
UNIT 13 MODERATES, EXTREMISTS AND REVOLUTIONARIES

(GOKHALE, TILAK AND BHAGAT SINGH)

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13.1 INTRODUCTION

The Indian National Congress was not a monolith and consisted of groups with different shades of opinions and beliefs. The Indian National Congress, which was established in 1885, had three main aims: 1) to bring together political workers from different parts of the country, 2) to promote national consciousness among the people and 3) to educate the people and influence public opinion in the interest of the country. It developed over a period of time through three stages of leadership, often described as Moderate, Extremist and Gandhian. The stages of development of Congress leadership were more or less concurrent with the three distinct phases in its history: 1885-1905, 1905-1919, and 1920-1947. Though there were other prominent Congress leaders, it was the leadership of Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Mahatma Gandhi that represented the essence and character of the Congress during the respective periods.

In the early years of the twentieth century, especially when the mass phase of the Swadeshi movement in Bengal ended in 1907, a new aspect was added to India's struggle for independence by the emergence of revolutionary groups. These groups

advocated the use of revolutionary terrorism as a political weapon and attracted a number of youth from all over the country, thereby contributing to the spread of national consciousness. Bhagat Singh typically represented the character of the revolutionaries in 1920s.

Aims and Objectives

After studying the unit, you will be able to understand

- the emergence of the three strands of Indian National movement- moderate, extremist and revolutionary
- their ideologies and methods of work
- their contribution to the Indian National movement
- the significant similarities and differences between the ideas of Gandhi and Gokhale, Tilak, and Bhagat Singh.

13.2 THE MODERATES

During the early years (1885-1905) the Indian National Congress, henceforth referred to as INC, provided a common stage for the leaders from diverse parts of the country. Though the Congress represented the entire nation, members of some classes, castes, occupations and provinces were more conspicuous than others. The members of the educated middle class were predominant in numbers. The members of the Brahmin caste were comparatively higher to those of other castes. While a number of journalists, doctors and teachers were also members, it was the lawyers who dominated in the occupations. The members from Bombay, Bengal and Madras presidencies were more in number compared to members from other parts of the country. The masses and the landed class were conspicuous by their absence. In short, the Congress was by and large a middle class affair, and it was but natural that majority of the members of the INC belonged to the middle class during the early years since it was this class that took to modern education and played a pioneering role in its foundation.

The Congress, since its establishment, was under the influence of Moderate leaders, most of whom were first generation English educated Indians. The moderate leaders were influenced by Western political ideas and practices, especially by the political philosophy of liberalism. The liberal philosophy of moderate Congress leaders gave emphasis on: 1) dignity of the individual 2) Individual's right to freedom c) Equality of all irrespective of caste, creed or sex. This liberal philosophy guided the moderate leaders of the Congress in opposing the autocratic attitude of the British government, demanding rule of law and equality before law, and advocating secularism. Some of the prominent moderate leaders who became presidents of the Congress in its early years were Dadabhai Naoroji, Badruddin Tyabji, Pherozeshah Mehta, P. Ananda Charlu, Surendranath Banerjee, Romesh Chandra Dutt, Ananda Mohan Bose and Gopal Krishna Gokhale. Some other moderate leaders were Mahadev Ranade, Madan Mohan Malaviya, G. Subramaniya Iyer and Dinshaw E. Wacha.

13.2.1 Ideology and Methods of Work

The moderate leaders made modest demands from the British rulers in a very cautious and peaceful manner, mainly for two reasons. Firstly, most of the moderate leaders had an enduring attachment for the British way of life, a belief in the British sense of justice

and fair play and a deep sense of gratitude towards British rulers. They believed that it was the association with the British rule and English education that had exposed them to modern ideas such as liberty, equality, democracy and dignity of the individual. Moreover, they were convinced that it was only due to the British rule that the much needed law and order, and effective administration had been established in India. Secondly, the moderates were also aware that the INC was a young organisation in its early stage of development. They did not want to incur the wrath of the British rulers, which could have resulted in suppression of their activities and nipped the Congress in the bud.

