- Appointment of Indians to commissioned ranks in the army
- Reduction of military expenditure

Social Demands

- More expenditure on welfare activities—education, health, sanitation
- Civil rights like freedom of speech, thought, association and press
- Basic Human rights for Indian workers in South Africa and elsewhere in the Empire
- Improvement in the condition of plantation labourers
- Timely justice and reduction in litigation costs
- Sympathetic behaviour of the police and other government officers towards the common people

The early leaders demanded Indianisation of bureaucracy on the following grounds:

- Europeans were paid hefty salaries which made Indian administration very costly.
- Their pensions were paid in England which added to the drain of wealth from India.
- It was hoped that Indian bureaucrats would be more responsive to Indian needs.

Note on Economic Demands: You may note that even though the political demands were moderate, the economic demands were quite radical. The demands were such that they required changes in the basic imperialist economic policies. The Moderates strongly opposed the attempts of the British to convert India into a market for raw materials and a supplier of British goods.

These demands were always carefully worded in prayerful and apologetic language. The Moderates only demanded some concessions and not freedom from British rule. This Congress program remained the same for the next 20 years (1885–1905). The same demands were repeated year after year with hardly any response from the government. The moderates adopted a very patient, cautious approach for fear of attracting government hostility.

At the same time, it is true that the demands were quite comprehensive and the Congress Program was truly national in nature. The program was broad enough to accommodate interests of all classes and communities.

> In 1895 Poona Congress, President Surendranath Banerjee stated that the Congress had never asked for representative institutions for the masses, but such institutions for the educated community, 'who by reason of their assimilation of English ideas and their familiarity with English methods of government might be presumed to be qualified for such a boon'.

British Reaction to Congress Demands

Initially, the British adopted a neutral attitude to the Congress demands. After 1887, their attitude stiffened. The British began to brand the nationalists as 'disloyal babus', 'seditious Brahmins'

and 'violent villains'. The Congress was described as 'a factory of sedition' and Congressmen as 'disappointed candidates for office and discontented lawyers who represent no one but themselves'.

Challenging the national character of the Congress, Lord Dufferin stated that the Congress represented only "a microscopic minority" and its demands as 'big jump into the unknown'.

George Hamilton, Secretary of State, ridiculed the Congress leaders and accused them of possessing 'seditious and double sided character'.

Some pamphlets of the Congress attracted open hostility of the government. These were pamphlets condemning government despotism such as 'A conversation between Maulvi Farukhuddin and one Ram Buksh of Kambakhtpur'.

Henceforth, the British began encouraging pro-British elements like Sir Sayed Ahmed Khan and Raja Shiv Prasad of Banaras. The Aligarh Movement and the United India Patriotic Association were formed to counter the Congress.

Seeing the growing unity of the Indian people, the British pushed further the policy of 'divide and rule' to increase the divide between Hindus and Muslims.

In 1890, government employees were forbidden to attend Congress meetings. As the century drew to a close, the British attitude became even more hostile to the Congress under Lord Curzon.

1900 Lord Curzon openly declared, 'The Congress is tottering to its fall, and one of my greatest ambitions while in India is to assist it to a peaceful demise.' Writing to the Madras Governor in 1903, he further stated, 'My policy ever since I came to India has been to reduce the Congress to impotence.'

Evaluation of the Moderates

Criticisms

The moderates were thoroughly criticised by the radical or extremist leaders. Their methodology of 3Ps-Prayer, Petition and Protest was decried as political mendicancy. According to the Extremists, the only political religion of the Moderates was their loyalty to the Crown and their only political aim was to improve their chances of getting seats in the central/provincial legislatures or judicial services or acquiring titles. Their only political activity included excessive speeches and attending Congress sessions as 'annual recreation' every year. The Moderates were also accused of limiting Congress to a narrow social base, i.e. the middle class, for fear of losing their leadership if the masses joined the movement.

In the words of **Lala Lajpat Rai**, 'it was at best an opportunist movement. It opened opportunities for hypocrites and enabled some people to trade in the name of patriotism."

Tilak described the Congress as "a Congress of flatterers,' the Congress session as 'a holiday recreation' and the Moderates as 'frogs' who croaked once a year.

Another weakness of the early Moderate phase lay in its narrow social base. The leaders lacked political faith in the masses and in the absence of mass support a strong political stand could not be adopted.

