

## CHAPTER 3

### The Struggle Begins

#### MODERATE PHASE AND EARLY CONGRESS (1858-1905)

The rise and growth of Indian nationalism has been traditionally explained in terms of Indian response to the stimulus generated by the British Raj through creation of new institutions, new opportunities, resources, etc. In other words, Indian nationalism grew out of colonial policies and reaction. In fact, it would be more correct to see Indian nationalism as a product of a mix of various factors.

- (i) Worldwide upsurge of the concepts of nationalism and right of self-determination initiated by the French Revolution.
- (ii) Indian Renaissance.
- (iii) Offshoot of modernisation initiated by the British in India.
- (iv) Strong reaction to British imperialist policies in India.

#### FACTORS IN GROWTH OF MODERN NATIONALISM

##### Understanding of Contradiction in Indian and Colonial Interests

People came to realise that colonial rule was the major cause of India's economic backwardness and that the interests of the Indians involved the interests of all sections and classes—peasants, artisans, handicraftsmen, workers, intellectuals, the educated and the capitalists. The nationalist movement arose to take up the challenge of these contradictions inherent in the character and policies of colonial rule.

##### Political, Administrative and Economic Unification of the Country

The British rule in the Indian subcontinent extended—from the Himalayas in the north to the Cape Comorin in the south and from Assam in the east to Khyber Pass in the west. The British created a larger state than that

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of the Mauryas or the great Mughals. While Indian provinces were under 'direct' British rule, Indian states were under 'indirect' British rule. The British sword imposed political unity in India. A professional civil

service, a unified judiciary and codified civil and criminal laws throughout the length and breadth of the country imparted a new dimension of political unity to the hitherto cultural unity that had existed in India for centuries. The necessities of administrative convenience, considerations of military defence and the urge for economic penetration and commercial exploitation were the driving forces behind the planned development of modern means of transport and communication such as railways, roads, electricity and telegraph.

From the nationalists' point of view, this process of unification had a two-fold effect:

(i) Economic fate of the people of different regions got linked together; for instance, failure of crops in one region affected the prices and supply in another region.

(ii) Modern means of transport and communication brought people, especially the leaders, from different regions together. This was important for exchange of political ideas and for mobilisation and organisation of public opinion on political and economic issues.

**Western Thought and Education** The introduction of a modern system of education afforded opportunities for assimilation of modern western ideas. This, in turn, gave a new direction to Indian political thinking, although the English system of education had been conceived by the rulers in the interest of efficient administration. The liberal and radical thought of European writers like Milton, Shelley, John Stuart Mill, Rousseau, Paine, Spencer and Voltaire helped many Indians imbibe modern rational, secular, democratic and nationalist ideas.

The English language helped nationalist leaders from different linguistic regions to communicate with each other. Those among the educated who took up liberal professions (lawyers, doctors, etc.) often visited England for higher

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education. There they saw the working of modern political institutions in a free country and compared that system with the Indian situation where even basic rights were denied to the citizens. This ever-expanding English educated class formed the middle class intelligentsia who constituted the nucleus for the newly arising political unrest. It was this section which provided leadership to the Indian political associations.

### Role of Press and Literature

The second half of the nineteenth century saw an unprecedented growth of Indian owned English and vernacular newspapers, despite numerous restrictions imposed on the press by the colonial rulers from time to time. In 1877, there were about 169 newspapers published in vernacular languages and their circulation reached the neighbourhood of 1,00,000.

The press while criticising official policies, on the one hand, urged the people to unite, on the other. It also helped spread modern ideas of self-government, democracy, civil rights and industrialization. The newspapers, journals, pamphlets and nationalist literature helped in the

exchange of ,political ideas among nationalist leaders from different regions.

