
UNIT 5 MODERATES AND EXTREMISTS: DADABHAI NAOROJI, MG RANADE AND BG TILAK

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5.1 INTRODUCTION

The nationalist movement was articulated differently in different phases of India's freedom struggle. Apart from ideological shifts, there were noticeable differences in the social background of those who participated in the struggle against the British. For instance, the Gandhian phase of Indian nationalism, also known as the phase of mass nationalism, radically altered the nature of the constituencies of nationalism by incorporating the hitherto neglected sections of Indian society. It would not be an exaggeration to mention that Indian masses regardless of religion, class and caste plunged into action in response to Gandhi's anti-British campaign. That Gandhi had inaugurated a completely new phase in Indian freedom struggle can easily be shown by contrasting it with its earlier phases, namely, the moderate and extremist phases. In contemporary historiography, 'the Moderate' phase begins with the formation of the Indian National Congress in 1885 and continued till the 1907 Surat Congress when 'the Extremists' appeared on the political scene. The basic differences between these two groups lay in their perception of anti-British struggle and its articulation in concrete programmes. While the Moderates opposed the British in a strictly constitutional way the Extremists favoured 'a strategy of direct action' to harm the British economic and political interests in India. By dwelling on what caused the dissension among those who sincerely believed in the well-being of the country, the aim of this unit is also to focus on the major personalities who sought to articulate as coherently as possible the respective ideological points of view.

5.2 DEFINING MODERATES AND EXTREMISTS

While Moderates and Extremists constitute contrasting viewpoints, their contribution to the

freedom struggle in its early phase is nonetheless significant. Moderates like Dadabhai Naoroji, Surendranath Banerji, Pherozeshah Mehta, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, M. G. Ranade, were uncritical admirers of Western political values. They held the concept of equality before law, of freedom of speech and press and the principle of representative government as inherently superior to their traditional Hindu polity which they defined as 'Asiatic despotism'. So emphatic was their faith in the British rule that they hailed its introduction in India as 'a providential mission' capable of eradicating the 'mis-rule' of the past. Given the reluctance of the Crown to introduce representative institutions in India, Dadabhai Naoroji lamented that the British government in India was 'more Raj and less British'. What he meant was that though the British rule fulfilled the basic functions of Hindu kingship in preserving law and order in India, its reluctance to introduce the principle of representative government was most disappointing. So, despite their appreciation of British liberalism their admiration hardly influenced the Raj in changing the basic nature of its rule in India.

5.3 MODERATE IDEOLOGY

The moderate philosophy was most eloquently articulated by Surendranath Banerji (1848 - 1925) in his 1895 presidential address to the Congress. In appreciation of the British rule, Banerji thus argued: 'we appeal to England gradually to change character of her rule in India, to liberalise it, to adapt it to the newly developed environments of the country and the people, so that in the fullness of time India may find itself in the great confederacy of free state, English in their origin, English in their character, English in their institutions, rejoicing in their permanent and indissoluble union with England'. It seems that the Moderates were swayed by British liberalism and were persuaded to believe that in the long run the crown would fulfill its providential mission. Banerji appears to have echoed the idea of Dadabhai Naoroji, (1825-1917) who in his 1893 Poona address, underlined the importance of 'loyalty to the British' in protecting India's future. As he stated, 'until we are able to satisfy the British people that what we ask is reasonable and that we ask it in earnest, we cannot hope to get what we ask for, for the British are a justice-loving people ... [and] at their hands we shall get everything that is calculated to make us British citizens'. Despite his 'loyalist' attitude, Naoroji was perhaps the first Congressman who argued strongly for a political role for the Congress that so far was identified as a non-political platform. While conceptualising the role of the Congress in 'the British-ruled' India, Naoroji had no hesitation in announcing that the Congress 'as a political body [was] to represent to our rulers our political aspirations'.

