

Extremist Phase (1905-1920)

[UPSC Notes]

What is the Extremist Phase?

The period between 1905 and 1920 is known as the period of the extremists. The main objective of the extremists was 'Swaraj.' For the first time, the historic session of Congress in Calcutta led by Dadabhai Naoroji, Swaraj, was accepted as the new goal of India's struggle for independence. It was a significant change that led to an ideal mission before Congress led the National Movement. Swaraj, before this period, also had a goal, but not like extremism.

Leaders like Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Lala Lajpat Rai, and Bipin Chandra Pal were known as the Extremist Congress. They believed in radical programs for the attainment of their demands. With their elitist background, the extremists thought that Moderates did not succeed in making any practical impact on the masses. Unlike the moderators, they choose to boycott Britishers' products and adopt Swadeshi. Under this, they rejected all the clothes and products brought in by the Britishers and chose to manufacture their products, for example, the fabric of khadi within the boundaries of India by the people of India. Unlike moderates, they rejected prayer and petition methods and advocated more vigorous agitation and mass action. Tilak remarked, 'Swaraj is my birthright, and I shall have it.'

History of Extremist Phase

The movement for India's independence began with the establishment of the Indian National Congress in 1885. The first session of the Indian National Congress at Bombay was in December 1885. It was presided over by Womesh Chandra Banerjee of Bengal and attended by 72 delegates. In its early years, the INC was a moderate organization and limited its means to constitutional methods and dialogue. Its demands were limited to including more Indians in the civil service and the armed forces.

But after a few years, the INC became more radical in its demands and approach. By 1905, there was an apparent rift in the party, which was now divided between old moderates and the newer group, the extremists. The reasons for the formation of the Extremists group of the Congress were:

- The failures of Moderates to win any remarkable achievement except the development of the administrative committees by the Indian Council Act, 1892.
- Indians in South Africa faced racial discrimination.
- Youth were inspired by the Russian Revolution and the overthrow of the Czar.
- Indians become impatient after not getting any significant results from the moderates.

- The Partition of Bengal in 1905 was the eye opener for Indians to recognize the real face and character of the British Empire, which inspired many Indians to take extremist steps against Lord Curzon.
- Extremist leaders were also inspired by spiritual nationalism.
- Indians are also motivated by the National Movements in Persia, Egypt, Turkey, etc.

Extremist Phase: The Surat Split of Congress

The Surat split of the Extremist phase meant the division of Congress in Surat in 1907. It was the most tragic situation ever witnessed by Congress in the history of the struggle for independence. The primary issue was who should be elected as president of the congress, Rash Behari Ghosh, supported by moderates, or Tilak, later on, Lala Lajpat Rai, supported by extremism.

Congress leaders split into groups, i.e., moderates and extremists, at the Surat in 1907. The Rift between these two sections became visible at the Banaras Session of Congress (1905) when some nationalist-led by Tilak denounced the method of the moderates and suggested passive resistance..

The leading causes of the Surat Split were:

- In the Surat Session of Congress, the two main objectives placed by the extremists were: Lala Lajpat Rai to be made the President of the INC and Demand for the resolution of Swaraj. The moderates did not accept these two demands,
- Bengal partition of 1905 enabled the Extremists to criticize the Moderate strategies
- The Moderate method of constitutional agitation, expressed in the three Ps (petition, prayer, and protest), remained largely an academic exercise. On the other hand, extremists supported the revolutionary tendencies, which asked for direct action against the British.

After the Surat Split in 1907, the moderates demanded colonial self-government against the extremist demand for complete independence.

Leaders of Extremist Phase

Lala Lajpat Rai, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, and Bipin Chandra Pal led the extremist cause in Punjab, Bombay, and Bengal. Some other leaders were Aurobindo Ghosh, Raj Narayan Bose, A.K. Dutt, and V.O.C. Pillai.

Methods of Leader of Extremist Phase

The extremist leader's working method differed from the moderate because it was based on self-confidence and self-sacrifice. The main program of extremism was-

- Swaraj
- Swadeshi
- National Education

- Boycott of a foreign institution

The Extremist leader had no conviction in the imperial British government. They always emphasize opposing the government by a method of passive resistance, mass movement, and refusal of everything related to the imperial government.

This leader tried to use their own cultural and social symbols, festivals, 'melas', etc., to cement the growing tendency of nationalism. Tilak organized Ganpati Mahotsav and Shivaji Mahotsav; Aurobindo created an energetic spirit over youth through Kali Puja. At the same time, these leaders also took inspiration from the song of Rabindranath Tagore, 'Amar Sonar Bangla,' as well as the painting of Arvind Nath Tagore. Unlike moderate leaders, extremist leaders' demands were based on legitimate rights. They thought that without making this organization, strong their demands for Swaraj, Swadeshi, and national education could not be promoted

Reactions of Government on Extremist Phase

The British government attacked the extremist leaders during the Extremist Phase. Between 1907 and 1911, the following laws were passed to check the extremist influence and activities:

- Seditious Meeting Act 1907.
- Indian Newspapers (Incitement to offenses) Act 1908.
- Criminal Law Amendment Act 1908.
- Indian Press Act 1910.
- Tilak was sentenced and served in prison in Mandalay (Burma) to support the revolutionaries involved in killing two women by his writing.

Impact of Extremist Phase

The concept of Swaraj was introduced in Congress. The same Swaraj became the political slogan of Mahatma Gandhi when he started his first National Movement, Non-Cooperation Movement. Swadeshi National academic boycott was the innovation that became the part of Gandhian strategy to fight against the colonial system. For the first time, the feeling of Patriotism was infused in the thought of nationalism that got strongly manifested by the Swadeshi movement. For the first time, the fear of Nationalism started threatening the Multi-British Empire.

Limitation of the Extremist Phase

The following were the limitations faced during the Extremist Phase of the Indian Independence Movement.

- Though extremism demanded Swaraj as a new goal of a national movement, the definition of Swaraj by extremist leaders was unclear. For example, Aurobindo Ghosh's

'Swaraj' meant complete Independence from foreign rule, but for Tilak, it was a kind of self-government under the British framework.

- Although the extremist leader opposed the moderates for not creating any mass movement but failed to create a mass movement, the social base of Congress led them couldn't bring the rural people within the radius of their ideology.
- The extremist leader, by their energetic and emotional appeal, created a new zeal among the people, but they failed to translate them into reality; reversionary activism came to emerge that was believing in bombs, pistols, and the assassination of famous English officers.
- Since all these extremist leaders started taking inspiration from the cultural legacy of Hinduism, the isolation of Muslims and Communalism started gaining momentum, and the British Empire instigated it.
- Like moderate, their ideology was not fundamental. They failed to provide a classic analysis like the drain of wealth theory.