The moderates genuinely believed that India had gained from the political connection with the British and often acknowledged their loyalty to British rule. However, this did not mean that they were not patriotic. The moderates disfavoured a direct confrontation with the British rulers, but wanted to change their rule to reflect the interests of the country. Later, when many of the moderate leaders realised that British rule had done a lot more harm to the country than good, they underwent a change of heart and began to press for 'Swaraj' or self-government for India within the British Empire. They were aware that national consciousness among the Indian people had to be promoted and consolidated before throwing a direct challenge to the British rule.

The historian Bipan Chandra has summed up the political method of the Moderates as "constitutional agitation within the four walls of law and slow, orderly political progress." The moderate leaders adopted the strategy of influencing and organising public opinion to compel the British to approve their (moderates') demands bit by bit. Their political strategy was to emphasise building-up public opinion in India as well as outside India, especially in Britain. In India they sought to promote national consciousness and educate the people on political issues by submitting petitions to British authorities, organising meetings, passing resolutions and giving speeches. Outside India, in Britain, they made efforts to familiarise the people of Britain and the Parliament with the 'real' conditions in India. They carried out active propaganda to influence the public opinion in Britain by sending delegations of leading Indians to Britain. In 1889, a British Committee of the INC was founded. In 1890, this Committee started a journal called 'India'. Dadabhai Naoroji spent a major part of his life in Britain and played an exemplary role in propounding India's case.

13.2.2 Contribution of the Moderates

The moderate leaders of the Congress tried to generate public opinion on all important measures of the Government. The Congress programme during the early phase (1885-1905) can be divided under three categories:: 1) constitutional and administrative reforms 2) social reforms and defence of civil rights and 3) economic reforms.

One of the major demands of the moderate leaders was proper representation of Indians on the Legislative Councils as well as increase in the power of these Councils. The moderate leaders also pressed for reforms in the administrative system. They vehemently argued for 1) increase in the number of Indians in the higher echelons of administration 2) separation of judiciary from the executive 3) promotion of primary education, technical and higher education 4) establishment of agricultural banks to prevent the farmer from being exploited by the money-lender 5) development of irrigation to avoid famines 6) extension of medical and health facilities 7) reform of the police system which was dishonest, inefficient and unpopular.

The moderate leaders voiced their opinions on issues related to territories outside India. They opposed the annexation of Burma, and the attack on Afghanistan and the tribal people of the North-western India. They demanded improvement in the condition of the Indian workers who had migrated to other countries like South Africa, Malaya, Mauritius, West Indies and British Guyana.

The moderates, who had developed a firm commitment to the principle of democracy, also tried to safeguard the Civil Rights of the Indian people, and supported social reforms in Indian society. According to them, a vigorous movement to eradicate social evils and backwardness was necessary to make India fit for self-government. They defended the freedom of speech, the Press, thought and association. Their advocating of these ideas popularised them among the Indians.

It was, however, in the economic critique of colonial rule that the Moderates played their most important role. The Moderate leaders like Dadabhai Naoroji and Mahadev Govind Ranade made scathing criticism of the economic policies followed by the British rulers in India. The moderate leaders through books, newspaper articles and speeches exposed the British Government's economic exploitation of India. The Drain Theory, in which the moderates argued that wealth from India was being drained to England, exploded the myth that British rule was good for India. The moderates demanded changes in official policies on industry, agriculture, tariff, transport and taxation that would improve the system of India.

