

# GS Foundation 2024: Modern India

## Handout 25: Politics of Moderates (1885-1905)

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The first 20 years of the INC is the era of Moderates. INC was **not a radical** organisation from the beginning. It was moderate in both goals and means. They hoped to gain freedom gradually and step-by-step.

Early Nationalists believed that massed need to be awakened before even taking the cause for freedom. Their **agenda** was:

- Creation of public interest in political questions
- Formulate popular demands on national basis
- Organize public opinion.

**Demands** (not complete independence but specific demands)

- **Councils Reforms**

1. More Indians participation in both central and provincial legislatures. They should have real powers.
2. By 1900, the claims for swarajya (self-government) like that in Australia or Canada.

- **Administrative Reforms**

1. Indianization of ICS: Simultaneous exam, increase in age limit, remove limit on the number of Indians in the service
2. Appointment of Indians to ranked officers in the army
3. Separation of judiciary from executive
4. Criticism of delays in and costs of justice delivery
5. Opposed aggressive foreign policy and wars with Afghanistan, Burma, suppression of NE tribals etc.
6. Urged government for public welfare activities, expansion of primary education and more facilities for higher education.

- **Defence of Civil Rights**

1. Modern civil rights: freedoms of speech, press, thought and association.
2. Promoting Jury system to protect rights of Indians

- **Economic Reforms**

1. Imposition of custom duties on foreign goods to protect nascent Indian industries
2. Reduction of land revenue
3. To check exploitation of plantation workers
4. Refer to Drain of Wealth section.

The **method** of the moderates was not street agitation, but **liberal constitutional means**. They didn't believe in mass political agitation but rather preferred:

- Forming associations (most important being the INC itself)
- Holding meetings
- Giving speeches
- Drafting/Submitting petitions and memorandums
- Journalism (criticism of govt policies through press)

Thus,

- Both demands and methods of the moderates were liberal in character. (whiggish)
- The moderates were progressive nationalists. They were inspired by the vision of better and brighter future of the people as well as the country.
- They were westernized in their outlook. Most of them were western educated.
- They were secular in character. The members of Congress were coming from all the permanent Indian faiths. The first four presidents of Congress were belonging to four different religions.
- Their method was nonviolent in character. They believed in the efficacy of peaceful means.
- Moderates were democratic in outlook. They demanded democratization of Indian politico-admin system so that Indians could participate effectively in running affairs of state.
- Moderate nationalists were egalitarian in their outlook. They were against discrimination on the basis of race culture or any others ground.

#### **Attitude towards the masses:**

- **Opposed militant mass movement and lacked faith in the politics of masses.**
  - Believed that militant **mass struggle** could be waged **only after** the heterogenous elements of Indian society had been **welded into a nation**.
  - They assumed that **illiterate masses cannot represent** themselves. They need middle class leaders. They assigned masses a **passive role**.
  - However, the notion that the masses had their political rights had not come at this point of time in India. All of this quickly changed in a manner of 2 decades in India.
- Their Swarajya was not meant for all, rather it is meant only for educated Indians. However, their demands were not only for the elites but concerned the common people as well.

In short, these are all liberal methods of constitutional agitations, all while continuously and sincerely professing loyalty.

- They believed that if **public opinion was created**, organized and popular **demands presented to the authorities** through petitions, meetings, resolutions and speeches, the authorities would concede the demands gradually. (*educate Indians*)
- Next to educating Indian public opinion, they worked to **educate British public** opinion. It required active public propaganda in Britain.
  - In 1889, a British Committee of INC was founded. It started a journal called India in 1890.
  - Dadabhai spent major part of his life and income in England in popularizing case for India.

