

Lecture-27



The Radical phase of Politics

THE EXTREMISTS

The rise of extremism on the Indian political scene was not sudden. In fact it had been growing steadily since the uprising of 1857. Though the uprising was brutally suppressed by the British, the ideas of 'Swadharma' and 'Swaraj', which had kindled the uprising continued to linger on as an undercurrent among the Indian people. The English educated class had remained aloof from the uprising. In the latter half of 19th century, the work of leaders like Ramkrishna Paramhansa, Swami Vivekanand, Swami Dayanand Saraswati, and Vishnusastry Chiplunkar and Sri Aurobindo instilled a sense of pride in the ancient Indian civilisation. They were successful, to a certain extent, in promoting political radicalism and bridging the gulf between the masses and the English educated class. The work of the moderate leaders had also exposed the evils of British rule and promoted the spread of national consciousness. The 'peaceful' methods used by the moderate leaders were not effective in making the British Government accept their demands. As a result a number of politically conscious people became frustrated and disillusioned. At the end of the 19th century, a strong feeling arose among the people that more radical political action was needed to force the British to accept popular demands.

Ideology and Methods

Unlike moderates, the extremist leaders neither believed in the goodness of the British rule nor in their sense of justice and fair play. They were aware that the British were driven by selfishness and had come to India to exploit her resources. Since exploitation of India was the chief motive of the British, the extremists did not expect them to take a sympathetic view of the popular demands of the Indian people. Therefore, it was necessary to use pressure to make them accept the demands, not by petitioning or praying like the moderates, but by openly agitating against them. For the Extremist leaders like Lokmanya Tilak, 'Swaraj' was a 'birth right' and was not at all dependent on British assurances.

The extremists' programme of action was radically different from that of the moderates and aimed specifically at arousing emotive indignation against British rule and thereby promoting active involvement of the masses in the agitations. The extremists aimed at preparing the masses for the struggle to gain 'Swaraj' by educating them, uniting them and instilling in

them a sense of self-respect, self-reliance, and pride in their ancient heritage. Aurobindo Ghose and Lokmanya Tilak had played a major role in developing the blue print of the extremist programme, which involved the following activities:

- a) 'Boycott' of foreign goods and promotion of 'Swadeshi' goods to give impetus to the growth of indigenous industry and commerce.
- b) Non-cooperation with the bureaucracy; this included 'boycott' of governmental activities.
- c) Establishment of schools and colleges that gave education in the Indian languages and instill in the students pride for the glorious heritage of India, make the students nationalistic and public spirited in character and knowledgeable, self-reliant and independent in spirit.
- d) 'Passive Resistance' to British rule by non-payment of revenue and taxes and by organising separate 'indigenous administrative institutions' parallel to those of the British at the level of villages, talukas and districts.

Significance of the Extremists

There was a fundamental change in the nature of Indian nationalism under extremist leadership due to their forceful articulation of the demand for 'Swaraj' and use of more radical methods than those of the moderates. Their concept of nationalism was emotionally charged and based on rich interpretation of Indian religious traditions. The Extremist leaders tried to reorient Indian religious traditions to worldly life and link them with the national liberation struggle. Aurobindo Ghose reinterpreted Vedanta philosophy, which advocated unity of man and God and based his concept of nationalism on it. To him national work was the work of God, which should be done in the spirit of Karma Yoga because the true nationalist was an ideal Karma Yogi, who performed his functions in the spirit of disinterestedness. The service of the millions of Indians was service of God because God was present in them. The extremists conceived the nation as 'Mother India', which represented united power or Shakti of millions of her children. Tilak reinterpreted the message of the Gita in his famous book Gita Rahasya. To Tilak, the Gita gave a message of disinterested action with full self-knowledge rather than that of Bhakti or Sanyasa. National work done for general welfare was a type of disinterested action. The new nationalism of the extremists was an "attempt to create a nation in India by reviving the spirit and action of the ancient Indian character." They vehemently opposed foreign rule. According to them, a good or just

government was not a substitute for selfgovernment and freedom was an inalienable right of all human beings.

MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTION:

Question 1: Royal Asiatic Society was founded by

- a) Sir William Jones
- b) Sir John Marshall
- c) R D Banerjee
- d) Sir William Bentick

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Answer: (a)

Question 2: Who was the founder of the Indian Association?

- a) Surendranath Bannerjee
- b) Bal Gangadhar Tilak
- c) Dadabhai Naoroji
- d) A O Hume

Answer: (a)

Question 3: Who observed “The Congress is in reality a civil war without arms”?

- a) Lord Dufferin
- b) M A Jinnah
- c) Sir Sayeed Ahmed Khan
- d) Lord Curzon

Answer: (c)

Question 4: Who attended the Imperial Durbar (1877) dressed in hand spun khadi?

- a) Ganesh vasudev Joshi
- b) MG Ranade
- c) Rabindranath Tagore
- d) Balendranath Tagore

Answer: (a)

Question 5: The earliest public association had been formed in modern India in 1837 was

- a) The Bengal British Indian Society
- b) The British India Association
- c) The Landholders Society
- d) The Madras Native Association