There are two points that need to be highlighted here. First, as evident, the Moderates identified specific roles for the Congress that sought to mobilise people in accordance with what was construed as the most appropriate goal in that context. The guiding principle was to avoid friction with the ruler. In fact, this is how G. K. Gokhale explained the birth of the Indian National Congress. According to him 'no Indian could have started the Indian national Congress... if an Indian had ... come forward to start such a movement embracing all India, the officials in India would not have allowed the movement to come into existence'. Secondly, the philosophy stemmed from an uncritical faith of the early nationalists in the providential mission of the British and hence the British conquest of India was not 'a calamity' to be lamented but 'an opportunity' to be seized to 'our advantage'. So it was not surprising for Ranade to uncritically appreciate the British nation that came into existence 'by ages of struggle and self-discipline which illustrates better than any other contemporary power the

supremacy of the reign of law'. This is what differentiated the British government from other colonial powers which endorsed different systems of law for the colonies. The British nation therefore 'inspires hope and confidence in colonies and dependencies of Great Britain that whatever temporary perturbation may cloud the judgment, the reign of law will assert itself in the end'. Thirdly, the moderates believed that the continuity of the British rule was *sine-qua-non* of India's progress as 'a civilised nation'. In other words, the introduction of the British rule was a boon in disguise simply because Hindus and Muslims in India, argued Ranade, 'lacked the virtues represented by the love of order and regulated authority'. Hailing the British rule as 'Divine dispensation', he further appreciated the British government for having introduced Indians to 'the example and teaching of the most gifted and free nation in the world'. Finally, **Ranade** defended a strong British state in India to ensure equality of wealth and opportunity for all. By justifying state intervention in India's socio-economic life, he differed substantially from the basic tenets of liberalism that clearly restricts the role of the state to well-defined domain. Here the Moderates performed a historical role by underlining the relative superiority of a state, drawn on the philosophy of enlightenment, in comparison with the decadent feudal rule of the past. To them, the imperial state that **gradually** unfolded with its devastating impact on India's economy, society and polity, was a distant object and hence the idea never gained ground in their perception and its articulation.

Underlying the Moderate arguments defending the British rule in India lay its 'disciplining' function in **comparison** with the division and disorder of the eighteenth century. And also, the exploitative nature of imperialism and its devastating role in colonies did not appear to be as relevant as it later became. So, the moderate assessment of British rule, if contextualised, seems to be appropriate and drawn on a new reality that was clearly a break with the past. **Finally**, it would be wrong to **dismiss** the role of the Moderates in India's freedom struggle given their loyalist attitude to the rule for two reasons: (a) there is no denying that the Moderates never launched mass agitations against the alien state in India; but by providing an ideological critique of the British rule in India keeping in view the grand ideals **on which** the British civilisations stood, they actually initiated a political dialogue that loomed large in course of time; and (b) the Moderate constitutional and peaceful **method** of political mobilisation, if contextualised, seems to be a milestone in India's freedom struggle for it paved the ground for other kinds of anti-imperial protests once it ceased to be effective.

5.4 EXTREMIST IDEOLOGY

In contrast with the Moderates who pursued a policy of reconciliation and compromise with imperialism, the Extremists demanded time-bound programmes and policies harming the British interests in India. This new school of thought represented an alternative voice challenging the Moderates' compromising policies of conciliation with imperialism. Disillusioned with the Moderates, the Extremists believed in 'self reliance' and sought to achieve **Swaraj** through direct action. So, there were two levels at which the Extremist critique had operated. At one level, they questioned the Moderate method of 'mendicancy' that, for obvious reasons, appeared 'hollow' when **the** imperial logic of the state prevailed over other considerations. In **other words**, the failure of Moderates in **obtaining** concessions for the Indians indicated the changing nature of the colonial state that had shown its true colour as soon as its political control in India was complete. So it was a level in which the **Extremists** articulated their opposition both **to** the Moderates and **the** British government. At another level, the Extremists

also felt the need of being self-reliant economically to fight the British state that gained in strength by exploiting India's economic resources. Swadeshi was not merely an economic design but also a political slogan on which India was sought to be made strong by being self-reliant. This was an area where serious intellectual contributions were made by the exponents of Extremism – BG Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal, Aurobindo among others. Unlike the Moderates who insisted on constitutional means to reform the British state, not only did the Extremists dismiss this plea as 'most unfortunate' but also ruled out the possibility of negotiations with the ruler for 'verbal' concession.