#### Rediscovery of India's Past

The historical researches by European scholars, such as Max Mueller, Monier Williams, Roth and Sassoon, and by Indian scholars such as R.G. Bhandarkar, R.L. Mitra and later Swami Vivekananda, created an entirely new picture of India's past. This picture was characterized by well-developed political, economic and social institutions, a flourishing trade with the outside world, a rich heritage in arts and culture and numerous cities. The theory put forward by European scholars, that the Indo-Aryans belonged to the same ethnic group from which other nations of Europe had evolved, gave a psychological boost to the educated Indians. The self-respect and confidence so gained helped the nationalists to demolish colonial myths that India had a long history of servility to foreign rulers.

#### Progressive Character of Socio-religious Reform Movements

These reform movements sought to remove social evils which divided the Indian society; this had the effect

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of bringing different sections together, and proved to be an important factor in the growth of Indian nationalism.

#### Rise of Middle Class Intelligentsia

British administrative and economic innovations gave rise to a new urban middle class in towns. According to Percival Spear, "The new middle class was a well-integrated all-India class with varied background but a common, foreground of knowledge, ideas and values. It was a minority of Indian society, but a dynamic minority. It had a sense of unity of purpose and of hope.

This class, prominent because of its education, new position and its close ties with the ruling class, came to the forefront. The leadership to the Indian National Congress in all its stages of growth was provided by this class.

#### Impact of Contemporary Movements Worldwide

Rise of a number of nations on the ruins of Spanish and Portuguese empires in South America, and the national liberation movements of Greece and Italy in general and of Ireland in particular deeply influenced the nationalist ranks.

#### Reactionary Policies and Racial Arrogance of Rulers

Racial myths of white superiority were sought to be perpetuated by a deliberate policy of discrimination and segregation. Indians felt deeply hurt by this. Lytton's reactionary policies such as reduction of maximum age limit for the I.C.S. examination 'from 21 years to 19 years (1876), the grand Delhi Durbar of 1877 when the country was in the severe grip of famine, the Vernacular Press Act (1878) and the Arms Act (1878) provoked a storm of opposition in the country. Then came the Ilbert Bill controversy. Ripon's Government had sought to abolish, "judicial disqualification based on race distinctions" and to give the Indian

members of the covenanted civil service the same powers and rights as those enjoyed by their European colleagues. Ripon had to modify the bill, which almost defeated the original purpose, because of stiff opposition from the European community.

It became clear, to the nationalists that justice and fair play could not be expected where interests of the European community were involved. However, the organized agitation

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by the Europeans to revoke the Ilbert Bill also taught the nationalists how to agitate for certain rights and demands.

### POLITICAL ASSOCIATIONS BEFORE THE INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS

The political associations in the early half of the nineteenth century were dominated by wealthy and aristocratic elements, local or regional in character, and through long petitions to the British Parliament demanded—

- \* administrative reforms,
- \* association of Indians with the administration, and
- \* spread of education.

The political associations of the second half of the nineteenth century came to be increasingly dominated by the educated middle class—the lawyers, journalists, doctors, teachers, etc. and they had a wider perspective and a larger agenda.

### Political Associations in Bengal

The Bangabhasha Prakasika Sabha was formed in 1836 by associates of Raja Rammohan Roy.

The Zamindari Association, more popularly known as the 'Landholders' Society', was founded to safeguard the interests of the landlords. Although limited in its objectives, the Landholders' Society marked the beginning of an organized political activity and use of methods of constitutional agitation for the redressal of grievances.

The Bengal British India Society was founded in 1843 with the object of the collection and dissemination of information relating to the actual condition of the people of British India and to employ such other means, of peaceful and lawful character as may appear calculated to secure the welfare, extend the just rights and advance the interests of all classes of our fellow subjects.

In 1851, both the Landholders' Society and the Bengal British India Society merged into the British Indian Association. It sent a petition to the British Parliament demanding

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inclusion of some of its suggestions in the renewed Charter of the Company, such as

- (i) establishment of a separate legislature of a popular Character
- (iii) separation of executive from judicial functions
- (iv) reduction in salaries of higher officers
- (iv) abolition of salt duty, abkari and stamp duties.

These were partially accepted when the Charter Act of 1853 provided for the addition of six members to the governor-general's council for legislative purposes.

