

UPSC Civil Services Examination

UPSC Notes [GS-I]

Topic: NCERT Notes: Indian National Movement – Extremist Period

In the beginning of the 20th century, a new class of national leaders emerged in India which was different from the moderate group. They took a more aggressive stance against the British Empire. They were typically younger and did not believe in the soft and persuasive approach of moderate leaders.

This is an important topic for UPSC and is also relevant for different [government exams](#).

The extremist phase of Indian nationalism is from 1905 to 1920.

Background/Causes of the rise of extremism

- The failure of the moderate leaders in getting any significant results from the British authorities.
- The limitations of the moderates were the main causes of the rise of extremism.
- The partition of Bengal in 1905 opened the eyes of the Indians to the true colours of the British rulers.
- Lord Curzon and his disdain for anything Indian also created resentment and anger against the foreigners.
- There was a fear among some leaders that the moderates with their westernized notions were trying to create an India in the image of the West.
- There was a revival of national pride at that time.
- The extremist leaders were also influenced by the growth of spiritual nationalism at that time.
- The Delhi Durbar held in 1903 when people had not fully recovered from the horrific effects of the famine that killed lakhs of people drew widespread condemnation.
- Events happening around the world also inspired the extremist leaders. Abyssinia's successful repulsion of the Italian army in 1896 and Japan's defeat of Russia in 1905 shattered the notion of European invincibility.
- Other national movements like in Persia, Egypt and Turkey also motivated the Indian leaders.

Surat Split

- The differences between the moderates and the extremists became official in the Surat session of the Indian National Congress (INC) in 1907.
- The meeting was to take place in Nagpur that year. The extremists wanted Lala Lajpat Rai or Bal Gangadhar Tilak to be the President. But the moderates wanted Rash Behari Ghosh as President.

There was a rule that the session's President could not be from the home province. Tilak's home province was Bombay Presidency in which Surat was also situated. So, the moderates changed the venue to Surat so that Tilak could be excluded from the presidency.

- The moderates also wanted to drop the resolutions on swadeshi, boycott movements and national education.
- Rash Behari Ghosh became the president in the session which was held at Surat.
- Tilak was not even allowed to speak and this angered the extremists, who wanted to cancel the session.
- Both sides were firm on their demands and neither was willing to find a common path.
- The moderates then held a separate meeting in which they reiterated the Congress goal of self-government within the British Empire and to adopt only constitutional methods to achieve their goals.
- Unfortunately, the Surat session was marred by the use of sticks and chappals by the members on one another.

Methods of Extremist Leaders

- The extremist goal was 'swaraj'. This, at that time either meant complete autonomy and freedom from British control, or a total Indian control over the administration but not necessarily a breakaway from Britain's imperial reign.
- This was in contrast to the moderates' demand of only an increase in the share of Indians in the administration and military upper echelons.
- The extremist leaders involved wider sections of people in the movement. They involved lower middle class people also.
- They did not stick to constitutional methods to protest and demand. They resorted to boycotts, strikes, etc. They also burned foreign-made goods.
- They believed in confrontation rather than persuasion.
- The Swadeshi movement gathered momentum in India because of the extremists' support. This led to the establishment of Indian banks, mills, factories, etc.
- They were strongly against British imperialistic policies in India.
- They took pride in Indian culture and history. They looked at the ancient scriptures for inspiration and courage.
- They believed in sacrificing everything including life for the cause of the motherland.
- They opposed westernisation of Indian society by the British.
- Tilak famously said, "Swaraj is my birth right and I shall have it."
- They were very vocal in their opposition to the British rule unlike the moderates who had faith in British justice.
- They tried to instill self-respect and patriotism in the people by invoking past heroes like Ashoka, Shivaji, Maharana Pratap and Rani Laxmibai.
- They did not believe in loyalty to the British Crown.

Extremist leaders

- Lala Lajpat Rai, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal (the first three called Lal-Bal-Pal leading the extremist cause in Punjab, Bombay and Bengal respectively.)
- Other leaders included Aurobindo Ghosh, Rajnarayan Bose, A K Dutt, V O C Pillai.

Government reaction to extremists

- The government attacked the extremist leaders vigorously.
- Laws were passed to check their activities and influence. The following laws were passed between 1907 and 1911: Seditious Meetings Act, 1907; Indian Newspapers (Incitement to Offences) Act, 1908; Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1908; and the Indian Press Act, 1910.
- Tilak was sentenced and served in prison in Mandalay (Burma) for writing in support of revolutionaries who were involved in the killing of two British women (their original target was a British magistrate).

Impact of the Extremist Period

- Bal Gangadhar Tilak organized Ganpati and Shivaji festival to spread the message of boycotting westernization in India. This was a major social reform and had a larger impact on society.
- The slogan “Swaraj is my birthright and I shall have it” by Tilak was the talk of society.
- British goods and national education was boycotted which brought a major change in the economy of the country and gave way to employment and various other opportunities for the Indians.
- There was a major reform in education across the country as the extremists worked on establishing National universities free from government control.