There were several factors that had contributed to the disillusionment of the Extremists with the Moderates. First, the growing government atrocities, especially in the wake of the 1905 Bengal partition agitation, clearly revealed the inadequacies of the constitutional and peaceful means. In fact, the Congress strategy of persuasion was usually interpreted as a sign of weakness by the British government and its supporters. Hence, there was a growing pressure for a change of strategy to force the authority to succumb to the demands of the Indians. Articulating the feeling of the extremist section of the Congress, Tilak thus exhorted: 'political rights will have to be fought for. The Moderates think that these can be won by persuasion. We think that they can only be obtained by strong pressure'. As evident, the friction between the two sections of the Congress reached a pinnacle and a formal division was imminent. Secondly, the uncritical acceptance of Western enlightenment of the Moderates was also rejected as a sign of emotional bankruptcy, especially, given the rich heritage of Indian civilisation. What contributed to the sense of pride among these youths in Indian values and ethos was certainly the socio-religious movements of the late nineteenth century seeking to articulate an alternative theoretical design for nationalist intervention. The ideal of Bhagavad Gita inspired them to pursue a line of action against the alien rule for its effort to denigrate Indian and its cultural distinctiveness. Vivekananda was a central figure in this nationalist conceptualisation and his teachings remained a significant source of inspiration for those who were critical of blind adherence to the western ideals. Thirdly, the recurrence of famine and the lackadaisical attitude of the British government brought out the exploitative nature of colonial power in clear terms. Even in the context of massive human sufferings, the government did not adopt measures to ameliorate the conditions of the victims. In fact, there were indications that the government deliberately withdrew relief in areas that suffered the most. The true nature of colonialism came to the surface and it was alleged that the indifferent alien authority left no stone unturned to gain maximum at the cost of human miseries. What caused maximum damage to the already crippled Indian economy was an economic policy of the British government that had stopped the supply of food grains to the affected areas on the plea that it would avoid famine in places where there was apparently no crisis of food. Nobody was persuaded by this logic. Even the Moderate Leaders like Naoroji and Ranade were critical of this governmental stance in the context of severe human agony that could have been avoided had the government followed 'a humane policy' even after the outbreak of famine in certain parts of India. The atmosphere was surcharged with anti-British feelings and the failure of the Moderate Congress to persuade the British for relatively pro-people welfare policies catapulted the Extremists to the centre stage. Finally, the anti-Indian repressive measures during the tenure of Curzon as the Viceroy (1899-1905) revealed the extent to which the Moderate methods of conciliation failed. Persuaded by his belief that Indians lacked the capacity to rule, the Viceroy adopted several legislations – the 1904 Indian Universities Act, the 1899 Calcutta Corporation Act, to name a few – in which the

representation of Indians was both drastically reduced and bypassed conveniently to fulfill his design. What was most distinctive in his reign was the decision to partition Bengal in 1905 that galvanised the masses into action against this imperial device of creating a religious division among the Indians. Although Curzon ostensibly undertook this administrative step for efficiency in administration, what prompted him was the principle of divide and rule. Since Curzon attributed the success of political movements in Bengal to the Hindu-Muslim unity, he deliberately adopted this measure to permanently separate the Hindus from the Muslims. This design caught the attention of the nationalist irrespective of religion and ideology and even a typical Moderate leader Surendranath Banerji while criticising Curzon for Bengal partition hailed 'this most reactionary of Indian viceroys' as someone who 'will go down to the posterity as the architect of Indian national life'. By releasing those forces in the wake of the partition agitation 'which contributed to the upbuilding of nations', argued Banerji, 'Curzon had made us a nation'.

As evident, by the early part of the twentieth century and especially in the context of the 1905 Bengal partition agitation, the Moderates lost credibility since their anti-imperial strategies failed to gain what they aspired for. Moreover, their faith in the British liberalism did not work to their advantage and it dawned on the later nationalists, particularly the Extremists, that the colonial power in India drew more on exploitation and less on the basic tenets of liberalism. So, the rise and consolidation of Extremism as a political ideal in contrast with the Moderate philosophy is a clear break with the past since the principles that inspired the late nineteenth century nationalists appeared to have completely lost their significance.