13.2.3 Gopal Krishna Gokhale (1866-1915)

Gopal Krishna Gokhale, one of the most prominent Moderate leaders of the INC, was born on 6 May 1866 in Kotaluk village of Ratnagiri District (Maharashtra). He belonged to the first generation of Indians to receive college education. He graduated from the Elphinstone College in Bombay in 1884 where he became extremely proficient in English and developed a liking for poetry of Tennyson and Browning. During his college days he was exposed to western political thought and the writings of John Stuart Mill, Edmund Burke, John Bright and John Morley. Though later Gokhale made a scathing critique of the British colonial rule, his respect for English political theory and institutions that he acquired in his college years remained with him for the rest of his life. After graduating, Gokhale played an important role in establishing the Deccan Education Society at Poona in 1885. Gokhale devoted 18 years (1885-1902) teaching at the New English School and Fergusson College, Poona. In 1888, he became the secretary of the Bombay Provincial Congress and began his career as a public figure. He actively participated in the meetings of the INC between 1889 and 1896, and was instrumental in holding the annual session of the Congress in Poona in 1895. In the annual sessions of the Congress, Gokhale spoke on subjects close to the hearts of the moderates, especially about administrative reform. Gokhale went to England to give evidence before the Welby Commission in 1897; worked as a plague volunteer in 1898; and finally in 1900 and 1901, worked as an Elected Member of the Bombay Legislative Council. After retiring from the Fergusson College in 1902, he devoted the last 13 years of his life as elected member of the Imperial Legislative Council. Gokhale founded the Servants of India Society in 1905. Though a moderate who had faith and trust in British democracy and ideal of equality and fraternity, Gokhale always acted in the Imperial Council as a leader of opposition. In his speeches he gave emphasis on the poverty and economic exploitation of the masses, social reforms, the need for communal harmony and universal education and need to spiritualise politics.

13.2.4 Gokhale and Gandhi

Gandhi valued the contribution of the moderates in laying the foundation of the Indian National movement. He was aware that it was Moderate leaders like Dadabhai Naoroji who had exposed the exploitative nature of British rule. According to him, deriding elderly leaders like Naoroji and Gokhale would be like kicking “the very step from which we have risen”. Gandhi’s concern for social reform was a legacy of the moderates; he wanted his followers to question unjust social practices and had included a number of social reforms in his Constructive Programme. At the same time, however, he did not agree with the approach of constitutional agitation followed by the moderates. He was especially against petitioning which admitted the inferiority of the Indians. Unlike the moderates, Gandhi did not consider British rule as good and indispensable. For him British rule was an evil rule. Moreover, the Western style democracy and secularism, which was eulogised by the moderates, was not acceptable to Gandhi.

Gandhi shared a very special relationship with Gokhale. Gokhale’s firm belief in the need for spiritualisation of politics, communal harmony and universal education inspired Gandhi and considered Gokhale as his ‘political guru’. Gokhale not only strongly supported Gandhi during his struggle in South Africa but also helped him to collect funds for the relief of the suffering there. Gokhale guided Gandhi to travel in India for one year and gain experience of the Indian problems and conditions and only then concern himself with politics. Gandhi derived the principle of spiritualisation of politics from Gokhale. He also learnt from him that the means for bringing about change in society should be pure, peaceful and legitimate. Gandhi said: “Gokhale taught me that the dream of every Indian who claims to love his country, should be not to glorify the country in language but to spiritualize its political life and institutions. He inspired my life and is still inspiring in that I wish to purify myself and spiritualize myself. I have dedicated myself to that ideal. I may fail and to the extent I fail, I am an unworthy disciple of my master”. Gandhi had great respect for Gokhale; when Gokhale died, Gandhi took a vow to walk barefoot for a whole year.

Gokhale and Gandhi differed on certain issues relating to modern technology, Western education and industrialisation. Gokhale criticised certain ideas put forward by Gandhi in his *Hind Swaraj*. According to Gokhale, though the village industries were of importance, to survive in a competitive world it was necessary for the Indians to accept modern means of technology and energy for production of goods. Gandhi did not accept Gokhale’s faith in constitutional method as a means of achieving political reform. He did not have faith in Western education while Gokhale made utmost efforts to spread it in India. Unlike Gokhale, Gandhi was religious but his religious ethos was tempered by rationalism. Gokhale and Gandhi had a different style of functioning. The speeches of Gokhale were addressed not to the masses but to the educated middle class; he worked for the masses, but did not work among them. In contrast, Gandhi chose to work not only for the masses but also among them.