### Question of “loyalty”

Moderates were sincere in their repeated profession of loyalty to crown

- First Congress: Three Cheers for Queen Victoria 27 times
- They had belief in **providential nature of the Raj**. Moderates believed that the British empire is the **force of modernisation**.
  - “In my belief, a greater calamity could not befall India than for England to go away and leave her to herself.” – Dadabhai
  - So, they expected the British government to bring essential reforms in India.
- They understood that the foundation of the **INC itself was the outcome of the British rule**.
  - Dadabhai in Calcutta Congress (1886) said that no such thing like INC would be possible in the time of Vikramaditya or Akbar. It is British who brought law and order, safety and now people could leave their property and family back and assemble in Calcutta. Thank you for that.
- Moreover, there was **fear of suppression**.
  - They also noticed how brutally British had suppressed 1857 and felt that time was not yet ripe for such a challenge.
  - India was not ready and culture of open opposition to the Crown was not yet there.
- They were influenced by **western liberal tradition**. They were not against the British rule, only against the un-British aspects of the British rule.
  - They didn’t demand expulsion of British from India, rather they wanted democratic rights.
  - They even claimed their anxiety to get grievances addressed partly to help the Crown become popular in India.
- Later when they took note of the evils of the British rule and the failure of the government to accept nationalist demands for reform, many of them stopped talking of loyalty to the British rule and **started demanding self-government instead**.

In the early years, the INC had among its leaders some **Englishmen**.

Allahabad	1888	George Yule
Bombay	1898	William Wedderburn
Madras	1894	Alfred Webb
Bombay	1904	Henry Cotton
Allahabad	1910	William Wedderburn
Calcutta	1917	Annie Besant

**Most important contribution was in the Economic Field.**

- Moderates' vision was to create India as an industrialized country under the aegis of Indian capital. Their major **concern** was to protect and promote Indian industries.
- Important exponents:

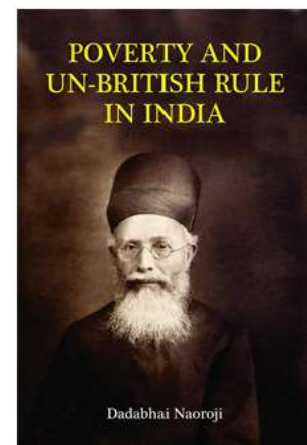
Author	Book
Dadabhai Naoroji	Poverty and Un-British Rule in India
Justice MG Ranade	Essays on Indian Economy
Romesh Chandra Dutt	The Economic History of India
William Digby	Prosperous British India
Subramaniam Iyer	Some Economic Aspects of British Rule in India

Other important exponents of the Economic Criticism

- Rao Bahadur GV Joshi
- Dinshaw Wachha

**The details of the Economic criticism:**

- Detailed study the question of poverty.
  - Dadabhai Naoroji was first to attempt to calculate per capita income of Indians. He estimated that it was 20 Rs in 1867-68.
- After becoming aware of the poverty, attempted a scientific economic analysis.
  - Earlier, in the 18<sup>th</sup> c, it was loot and tribute thus visible. Now, in the 19<sup>th</sup> c, it is more sophisticated, less visible methods. It consists of Free Trade and Foreign Capital.
- Main thrust: Drain of Wealth
  - Meaning: unilateral outflow of capital to other country without anything in return
  - Pipelines of Drain
  - Various Estimates of Drain




- RC Dutt: 50% of net revenue (around 20 million)
- Ranade: 33% of net revenue
- Dadabhai: 25% of net revenue
- William Digby: 30 million per year
- Modern historian: 17m, represented less than 2% of exports value over this period.

Not only that the British were blamed for the growing backwardness and poverty but some solutions were suggested as **remedy**.

- Stop the Drain
  - Reduce land revenue burden on peasantry, abolish high taxes (eg on salt)
  - Condemned military expenditure.
  - Appoint Indians to as many high posts as possible
  - Opposed large-scale investment of foreign private capital in Indian railways, plantations and industries as it led to suppression of Indian capitalists and strengthened British stranglehold.
- Develop Indian economy
  - Development of agricultural banks to save peasantry from clutches of the moneylenders, large-scale extension of irrigation to save country from famines, extension of permanent settlement, repeal of forest laws.
  - Modern Industry and technology based on Indian capital
  - For rapid development of Indian industries – need for government protection through import tariff protection and direct government aid. (Opposed countervailing excise duty)
  - Spread of technical education
  - Popularization of the idea of swadeshi and boycott.