5.5 MODERATE – EXTREMIST COMPARISON

The distinction between the Moderates and Extremists is based on serious differences among themselves in their respective approaches to the British Empire. Based on their perception, the Moderates hailed the British rule as most beneficial in contrast with what India had confronted before the arrival of the British. Until the 1905 Bengal partition, the Moderate philosophy was based on loyalty to 'the Empire that had shown signs of cracks in the aftermath of atrocities, meted out to those opposing Curzon's canonical design of causing a fissure among the Indians by highlighting their religious schism. For an extremist like Bipin Pal, it was most surprising because 'how can loyalty exist in the face of injustice and misgovernment which we confront everyday'. Opposed to the Moderate stance, the Extremists always considered the British rule as a curse that could never render justice to the governed in India. Not only did they challenge the British government for its 'evil' design against the Indians, they also criticised the Moderates for having misled the nationalist aspirations in a way that was clearly defeating. Instead, the new nationalist outlook, articulated by the Extremists drew largely on an uncompromising anti-imperial stance that also fed the revolutionary terrorist movement in the late nineteenth and early part of the twentieth century. Secondly, the difference between the Moderates and Extremists was based on their respective approaches to the outcome of the nationalist intervention. While the Moderates stood for the attainment of 'self government' through gradual reforms, the Extremists insisted on **complete Swaraj**. In other words, the model of self-government, as evident in the dominion of Canada and Australia, appeared to be an ideal form of government for India. The Extremist arguments were qualitatively different. By demanding complete swaraj, Tilak, the most prominent of the Extremists, exhorted that 'swaraj is my birthright' and 'without swaraj there could be no

social reform, no industrial progress, no useful education, no fulfillment of national life. That is what we seek and that is why God has sent us into the world to fulfill Him'. In appreciation of this attitude, Bipin Pal, a member of the Lal-Bal-Pal group, was categorical in stating that the principal goal of the extremist struggle was 'the abdication of the right of England to determine the policy of the Indian Government, the relinquishment of the right of the present despotism to enact whatever law they please to govern the people of this country'. **Secondly**, the Extremists were not hesitant in championing 'violence', if necessary, to advance the cause of the nation while the Moderates favoured constitutional and peaceful methods as most appropriate to avoid direct friction with the ruler. In contrast with these means, the Extremists resorted to boycott and swadeshi that never evoked support from the Moderates. While defending boycott, Tilak argued that 'it is possible to make administration deplorably difficult and to create conditions impossible for the British **bureaucracy** by fighting for our rights with determination and tenacity and by boycott and strike'. Urging those associated with the British bureaucracy, Tilak further argued that with the withdrawal of the Indians from the administration, 'the entire machinery will collapse'. Simultaneously with boycott of government offices, the Extremists also propagated for boycott of foreign goods and **promotion** of swadeshi or home-spun. This strategy, first adopted in the context of the 1905 Bengal partition agitation, was further extended to the nationalist campaign as a whole, **presumably** because of its effectiveness in creating and sustaining the nationalist zeal. The economic **boycott**, as it was characterised in **contemporary** parlance, caused consternation among the British industrialists more than the other types of boycott. Thirdly, the Moderates appeared to be happy under the British presumably because of their belief that Indians were not capable of self-rule. This was what **prompted** them to support the British rule uncritically. The views of the Extremists were, for obvious reasons, diametrically opposite. While articulating his opposition to this idea, Tilak argued that 'we recognise no teacher in the art of self-government except self-government itself. It values freedom for its own sake and desires autonomy, immediate and unconditional regardless of any considerations of fitness or unfitness of the people for it'. Here too, the Moderate-Extremist distinction is based on serious ideological differences. While the former supported a loyalist discourse, the latter simply rejected the stance in its articulation of anti-imperialism. Fourthly, in the Extremist conceptualisation of struggle against imperialism, the ideal of self-sacrifice, including the supreme sacrifice figured prominently while in the Moderate scheme of political struggle, this idea appeared to have received no attention. This probably indicates two different faces of Extremism: on **the** one hand, there was the public appearance where the strategies of boycott, swadeshi and strike were pursued to articulate the nationalist protest; the sudden violent attack was, on the other, also encouraged to terrorise the British administration that was rattled following the incessant violent interventions by those who preferred underground militant operation. One of the preferred modes of action was assassination of 'brutal' British officials. Such acts would strike terror into the hearts of the rulers, arouse the patriotic instincts of the people, inspire them and remove the fear of authority **from** their minds. And it had propaganda value because during the trial of those involved in conducting violent attacks on the British officials, **the** revolutionaries, and their cause received adequate publicity not only in the pro-government but **also** in the **nationalist media**. Finally, while the Moderates drew upon the British variety of liberalism, the Extremists were inspired by the **writings** of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and the teachings of Vivekananda. In view of their faith in constitutional means of opposition to the British rule, Moderates preferred the path of conciliation rather than confrontation **whereas** the Extremists, espousing the demand for Swaraj, plunged into direct action against the government