Achievements of the Moderates

Despite their shortcomings and criticisms, the role of the moderates cannot be completely ignored and even within the four walls of constitutional laws by their soft yet proactive nationalist approach led to some fruitful results-

Political Achievements

- **Indian Councils Act of 1892:** As a result of the sustained agitation of the Moderates, the British government was forced to pass the Indian Councils Act of 1892. But this act did not fully satisfy the Congress leaders. They were demanding that public purse be controlled by Indian representatives and had raised the slogan, 'No taxation without representation', which was earlier raised by the Americans during their War of Independence.
- **ICS Examination in India:** In 1893, the House of Commons passed a resolution for simultaneous examination for ICS in London and in India.
- **Demand for Swaraj:** Later, in 1905 Banaras Session, the Congress first demanded Swaraj or self-rule for Indians within the British Empire on the model of self-governing colonies like Australia or Canada (equivalent of Dominion Status). This demand was first referred to by GK Gokhale. In 1906 at Calcutta session, swaraj was explicitly demanded by Dadabhai Naoroji.
- **Birth of Democratic ideas:** The early nationalists put up a strong defence of civil rights wherever the government tried to curtail them. This political work of the early nationalists contributed in germination of democratic ideas among Indian people.
- **Training of Indians in political work:** The early nationalists also contributed in training the people in political work, popularising among them modern ideas and in exposing the evils of British rule.

Economic Achievements

- **Economic Critique of British Rule:** Another great work of the moderates was their economic critique of British rule in India. Early economists like Dadabhai Naoroji, RC Dutt, DE Wacha and others put forth the theory of 'Drain of Wealth' which explained how Indian poverty was a result of colonial exploitation. Naoroji first mentioned the drain theory in his book Poverty and Un-British Rule in India. RC Dutt mentioned it in his book Economic History in India. Later, this theory was used as a burning argument by the extremists to denounce the British rule.
- **Welby Commission on Indian Expenditure:** In 1895, the Welby Commission on Indian Expenditure was appointed to enquire into Indian Expenditure

Social Achievements

- **Spread of Awareness for Civil Rights:** It was due to their incessant campaign that the defence of civil rights became an integral part of the freedom struggle. Consequently, there was a great public outrage at the arrest of Tilak in 1897 and at the arrest and deportation of Poona leaders, the Natu Brothers without a trial.

Evaluation

It is true that the INC could not achieve much success in its early phase. But at the same time, the Moderate Phase cannot be called as a failure. Moderates like Naoroji, DE Wacha, GK Gokhale, SN Banerjee were some of the most progressive Indians of their times and true patriots. They sincerely wished the progress of Indian society. They succeeded in creating a wide national awakening and the feeling among the people that they belonged to one nation-Bharat. History stands verdict that in later years, the weaknesses of the Moderate Phase were to be removed and achievements were to serve as a platform for more vigorous national movement in the later years.

Opinions

Bipan Chandra

The period from 1858 to 1905 was the seed time of Indian nationalism, and the early nationalists sowed the seeds well and deep. Instead of basing their nationalism on obscurantist appeal to the past, they rooted it in a hard-headed and penetrating analysis of the complex mechanisms of modern imperialism and chief contradictions between the interests of the Indian people and British rule. The result was that they evolved a common political and economic program which united rather than divided the different sections of the people. In spite of their many failures the early nationalists laid strong foundations for the national movement to grow upon and that they deserve a high place among the makers of modern India.

Pattabhi Sitaramayya

We cannot blame them for the attitude they adopted as pioneers of Indian political reform any more than we can blame the brick and mortar that is buried six feet deep in the foundation and plinth of a modern edifice. They have made possible the superstructure, story by story, by colonial self-government, Home Rule within the empire, and on top of all, complete independence.

Previous Years' Questions – Preliminary Exam

1. Which one of the following Indian leaders was dismissed by the British from the Indian Civil Service? **[UPSC 1999]**
   (a) Satyendranath Tagore
   (b) Surendranath Banerjee
   (c) R C Dutt
   (d) Subhash Chandra Bose

2. That the per capita income in India was ₹20 in 1867–68, was ascertained for the first time by **[UPSC 2000]**
   (a) MG Ranade
   (b) Sir W Hunter
   (c) RC Dutta
   (d) Dadabhai Naoroji

3. Who among the following used the phrase 'Un-British' to criticise the English colonial control of India? **[UPSC 2008]**
   (a) Anand Mohan Bose
   (b) Badruddin Tyabji
   (c) Dadabhai Naoroji
   (d) Pherozeshah Mehta

4. Who among the following rejected the title of knighthood and refused to accept a position in the Council of the Secretary of State for India? **[UPSC 2008]**
   (a) Motilal Nehru (b) M G Ranade
   (c) G K Gokhale (d) B G Tilak

5. Consider the following statements: **[UPSC 2012]**
   The most effective contribution made by Dadabhai Naoroji to the cause of Indian National Movement was that he
   1. Exposed the economic exploitation of India by the British
   2. Interpreted the ancient Indian texts and restored the self confidence of Indians
   3. Stressed the need for eradication of all the social evils before anything else

   Which of the statements given above is/are correct? Select the correct answer from the following options.
   (a) 1 only (b) 2 and 3 only
   (c) 1 and 3 only (d) 1, 2 and 3