The East India Association was organized by Dadabhai Naoroji in 1866 in London to discuss the Indian question and influence public men in England to promote Indian welfare. Later, branches of the association were started in prominent Indian cities.

The Indian League was started in 1875 by Sisir Kumar Ghosh with the object of "stimulating the sense of nationalism amongst the people" and of encouraging political education.

The Indian Association of Calcutta superseded the Indian League and was founded in 1876 by younger nationalists of Bengal led by Surendranath Banerjee and Ananda Mohan Bose, who were getting discontented with the conservative and pro-landlord policies of the British Indian Association. The Indian Association of Calcutta was the most important of pre-Congress associations and aimed to

- (i) create a strong public opinion on political questions, and
- (ii) unify Indian people on a common political programme.

Branches of the association were opened in other towns and cities of Bengal and even outside Bengal. The membership fee was kept low in order to attract the poorer sections to the association.

#### Political Associations in Bombay

The Poona Sarvajanik Sabha was founded in 1867 by M. Mahadeo Govind Ranade and others, with the object of serving as a bridge between the government and the people.

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The Bombay Presidency Association was started by Badruddin Tyabji, Pherozshah Mehta and K.T. Telang in 1885.

#### Political Associations in Madras

The Madras Mahajan Sabha was founded in 1884 by M. Viraraghavachari, B. Subramaniya Aiyer and P. Anandacharlu.

#### PRE-CONGRESS CAMPAIGNS

These associations organized various campaigns before the first-all-India association—the Indian National Congress appeared on the scene. These campaigns were—

- (i) for imposition of import duty on cotton (1875)
- (ii) for Indianisation of government service (1878-79)
- (iii) against Lytton's Afghan adventure
- (iv) against Arms Act (1878)
- (v) against Vernacular Press Act (1878)

- (vi) for right to join volunteer corps
- (vii) against plantation labour and against Inland Emigration Act
- (viii) in support of Ilbert Bill
- (ix) for an All India Fund for Political Agitation
- (x) campaign in Britain to vote for pro-India party
- (ii) against reduction in maximum age for appearing in Indian Civil Service; the Indian Association took up this question and organized an all-India agitation against it, popularly known as the Indian Civil Service agitation.
- (iii)

#### INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS—ITS AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Solid ground had thus been prepared for the establishment of an all-India organisation. The final shape to this idea was given by a retired English civil servant, A.O. Hume, who mobilised leading intellectuals of the time and with their cooperation organized the first session of the Indian National Congress at Bombay in December 1885. As a prelude to this, two sessions of the Indian National Conference had been held

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in 1883 and 1885, which had representatives drawn from all major towns of India. Surendranath Banerjee and Ananda Mohan Bose were the main architects of the Indian National Conference.

The first session of the Indian National Congress was, attended by 72 delegates and presided over by Vomesh Chandra Bonnerjee. Hereafter, the Congress met every year in December, in a different part of the country each time. Some of the great presidents of the Congress during this early phase were Dadabhai Naoroji (thrice president), 13adruddin Tyabji, Pherozshah Mehta, P. Anandacharlu, Surendranath Banerjee, Romesh Chandra Dutt, Ananda Mohan Bose and Gopal Krishna Gokhale. Other prominent leaders included Mahadeo Govind Ranade, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Sisir Kumar Ghosh, Motilal Ghosh, Madan Mohan Malaviya, G. Subramaniya Aiyar, C. Vijayaraghavachariar, Dinshaw E. Wacha.

In 1890, Kadambiny the first woman graduate of Caktiffa University addressed the Congress session, which symbolised the commitment of the freedom struggle to give the women of India their due status in national life.

Apart from the Indian National Congress, nationalist activity was carried out through provincial conferences and associations, newspapers and literature.

#### Aims and Objectives of the Congress

These were to—

- (i) found a democratic, nationalist movement;
- (ii) politicise and politically educate people;
- (iii) establish the headquarters for a 'movement';
- (iv) promote friendly relations among nationalist political workers from different parts of the country;
- (v) develop and propagate an anti-colonial nationalist ideology;

(vi) formulate and present popular demands before the Government with a view to unifying the people over a common economic and political programme;

(vii) develop and consolidate a feeling of national unity among people irrespective of religion, caste or province.