by resorting to boycott and strike. Unlike the Moderates who drew upon the ideas of Gladstone, Disraeli and Burke to refine their political strategy, the Extremists found Bankim's Anandamath, a historical novel that narrated the story of the rise of the Hindu Sannyasis vis-à-vis the vanquished Muslim rulers and Vivekananda's interpretation of Vedanta philosophy. The poem "Bande Mataram" in Anandamath clearly set the tone of the Extremist philosophy in which the notion of 'Mother' seemed to be prominent. Mother representing simultaneously the divine motherland and the mother-goddess, Durga, conveyed both patriotic and religious devotion. This was an articulation that generated mass emotional appeal which the Moderate form of constitutional agitation failed to arouse. Bankim and Vivekananda were probably the most effective ideologue who evoked Hindus imageries, well-tuned to the contemporary scene. By overlooking the non-Hindu tradition completely and accepting the Hindu tradition as Indian tradition, they however, nurtured a narrow view of history which is misleading given the cross-fertilisation of multiple traditions in Indian civilisation.

5.6 THE IMPORTANCE OF LAL-BAL-PAL

The Extremist ideology created a leadership trio of Lal-Bal-Pal (Lala Lajpat Rai, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Bipin Chandra Pal), who, while critiquing the Moderates, altered the nationalist vocabulary by incorporating swadeshi, boycott and national education. So popular were Lal-Bal-Pal in Punjab, Maharashtra and Bengal respectively, that Moderates seemed to have lost their credibility in these areas. Of the trio, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, rooted in Maharashtra, was perhaps the most articulate militant leader of this phase of freedom struggle. Long before his active involvement in the Congress, Tilak articulated his nationalist ideas in both *Kesari* (in Marathi) and *Mahratta* (in English). In 1893, he transformed the traditional religious Ganapati festival into a campaign for nationalist ideas through patriotic songs and speeches. Similarly, in 1896, he introduced the Shivaji festival to inspire the youth by drawing upon the patriotism of Shivaji in opposition to the Moghul ruler, Aurangzeb. It would be wrong however to blame as a 'revivalist' since he supported, most enthusiastically, the Ganapati and Shivaji festivals. In fact, Tilak himself responded to this charge by saying that these festivals were intended to give to the people 'a sense of belonging and to evoke in them a pride in their past'. He also dismissed the idea that he was in favour of bringing back 'the reign of Shivaji or of Peshwas' while arguing strongly for 'popular and representative government' in opposition to the 'oriental ideal of revivalism'. He rose to prominence by organising a successful campaign for boycott of foreign clothes in Maharashtra in 1896 in protest against the imposition of taxes on cotton. His involvement in the no-tax campaign in areas, adversely affected by the 1896-7 famine in Maharashtra, had clearly articulated his mission of expanding the Congress base by incorporating the peasants, a constituency that was simply beyond the Moderates purview. By deciding to serve the plague victims in Poona during the 1897, Tilak became a leader of the people who automatically were drawn to him for humanism. Apart from his role in serving the victims, he wrote several pieces in Kesari condemning the arrangement and the steps, the government undertook in combating this deadly disease. In fact, the killing of Rand, the chairman of the Plague Commission in Poona in 1898 was attributed to the popular resentment against official measures even in the government document. Tilak was arrested following the assassination but was released soon because of lack of proof of his involvement.