13.3 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 Vishnusastri 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.

Various international events also gave impetus to the growth of extremism in India. Revolutionary movements in Ireland, Russia, Egypt, Turkey, China and the Boer War in South Africa made the Indian leaders aware that the British rule could only be challenged by putting a united stand against it. The defeat of the Italian Army by the Ethiopians in 1896, and the Russian Army by the Japanese in 1905, showed that the Europeans were not invincible. All these instilled a sense of self-respect and self-confidence in the Indian Nationalists.

The extremist leaders of INC like Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal, Lala Lajpat Rai and Aurobindo Ghose articulated radical political ideas against colonial rule. The first three of them became famous as the trio of extremist leadership: Lal-Bal-Pal. They became prominent after the Partition of Bengal in 1905. Their radical ideology and programme became popular during the movement against Partition of Bengal, also known as the 'Swadeshi Movement'

13.3.1 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.

The Extremist leaders disfavoured the use of violence against British rule and did not approve the methods of political murder and assassination used by the Indian revolutionaries. However, they did take a sympathetic view of the activities of the revolutionaries. For them the young revolutionaries were no doubt misguided and reckless but their violent actions were provoked by the equally violent repressive policies implemented by the British Government.

13.3.2 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 self-government and freedom was an inalienable right of all human beings.

The extremists emphasised the mobilisation of people against foreign rule by launching political movements. If the nation was not ready to undertake political movement, then it was the duty of the leaders to prepare the people for it. The extremists were ready to suffer imprisonment, deportation and other physical suffering for the sake of mobilising the masses for struggle against foreign rule. They saw struggle against foreign rule as a full time activity and devoted their whole life for it. The demonstrations, processions undertaken by the extremists brought about an involvement of the common people in agitations against British rule. They also made use of popular symbols like Shivaji, and religious symbols like God Ganapati and Goddess Kali for mobilising the people. Thus, under the Extremist leadership, the Indian National Movement gradually began to acquire a mass character. However, the extremists could not fully exploit the potential of mobilised people or of their radical methods like boycott and passive resistance. They were successful in arousing the urban middle and lower classes, apart from mobilising the peasants and workers.

The Extremist leaders used religious symbols in arousing the masses; however, they did not mix religion and politics. Their concept of nationhood encompassed all religions in India. Though the 'Dharma' advocated by leaders like Tilak and Lajpat Rai looked like it had a Hindu connotation, for the extremists, it actually meant 'universal moral law' under whose unifying influence, the different religions and communities in India would coexist peacefully.

13.3.3 Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856-1920)

Bal Gangadhar Tilak, the foremost Extremist leader, was born in a middle class family in Ratnagiri District (Maharashtra) on 23 July 1856. His father, Gangadhar Pant, was a school teacher and a scholar of Sanskrit. The influence of his father instilled in Tilak love for Sanskrit and respect for ancient Indian religion and culture. Tilak graduated from Pune in 1875 and later studied law. Believing that the best way to serve the country was to educate the people, Tilak, along with his friend Gopal Ganesh Agarkar, founded the New English School in Pune in 1876. However, he soon realised that merely educating young children was not enough and the people should also be aware of the condition of the country. To achieve this, they started two weeklies in 1881, 'Maratha' in English and 'Kesari' in Marathi. In 1885, they started the Deccan Education Society. Tilak was also one of the leading Sanskrit scholars in India. He studied the classical literature in Sanskrit on metaphysics, religion and astronomy and wrote a number of books. Tilak, along with Aurobindo Ghose, was instrumental in developing the action programme of the extremists: Boycott, Swadeshi, National Education and Passive Resistance. To bring the masses together, he started the Ganapati Festival in 1894 and Shivaji Festival in 1896, mobilise the masses and accelerate the attainment of Swaraj. He gave the slogan 'freedom is my birth-right and I will attain it'. He suffered imprisonment for trying to mobilise people against British rule. The British authorities arrested him in 1908 for writing an allegedly seditious article in 'Kesari'. He was deported to Mandalay, where he wrote his famous commentary on Gita, the 'Gita-Rahasya'. After being released from Mandalay in 1914, he played an important role in the signing of the Lucknow Pact in 1916. In the same year he founded the Home Rule League for the goal of achieving Swaraj.