**Significance of Economic Criticism** (although economic argument, it had political and ethical consequences)

- It helped in the development of **Nationalism that is based on scientific anti-colonial analysis** and not obscurantist past. Of all the anti-colonial movements, Indian is the one most deeply rooted in the understanding of the nature of colonial exploitation.
- Exposed and attacked the **economic essence of colonization**.
  - Proved that **poverty** is due to British imperialism. Such conclusion questioned the basic purpose of colonialism itself.
  - Linked poverty to colonialism → **undermined the ideological foundations/hegemony** of the benevolent rule, corroded moral authority
- Easy to grasp for **common people**
  - Created anger and helped Indians unite

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- To solve the economic issues → we need political rights
  - It became the **major plank for all the future leaders** to criticize the British rule. It was accepted by Moderates, Extremists, Socialists, Communists, Gandhi, Nehru...

Limitation: Due to the own weakness of the moderates, they could not convert the anger generated into effective agitation. They didn't connect Drain of Wealth with Swadeshi as a political tool, which was later done by extremists.

## Survey of some important Moderate leaders

- **Dadabhai Naoroji**

- Grand old man of India
- Huge contribution to the study of poverty and generating thesis of Drain of Wealth
- Didn't stop at discussing only the question of economy but spent 50+ years trying to get political rights in Britain and in India.
- East India Association (London, 1866)
- He canvassed in Britain, also contested many times and once became an MP in the House of Commons.
- Congress President 3 times: 1886, 1893, 1906



- **Justice MG Ranade**

- Taught virtues of industrialization to the entire generation.
- Didn't exactly agree with DoW but focussed more on entire socio-economic regeneration.
- Founder of Poona Sarvajanik Sabha (1870), major force behind Prarthana Samaj (1867)
- Also formed Indian National Social Conference (1887)



- **Pherozshah Mehta** (successful Bombay lawyer)

- Studying his contribution is like studying history of Congress from 1885-1915. He participated in the INC from the day one, initially as the follower of Dadabhai and once he left for England, he had his one-man control over INC organization.
- Considered as the Moderate among moderates.

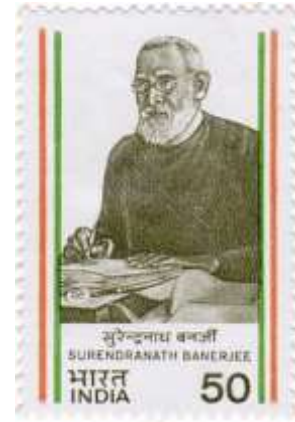


- **Gopal Krishna Gokhale**

- Student of MG Ranade and later became the guru of Mahatma Gandhi
- Hugely respected for personal rectitude, support to gender cause and backward people.
- First major moderate leader to go for fulltime social-political work by rejecting profession.
- He gave the evidence of misuse of Indian finances to Welby Commission
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- Legislative work (Bombay Legislative Council 1899, Imperial Legislative Council in 1901)
  - Fearless, intellectual, and sharp criticism of government
  - Most famous for budget analysis.



- Asked for free and universal basic education.
- Attitude
  - He didn't consider Legislative council as the battlefield, but an arena to change the opinion of the opponent.
  - Converted the Legislative Councils into open universities for people.



- Servants of India Society in 1905 – to promote both nationalism and social service
- Congress President at Benares in 1905

- **SN Banerjee**

- One of the first-generation ICS officers from India but had to resign for no mistake of his own
- Brilliant orator and started schools/colleges and also newspapers etc
- Most effective phase: during Swadeshi movement – he sternly opposed the partition of Bengal and was not willing to compromise at all.
- Book: Nation in the Making

- **G Subramanya Iyer**

- Editor of **The Hindu** for first 20 years (1878-98).
- Also started **Swadeshmitran**, a Tamil language newspaper
- Honour of tabling first resolution in the first Congress (1885) with KT Telang.
- Play a significant role in economic nationalism



- **Others**

- **Badruddin Tyabji**

- Efforts to bring Muslims in the Congress
- Opposed by Wahabis as well as loyalists (led by Sir Sayyid)
- Third President of Congress (1887)
- Later became the first Muslim judge in the Bombay High Court.