Two important features in Tilak's political philosophy separated him from the Moderate

thinkers. First, unlike the Moderates who argued for gradual introduction of democratic institutions in India, Tilak insisted on immediate swaraj or self rule. His concept of swaraj was not complete independence but a government constituted by the Indians themselves that 'rules according to the wishes of the people or their representatives. Similar to the British executive that 'decides on policies, impose and remove taxes and determine the allocation of public expenditure', Indians should have the right 'to run their own government, to make laws, to appoint the administrators as well as to spend the tax revenue'. This is one dimension of his thought; the second dimension relates to the notion of *prajadroha* or the right of the people to resist an authority that loses legitimacy. In Tilak's conceptualisation, if the government fails to fulfill their obligation to the ruled and becomes tyrannical, it lacks legitimacy to rule. What is interesting to note that Tilak's *prajadroha* also justifies the enactment of laws to prevent unlawful activities of the people. If contextualised, this idea makes sense because he was aware that a total rejection of the government would invite atrocities on the nationalists who had neither the organisational backing nor a strong support base among the people. So, his support for governmental preventive mechanisms was strategically conditioned and textured.

Tilak was a nationalist par excellence. In view of his uncritical acceptance of Vedanta philosophy and orthodox Hindu rituals and practices, Tilak was accused of being sectarian in multi-religious India. That he upheld the most reactionary form of Hindu orthodoxy was evident in his opposition to the 1890 Age of Consent Bill that sought to raise the age of consummation of marriage of girls from ten to twelve years. While the Moderate spokesman, Ranade hailed the bill for its progressive social role, Tilak found in this legislation an unwarranted intervention in Hindu social life. Similarly, his involvement in the Cow Protection Society alienated the Muslims to a large extent from the Extremist campaign, Tilak's argument in favour of cow protection drew upon the sacredness of cow in Hindu belief disregarding completely the importance of beef in Muslim diet. Furthermore, the organisation of national festivals in honour of Shivaji, the Hindu hero of the Marathas and also redefining of an essentially Hindu religious festival – the Ganapati *utsav* – in nationalist terms, set the ideological tenor of Tilak's political philosophy where Muslims seemed to be peripheral if not entirely bypassed.

It is necessary to pause here for a moment and reassess Tilak's worldview critically with reference to the context in which it was articulated. There is no denying that underlying all these religious forms lay the national patriotic purpose. Under the cover of religious festivals, Tilak sought to create a nationalist platform for an effective mobilisation against the British that would not allow, for obvious reasons, a political campaign adversely affecting the imperial interests. Under conditions of severe governmental repression of all political agitation and organisation, before the nationalist movement had struck roots among the masses, the use of such apparently religious and orthodox forms of nationalist outpouring seems to be strategically conditioned and Tilak emerged as a master planner in refining these in the pre-Gandhian phase of India's freedom struggle. So, not only did he articulate the voice of protest in a unique vocabulary, but also he expanded the constituency of the nationalist politics by proclaiming the supposed spiritual superiority of the ancient Hindu civilisation to its Western counterpart. In other words, Tilak played a historical role in the construction of a new language of politics by being critical of 'the denationalised and westernised' Moderate leaders who blindly clung to typical western liberal values disregarding their indigenous counterparts while articulating their opposition to the British rule. It is possible to argue that Tilak had a

wider appeal for his campaign was couched in a language that drew upon values, rooted in Indian culture and civilisation in contrast with what the Moderates upheld, which were completely alien. So, Tilak was not merely a nationalist leader with tremendous political acumen; he himself represented a new wave of nationalist movement that created an automatic space for it by (a) providing the most powerful and persuasive critique of Moderate philosophy and (b) articulating his nationalist ideology in a language that was meaningful to those it was addressed. This is how Tilak is transcendental and his ideas of swadeshi, boycott and strike had a significant sway on Gandhi who refined and well-tuned some of the typical Extremist methods in a completely changed socio-economic and political context when the nationalist struggle had its tentacles not only in the district towns but also in the villages that unfortunately remained peripheral in the pre-Gandhian days of freedom struggle.