(viii) carefully promote and nurture Indian nationhood.

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### Was It a Safety Valve?

There is a theory that Hume formed the Congress with the idea that it would prove to be a 'safety valve' for releasing the growing discontent of the Indians. To this end he convinced Lord Dufferin not to obstruct the formation of the Congress. Modern Indian historians, however, dispute the idea of 'safety valve'. In their opinion the Indian National Congress represented the urge of the politically conscious Indians to set up a national body to express the political and economic demands of the Indians. If the Indians had convened such a body on their own, there would have been unsurmountable opposition from the officials; such an organisation would not have been allowed to form. In the circumstances, as Bipin Chandra observes, the early Congress leaders used Hume as a 'lightning conductor' i.e., as a catalyst to bring together the nationalistic forces even if under the guise of a 'safety valve'.

### METHODS OF POLITICAL WORK OF THE EARLY MODERATES (1885-1905)

The national leaders like Dadabhai Naoroji, Pherozshah Mehta, D.E. Wacha, W.C. Bonnerjee, S.N. Banerjee who dominated the Congress policies during this period were staunch believers in 'liberalism' and 'moderate' politics. As Moderates, they distinguished themselves from the neo-nationalists of the early twentieth century who were referred to as the Extremists.

The moderate political activity involved constitutional agitation within the confines of law and showed a slow but orderly political progress. The Moderates believed that the British basically wanted to be just to the Indians but were not aware of the real conditions. Therefore, if public opinion could be created, in the country and public demands be presented to the Government through resolutions, petitions, meetings, etc., the authorities would concede these demands gradually.

To achieve these ends, they worked on a two-pronged methodology—one, create a consciousness and national spirit and then educate and unite people on common political ends.

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British Government and British public opinion to introduce reforms in India on the lines laid out by the nationalists. For this purpose, a British committee of the Indian National Congress was established in London in 1899 which had Indira as its organ. Dadabhai Naoroji spent a portion of his life and income campaigning for India's case abroad: in 1890, it was decided to hold a session of the Indian National

Congress in London in 1892, but owing to the British elections of 1891 the proposal was postponed and never revived later.

The Moderate leaders believed that political connections with Britain were in India's interest at that stage of history and that the time was not ripe for a direct challenge to the British rule. Therefore, it was considered to be appropriate to try and transform the colonial rule to approximate to a national rule.

#### CONTRIBUTIONS OF MODERATE NATIONALISTS

##### Economic Critique of British Imperialism

The early nationalists, led by Dadabhai Naoroji, R.C. Dutt, Dinshaw Wacha and others, carefully analysed the political economy of British rule in India, and put forward, the to explain British exploitation of India. They opposed the transformation of a basically self-sufficient Indian economy into a colonial economy (i.e., a supplier of raw materials and foos an importer of finished goods and a field of investment for British capital). Thus, the Moderates were able to create an all-India public opinion that British rule in India was the major cause of India's poverty and economic backwardness.

To mitigate the deprivation characterising Indian life, the early nationalists demanded severance of India's economic subservience to Britain and development of an independent economy through involvement of Indian capital and enterprise. The early nationalists demanded reduction in land revenue abolition of salt tax, improvement in working conditions of plantation labour, reduction in military expenditure, and encouragement to modern industry through tariff protection and direct government aid. (Also refer to chapter on Economic Impact of British Rule in India.)

##### Constitutional Reforms and Propaganda in Legislature

Legislative councils in India had no real official power till 1920. Yet, work done in them by the nationalists helped the growth of the national movement. The Imperial Legislative Council constituted by the Indian Councils Act (1861) was an impotent body—designed to disguise official measures as having been passed by a > representative body. Indian members were few in number—thirty years from 1862 to 1892 only for brLfiye. Indians were nominated to it most of them being wealthy, landed and, loyalist, interests. Only a handful of political figures and intellectuals such as Ahmed Khan, Kristodas Pal, V.N. Mandlik, K.L. Nulkar and Rashbehari Ghosh were nominated.