- **Rahimatullah Sayani**

- Congress President in 1896 (12<sup>th</sup> Session): This year is known for the first time singing of Vande Mataram in Congress Session

- RC Dutt
- Dinshaw Wacha
- C Vijayaraghavachariar
- P Ananda Charlu
- PR Naidu
- Sankaran Nair
- Ghosh – Lalmohan, Anandmohan, Manmohan



- WC Banerjee
- Madanmohan Malaviya
- Pandit Ayodhyanath

### **Assessment of limitations and weaknesses of the moderates**

During the moderate phase, the Indian National Congress met with **limited success** with respect to its declared objectives. They were unable to create effective pressure on the colonial regime to accept their demands in any meaningful way.

- Very meagre concrete immediate and direct achievements
- **Elite, English-educated, upper caste social background**
  - Lawyers, journalists, landlords, merchants etc
  - No special efforts to promote representation of lower castes as well as Muslims. (savarna bias)
  - No anti-zamindar or anti-moneylender proposal. They Opposed to Bengal Tenancy Act (1885), Punjab Land Alienation Act (1900)
- **Not full-time political activists**
  - Lawyers and Journalists made about 70% delegates
- **Ineffective methods** (Gandhi: Slow Party) due to inherent limits to the effectiveness of liberal constitutional methods under colonial framework
  - Politics of prayers, petition and memorials.
  - Gradualism: not ready to take a big jump.
- Constant **professions of loyalty** were not attractive to people.
- Failure to make INC a genuine full-fledged party. It remained a **“3-day tamasha”**, a part time affair during annual sessions. Thus, it limited its ability to respond and lead.
- They **lacked faith in the masses**, their propaganda didn't reach the masses. As their mass base remained limited, and so did their power to pressure the government.
- **They didn't keep the pace with changes.** They couldn't see that their own success made their politics obsolete, and they failed to accept the new demands. Thus, they tried for exclusion of extremists from the Congress which further weakened them.

However, it doesn't mean that the moderates were of all failure They were the torch bearers of Indian nationalism.

- **Congress pressure was responsible for**
  - **Council Act of 1892** included the provisions of the election for the first time, under moderates' pressure.
  - **Welby Commission**
  - **Aitchison Commission**
  - In 1893, a resolution was introduced in the British House of Commons providing for holding of CSE simultaneously in India along with London.

- Moderates were the **first-generation nationalists**, they worked hard against heavy odds to convince the British of need of initiating reforms in India.
- **National awakening:** arousing feelings of common nation, exploitation and common enemy
  - The writings and speeches of moderates brought about maturity among Indian nationalists. As a result of this the national struggle could keep on gaining strength.
- **Political work based on concrete study** of hard facts and not narrow appeal to religious sentiments or emotional appeal to hoary past.
- **Mercilessly exposed** the exploitative character of the British empire. With the systematic economic criticism of the colonial economy, they exposed the hollowness of British claim of paternal regime. It was their most commendable achievement which exposed the true character of the British Raj.
- **Trained people** in the art of political work, popularized ideas of democracy, civil liberties etc. Indians became familiar with modern politics.
- **Formed Indian National Congress.** Their all India, secular approach gave legitimacy to the Congress, helping it emerge as a true representative of all Indians.
- **Represented Indians** in the provincial and imperial legislative councils
- **Evolved national political and economic programs/objectives** for future political struggle.

While the weakness of the Early nationalists was removed by the later generation, its achievements were to serve as the base for a more vigorous national movement in future. The perceived ineffectiveness of moderate politics inspired the next generation of nationalists to search for new methods of struggle. As a result, passive resistance and mass politics emerged as the preferred method of nationalists from the beginning of the 20th century. Thus, despite many weaknesses, the early nationalists laid the foundation for the national movement to grow upon.