5.7 THE 1907 SURAT SPLIT

From 1905 to 1907, the struggle between various trends within the nationalist articulation of freedom struggle was fought out also at the annual sessions of the Congress, culminating in the Surat split of December, 1907. The flashpoint was the 1905 Bengal partition that appeared to have enabled the Extremists to provide a sharp critique of the Moderate strategies that miserably failed. The Moderate method of constitutional agitation, articulated in three Ps – petition, prayer and protest – remained largely an **academic** exercise that seemed to have exhausted potentials with the consolidation of various groups championing direct action against the British. Condemning the Bengal partition and the repressive measures, Gokhale in his 1905 Benaras presidential address referred to economic boycott in a **very** lukewarm manner **to** avoid further repression by the government. The 1906 Calcutta Congress fulfilled the Extremists goal partly in the sense that the Congress president, Dadabhai **Naoroji** officially endorsed the resolutions on boycott, swadeshi, national education and self-government. The Extremists effort to extend the boycott resolution to cover provinces other than Bengal as well was defeated along with the resolution on boycott of honorary **offices** and of foreign goods. Enthusiastic over the victory of the Liberal **Party** in England, the Moderate leadership was hopeful of a series of reform measures including the annulment of the **Bengal** partition. The appointment of John Morley as the secretary of state in early 1907 was hailed for his liberal views and was expected to inaugurate a new face of British **colonialism** in contrast with the bitter legacy of the **Curzon** era. Despite changes in the British political climate, the friction between the Moderates and Extremists had shown no abatement and they were preparing themselves for a head-on collision in the 1907 Surat Congress presided over by Rash Behari Ghosh who was vehemently opposed by Tilak and his colleagues from Maharashtra and Bengal. This was perhaps the only annual meeting of the Congress that was dissolved without deliberations.

On the surface, one may find that the Surat Congress ended in a **fiasco** because it failed to amicably settle the Extremist-Moderate dichotomy. In other words, what came out of this failed meeting of the Congress was largely attributed to the irreconcilable contradiction between the Extremists and Moderates over the anti-imperial political agenda. There **is**, however, another dimension if one goes below the surface. The antagonism that split the Congress in Surat was the product of a **fierce** struggle between 'the Tilakites of Poona' and Moderates of **Bombay**, led by Pherozeshah Mehta. In fact, the Bengal Extremists, including Aurobindo wanted to avoid the split within the Congress so as not to weaken the Swadeshi movement

in Bengal. This was expressed clearly at the Bengal Provincial Conference at Patna, presided over by Rabindranath Tagore in which a resolution for an immediate session of the Congress was accepted unanimously. Even Tilak's effort did not yield results. The Bombay Moderates remained adamant and at its 1908 Allahabad convention, the split was formalised by debarring those, opposed to 'the strictly constitutional methods' from participating in the Congress meetings and deliberations. The most obvious victim of this division was the nationalist movement itself that appeared to have taken a backseat during internecine feud among the Moderates and Extremists. Interestingly, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to demarcate the Extremists and Moderates in terms of their class background. Supporting largely the Hindu vested interests, both of them, though separated ideologically, were a product of an era when the nationalist politics was primarily confined to the urban areas. While the extremists, by encouraging 'individual heroism' and 'revolutionary terrorism', inaugurated a new phase in nationalist agitation, Tilak's 1896-7 no tax campaign for the famine-stricken peasants in Maharashtra was a concrete step in expanding the constituency of nationalist politics by addressing the issues that hitherto remained neglected in the Congress agenda.