From 1885 to 1892, the nationalist demands for constitutional reforms were centred around

1. expansion of councils—i.e., greater participation of Indians in councils,
2. reform of councils—i.e., more powers to councils, especially greater control over finances.

The early nationalists worked with the long-term objective of a democratic self-government. Their demands for constitutional reforms were conceded in 1892 in the form of the Indian Councils Act.



These reforms were severely criticised at Congress sessions, where the nationalists made no secret of their dissatisfaction with them. Now, they demanded (i) a majority of elected Indians, and (ii) control over the budget i.e., the 'power to vote upon and amend the budget. They gave the slogan—"No taxation without representation". Gradually, the scope of constitutional demands was widened and Dadabhai Naoroji (1904), Gopal Krishna Gokhale (1905) and Lokmanya Tilak (1906) demanded self-government like the self-governing colonies of Canada and Australia. Also, leaders like Pherozshah Mehta and Gokhale put government policies and proposals to severe criticism.

The British had intended to use the councils to incorporate the more vocal among Indian leaders, so as to allow them to let off their "political steam", while the impotent councils

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### Indian Councils Act 1892.

The main provisions of this Act were as follows.

- Number of additional members in Imperial Legislative Councils and the Provincial Legislative Councils was raised. In Imperial Legislative Council, now the governor-general could have ten to sixteen non-officials (instead of six to ten previously).
- Some of these additional members could be indirectly elected. Thus an element of election was introduced for the first time.
- Budget could be discussed.
- Questions could be asked.

But there were certain limitations of these reforms.

- The officials retained their majority in the council, thus leaving ineffective the non-official voice.
- The 'reformed' Imperial Legislative Council met, during its tenure till 1909, on an average for only thirteen days in a year, and the number of unofficial Indian members present was only five out of twenty-four.
- The budget could not be voted upon, nor could any amendments be made to it.
- Supplementaries could not be asked, nor could answers be discussed.

could afford to remain, deaf to their criticism. But the nationalists were able to transform these councils into forums for ventilating popular grievances, for exposing the defects of an indifferent bureaucracy, for criticising government policies/proposals, raising basic economic issues, especially regarding public finance.

The nationalists were, thus, able to enhance their political stature and build a national movement while undermining the political and moral influence, of imperialist rule. This helped in generating anti-imperialist sentiments among the public. But, at the same time, the nationalists failed to widen the democratic base of the movement by not including the masses, especially women, and not demanding the right to vote for all.

Campaign for General Administrative Reforms

These included the following:

Indianisation of government service: on the economic grounds that British civil servants expected very high emoluments

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while inclusion of Indians would be more economical; on political grounds that, since salaries of British bureaucrats were remitted back home and pensions paid in England, this amounted to economic drain; and on moral grounds that Indians were being discriminated against by being kept away from positions of trust and responsibility.

Separation from, executive functions.

Criticism of a bureaucratic and an expensive and time-consuming judicial system.

Criticism of foreign policy which resulted in Afghanistan war and suppression of tribals in the North-West.

Increase in expenditure on welfare (i.e., health, sanitation), education—especially technical—irrigation works and improvement of agriculture, agricultural banks for cultivators, etc. Better treatment for Indian labour abroad in other British colonies, who faced oppression and racial discrimination there.

Defence of Civil Rights These rights included the right to speech, thought, association and expression. An incessant campaign, the nationalists were able to spread modern democratic ideas, and soon the defence of civil rights became an integral part of the freedom struggle. It was due to the increased consciousness that there was a great public outrage at the arrest of Tilak and several other leaders and journalists in 1897 and at the arrest and deportation of the Nattu brothers without a trial. (Also refer to chapter on Development of Press in India.)

#### AN EVALUATION OF THE EARLY NATIONALISTS

- (i) They represented the most progressive forces of the time.
- (ii) They were able to create a wide national awakening of all Indians having common interests and the need to rally around a common programme against a common enemy, and above all, the feeling of belonging to one nation.
- (iii) They trained people in political work and popularised modern ideas.

