

Important Points on Surat Split for Civil Services Exam

Background of the Surat Split

The years from 1885-1905 was known as the period of the moderates because they dominated the Indian National Congress. The Moderates used petition, prayers, meetings, leaflets, pamphlets, memorandum and delegations to present their demands to the British government.

Their only notable achievements were expansion of the legislative council by the Indian Councils Act of 1892. This created dissatisfaction among the people. The 1907 INC meeting was to be held in Nagpur. The Extremists wanted leaders were not released till that date. Some of the new extremists came into being with the same policy of prior extremists. The Moderates supported Rash Bihari Ghosh. [Gopal Krishna Gokhale](#) moved the meeting place from Nagpur to Surat fearing that in Nagpur, Bal Gangadhar Tilak would win. The partition of Bengal drove the rise of extremism in INC.

An INC meeting was shifted from Nagpur to Surat. Since Surat was in the home province of [Bal Gangadhar Tilak](#), he could not preside over the meeting. But what outraged the extremists was that he was not even given permission to speak. This led to a violent altercation between the two factions and the meeting being cancelled.

The Moderates and the Extremists patched up their differences for a year, but in 1907 the two groups permanently split.

Important Points regarding the Surat Split

The dream of a 'Surat Split' was already conceived by Curzon when he made the statement 'Congress was tottering to its fall and one of the biggest ambitions in my life is to give it a peaceful demise'.

1. The Surat split was a big jolt to the Indian National Congress. In fact, the difference between the moderates and the extremists presented an opportunity to the British.
2. The moderates were quite reluctant to pass the motion on the demand for Swaraj. The Arya-samajist notion of Swaraj and Swadeshi, was the hallmark of the programme of the extremists.
3. In the initial days, there were many Congress leaders who opposed the notion of Swaraj, the demand for Swaraj, and extremist politics, but in the beginning of the 20th Century, some of the veteran Congress leaders like Dadabhai Naoroji, and G.K. Gokhale, had the word, 'Swaraj' in their minds.

For Example,

In 1905 (Banaras Session of the INC): Gokhale was the President and for the first time he had a discussion over 'Swaraj'.

In 1906, Dadabhai Naoroji (who was the President of the INC session at Calcutta), and in his Presidential address, used the word Swaraj. Thus, the word, 'Swaraj' wasn't untouchable to them, but they were reluctant to pass the resolution over 'Swaraj'.

In 1907, Surat Session: The two main objectives placed by the extremists were that:

- 1) Demand for the resolution of Swaraj
- 2) Lala Lajpat Rai to be made the President of the INC

These two demands were not acceptable to the moderates. Thus, instead of Lala Lajpat Rai (November 17 1928), the moderates supported the idea of Rash Behari Ghosh as the President. This was the first time that there was to be an election in the INC for Presidentship. In between the election, the extremists were expelled from the INC, and the moderates had complete command over the affairs of the INC. Rash Behari Ghosh became the President of the Surat session.

The Surat split was a victory of the British policy of Divide and Rule, and after a long time, the British believed that they were in control of the affairs of the moderates over the INC.

In 1909: Separate electorates were granted to the Muslim community during a time when the Congress was at its lowest ebb. The most critical and vocal elements were not a part of the INC. Thus the British had taken absolute advantage over the INC.

However, there are **some reservations** over the split of the INC at Surat:

1. This was because the extremists **did not form a separate organization** at first. They were merely indifferent from the activities of the Congress. And when they were expelled from the INC, the British Government was looking for an opportunity to settle scores with the extremists.

2. **Thus Bal Gangadhar Tilak was imprisoned for 6 years** (on the pretext that it was an 'offence to preach nationalism'). Lala Lajpat Rai was expelled from Punjab, and Bipin Chandra Pal had overnight turned 'moderate'.

Thus the extremist view no longer remained active in the field of Indian politics. This again encouraged the British to pursue the aggressive policy of Divide and Rule. Thus the 'Surat split' need not be called a 'split', as the extremists merely remained indifferent to the INC, and did not form a separate organization.

In 1916, they reunited with the Congress in the **Lucknow session**, thus there was only an ideological difference between the extremists and the moderates and not a division as such. The extremists only remained outside the fold of the INC and did not participate in its activities. Curzon really had a loud voice in the support of the policy of Divide and Rule, but the voice of Curzon found practical application in the policies undertaken by Lord Minto.