5.8 AN EVALUATION

Of the different phases of Indian nationalism, the Moderate and Extremist phases represented the voice of an incipient nationalist movement that was neither properly crystallised nor had a support base among the masses. Based on their faith in British liberalism, Moderates were perfectly justified in pursuing the policy of reconciliation. The 1909 Morley-Minto Reform was probably the upper limit of what the Moderates could have gained under the circumstances. Even the revocation of Bengal partition was largely attributed to the reform zeal of the Liberal government in Britain. So, Moderate efforts did not, at least on paper, go waste. What was however most remarkable was the fact that Moderate campaign let loose a process, of which Extremism was also offshoot, whereby new ideas were set in motion. The nationalist zeal, which so far was articulated in the annual sessions of the Congress in a strictly constitutional and peaceful way, was translated into a variety of actions, including boycott, swadeshi and strike. This resulted in an immediate expansion of the constituencies of nationalist politics that, under the Moderates, represented largely the upper crest of Indian society. Despite sharing more or less the common social background with the Moderates, the Extremists however addressed the issues of the peasantry and workers, of course in their terms, to underline the ideological differences with the former.

What lay at the root of the acrimonious exchange between the Moderate and Extremist leaders during the short-lived 1907 Surat Congress was perhaps the irreconcilable differences between the two. Articulating the ideological schism in probably the most sordid manner, both these groups seemed to have allowed them to be swayed by considerations other than anti-imperialism. That is why Rabindranath Tagore lamented that by determining to capture the Congress by hook or crook, the Moderate and Extremists failed to conceptualise, let alone realise, the basic nationalist goal of serving the people and thereby made a mockery of themselves and also what they stood for. Despite Tagore's own effort in bringing these two forces together in the aftermath of the Surat fiasco, the adoption of resolutions in the 1908 Allahabad convention by the Moderates for permanently disqualifying the Extremist section of the Congress underlined the declining importance of nationalism as a cementing ideology vis-à-vis the British imperialism. Also, the Extremist alternative was not qualitatively different

although the Extremists were more militant and their critique of British rule was articulated in stronger terms. They neither created a viable organisation to lead the anti-British movement nor could they define the movement in a way that differed from that of the Moderates.

5.9 SUMMARY

It would be however historically inaccurate to dismiss the Moderate and Extremist efforts as futile simply because of the historical role they discharged in conceptualising nationalist struggle in an organised manner. With a well-defined political agenda, the early Congress leadership of both varieties identified the true nature of the principal political contradiction in a colony between the ruler and the ruled. There were various counts where the efforts were neither well-tuned to the requirement nor well-directed involving the people regardless of religion, caste and clan. In fact, the failure of the Congress in its formative years to address the social contradiction between the Hindus and Muslims led to the growth of the Muslim League in 1906 as the sole champion of the Muslims socio-political interests in British India. From now on, a significant section of Indian Muslims asserted a separate identity vis-à-vis Congress and the government. Given the class bias of the Hindus, the chasm between these two principal communities had grown bigger in course of time. If this was one side of the coin, the other side provided the foundation for a qualitatively different experiment in organised politics, conducted by Gandhi through non violence in the post-war period. Redefining the Extremist method of Swadeshi, boycott and strike in the changed environment when the imperial power became more brutal than before, Gandhi easily mobilised the masses in the anti-British campaign. The Congress in the Gandhian phase of nationalist struggle was completely transformed into a movement that had its tentacles even in remote villages. So, Gandhi's success as a leader of a gigantic mass movement against perhaps the most organised imperial power was largely due to the organisational backing of the Congress that remained a mere platform for annually ventilating grievances against the British as well as settling scores against the fellow congressmen.

5.10 EXERCISES

1. What are the distinctive features of Moderate and Extremist philosophy?
2. What are the factors that contributed to the growth of Extremists in Indian nationalism?
3. How do you account for the split between the Moderates and Extremists?
4. In what ways, Dadabhai Naoroji was an epitome of Moderate politics?
5. How did Tilak differ from the Moderates? How did he articulate swadeshi, boycott and strike?
6. In what ways, the 1907 Surat split was a watershed in Indian struggle for independence?
7. What are the contributions of the Moderates and Extremists to the Indian struggle for freedom?