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- (iv) They exposed the basically exploitative character of colonial rule, thus undermining its moral foundations.
- (v) Their political work was based on hard realities, and not on shallow sentiments, religion, etc.
- (vi) They were able to establish the basic political truth that India should be ruled in the interest of Indians.

(vii) They created a solid base for a more vigorous, militant, mass-based national movement in the following years.

(vii) However, they failed to widen their democratic base and the scope of their demands.

#### ROLE OF MASSES

The moderate phase of the national movement had a narrow social base and the masses played a passive role. This was because the early nationalists lacked political faith in the masses; they felt that there were numerous divisions and subdivisions in the Indian society, and the generally ignorant and had conservative ideas and thoughts. These heterogeneous elements had first to be welded into a nation before their entry into the political sphere. But they failed to realise that it was only during the freedom struggle and political participation that these diverse elements were to come together. Because of the lack of mass participation, the Moderates could not take militant political positions against the authorities. The later nationalists differed from the Moderates precisely on this point. Still, the early nationalists represented the emerging Indian nation against colonial interests.

#### ATTITUDE OF THE GOVERNMENT

The British Indian Government was hostile to the Congress from the beginning despite the latter's moderate methods and emphasis on loyalty to the British Crown. The official attitude stiffened further after 1887 when the Government failed to persuade the Congress to confine itself to social questions while the Congress was becoming increasingly critical of the colonial rule. Now, the Government resorted to open

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condemnation of the Congress, calling the nationalists "seditious, brahmins", "disloyal babus", etc., Dufferin called the Congress "a factory of sedition". Later, the Government adopted a 'divide and rule' policy towards the Congress. The officials encouraged reactionary elements and Raja Shiv Prasad Singh of Benaras to organize the United Patriotic Association to counter Congress propaganda. The Government also tried to divide the nationalists on the basis and, through a policy of 'carrot and stick', pitted the Moderates against the Extremists. But the Government failed to check the rising tide of Nationalism.

#### Views

"You don't realise our place in the history of our country. These monuments are nominally 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 altogether new in this land." Justice Mahadeo Govind Ranade to Gokhale (1891)

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, storey by storey, by

colonial selfgovernment, home rule within the empire, swaraj and on the top of all, complete independence. Pattabhi Sitaramayya

The period from 1858 to 1905 was the seed time of Indian nationalism; and the early nationalists sowed the seeds well and deep. Bipin Chandra

It was at best an opportunist movement. It opened opportunities for treacheries and hypocrisies. It enabled some people to trade in the name of patriotism. Lala Lajpat Rai

The Congress is tottering to its fall, and one of my great ambitions while in India is to assist it to a peaceful fall

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Summary

FACTORS IN GROWTH OF MODERN "NATIONALISM"

Understanding of contradictions in Indian and colonial interests  
Political, administrative and economic unification of the country.  
Western thought and education  
Role of press and literature  
Rediscovery of India's past-historical researches  
Rise of middle class intelligentsia  
Impact of contemporary movements worldwide  
Reactionary policies and racial arrogance of rulers

POLITICAL ASSOCIATIONS BEFORE INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS

1836-Bangabhasha Prakasika Sabha  
Zamindari Association or Landholders' Society  
1843-Bengal British India Society  
1851-British Indian Association  
1866-East India Association  
1875-Indian League  
1876-Indian Association of Calcutta  
1867-Poona Sarvajanik Sabha  
1885-Bombay Presidency Association  
1884-Madras Mahajan Sabha

EARLY NATIONALIST METHODOLOGY  
Constitutional agitation within four walls of law

Create public opinion in India and campaign for support to Indian demands in England  
Political education of people  
Political connections with Britain in India's interests at that stage  
Time not ripe for direct challenge to colonial rule

CONTRIBUTIONS OF MODERATE NATIONALISTS

Economic critique of British imperialism  
Constitutional reforms and propaganda in legislature  
Campaign for general administrative reforms  
Defence of civil rights.