6. Who out of the following was/were economic critic/critics of colonialism in India? **[UPSC 2015]**
   1. Dadabhai Naoroji
   2. G Subramaniam Iyer
   3. R C Dutt

   Select the correct answer from the following options.
   (a) Only 1 (b) 1 and 2
   (c) 2 and 3 (d) 1, 2 and 3

Previous Years' Questions – Main Exam

1. What were the contributions of the Moderates in the formative stage of the Indian National Congress? **[UPSC 1994]**
2. What do you understand about 'Drain of Wealth' during British rule? Examine its effects on Indian economy. **[UPSC 1997]**
3. Why did the moderates lose appeal with the Indians and failed to elicit a desired response from the British? **[UPSC 1998]**
4. How did economic nationalism mirror the work of the early Nationalist leadership in India? **[UPSC 1998]**
5. Discuss the main objectives of the Indian National Movement upto 1905. What were its basic weaknesses during this period? **[UPSC 2001]**
6. Why did the 'Moderates' fail to carry conviction with the nation about their proclaimed ideology and political goals by the end of the nineteenth century? **[UPSC 2017]**

Practice Questions – Preliminary Exam

1. Consider the following statements with regard to the composition of the early Congress-
   1. Most of the members came from the landed aristocracy.
   2. The legal profession was most heavily represented.

Which of the above statements is/are correct? Select the correct answer from the following options.

(a) 1 only (b) 2 only
(c) both (d) neither

2. 1. The Moderates were full of admiration for British culture.
   2. The Moderates were powerfully attracted to the ideas of democracy and modern civil rights.

Which of the above statements is/are incorrect? Select the correct answer from the following options.

(a) 1 only (b) 2 only
(c) both (d) neither

3. Consider the following statements with regard to the early nationalists-
   1. The early nationalists had faith in the justice and goodness of the British people.
   2. They believed that the British rule was much needed in India as it was the reason behind the peace and order in the country.
   3. They believed that the progress of the country was being hindered not because of the British rule but because of the socio-economic backwardness of the country.

Which of the above statements is/are correct? Select the correct answer from the following options.

(a) 1 and 2
(b) 2 and 3
(c) All of the above
(d) None of the above

4. _____ was a member of the British House of Commons and set up a strong Indian lobby there.

(a) Badruddin Tayabji
(b) Dinshaw Edulji Wacha
(c) Womesh Chandra Banerjee
(d) Dadabhai Naoroji

5. 1. In 1889, a British Committee of Indian National Congress was set up.
   2. The journal 'Indian Opinion' was started by this Committee to educate the British people about Indian issues.

Which of the above statements is/are correct? Select the correct answer from the following options.

(a) 1 only (b) 2 only
(c) both (d) neither

6. Following elements were encouraged by the British to counter the Congress.
   1. Raja Shiv Prasad of Banaras
   2. Ram Buksh of Kambakhtpur
   3. United India Patriotic Association

Which of the above statements is/are correct? Select the correct answer from the following options.

(a) 1 and 2 (b) 2 and 3
(c) 1 and 3 (d) all of the above

7. The weakness of the early Moderate phase lay in its _____.

(a) admiration for British culture
(b) faith in British sense of justice and basic goodness
(c) narrow social base
(d) all of the above

8. Which of the following was not an achievement of the moderates?

(a) Economic critique of the British Rule
(b) Welby Commission
(c) Demand for Swaraj
(d) All of the above

9. Which of the following was not among the early demands of the Moderates?

(a) Expansion of Legislative Councils with more powers and more representation of Indians in them
(b) Education in vernaculars
(c) Reduction of military expenditure
(d) Civil rights like freedom of speech, thought, association and press

10. Consider the following statements about Gopal Krishna Gokhale.
    1. He was totally opposed to Western civilisation.
    2. He was radical in politics as well as in matters of social reforms.
    3. He was the first propounder of the doctrine of passive resistance.

Which of the above statements is/are correct? Select the correct answer from the following options.

(a) 1 and 2 only
(b) 2 and 3 only
(c) All of the above
(d) None of the above

Practice Questions – Main Exam

1. Throw light on the ideology and approach of the moderates towards the British government. To what extent was their approach responsible for the Moderate–Extremist split after the Swadeshi movement?
2. The moderate phase from 1885 to 1905 could not achieve significant results, evident in all the acts passed by the government during this period. Critically evaluate.
3. Discuss the achievements of the moderates and evaluate their role as catalysts in promoting the rise of modern Nationalism in the last decades of the 19th century.

Answers

Previous Years' Questions – Preliminary Exam

1. (b) 2. (d) 3. (c) 4. (c) 5. (a)
6. (d)

Practice Questions – Preliminary Exam

1. (b) 2. (d) 3. (c) 4. (d) 5. (a)
6. (c) 7. (c) 8. (d) 9. (b) 10. (c)