13.3.4 Tilak and Gandhi

Gandhi considered Gokhale as his 'political guru', but at the same time he also described himself as a 'true disciple' of Lokmanya Tilak. Two things, which they had in common, were "love of country and the steady pursuit of Swaraj". Gandhi remarked that "no one perhaps realized the evil of existing system of government as Tilak did". The root of Gandhi's theory of political disobedience lies in political tradition of the extremists. Gandhi's principles of Satyagraha were drawn from ideas of passive resistance developed by Aurobindo Ghose in his essay on 'Passive Resistance'. Gandhi further developed the interpretation of *Gita* as given by Aurobindo Ghose and Tilak. They had interpreted it as the philosophy of Karma Yoga, or performance of action in the spirit of disinterestedness. Gandhi adapted this interpretation to his views on truth, non-violence and service of the people by giving it a moral and nonviolent dimension. Gandhi's concept of Anasakti Yoga was an advance over the Nishkama Karma Yoga of Tilak. Tilak opined that man should perform disinterested action while doing work assigned to him in the Varna society. Gandhi's Anasakti Yoga meant that man should undertake action in a detached manner while performing his Swadharma or duty of man in present circumstances. By linking Swadharma with the message of Gita, Gandhi was able to connect it with moral and non-violent action. According to Gandhi in the present circumstances it was the duty of man

to avoid war; therefore, Anasakti and war could never go together. Though Gandhi developed and improved upon Tilak's interpretation of Gita, he acknowledged the greatness of Tilak's 'Gita Rahasya' and wrote, "I believe this commentary on the Gita will be a more lasting monument to his memory".

Gandhi developed his political strategy on the foundations laid by the Extremist leaders. In a sense Gandhian politics was a continuation of Tilak's politics; many issues which were close to the heart of Tilak like democratisation of Indian politics, anti-colonialism, passive resistance and his interpretation of *Gita* were later taken up by Gandhi. In fact, Gandhi based his strategy of agitation on the principles of Swaraj, Swadeshi, national education and boycott which had been enunciated by the extremists. He agreed with Tilak that 'Swaraj was a birthright' and learned from him the importance of enlisting the support of the masses in a movement against British rule. Like Tilak, Gandhi deemed it necessary to sacrifice and endure suffering in the cause of the country.

Gandhi admired Tilak for "his indomitable will, his vast learning, his love of country, and above all, the purity of his private life and great sacrifice". Gandhi was also conscious that his method was different from the method of Tilak. Gandhi differed with regard to the meaning of 'Swaraj' and means to achieve it. The extremists wanted to expel the British but were in favour of keeping the western institutions established by them. Gandhi did not have much faith in Western institutions like parliamentary democracy, army, industries, law and railways. For the extremists there was no place for saintly qualities in the sphere of politics, while Gandhi gave highest priority to morality and nonviolence in personal life and public action. The Extremists and Gandhi differed regarding the relationship between the means and the ends. Tilak favoured the use of plurality of means to achieve 'Swaraj' for the country. Though he thought that purity of means was desirable, he did not see this as a rigid rule. Tilak maintained that British rule in India was immoral and therefore if 'Swaraj' could not be achieved by using pure and non-violent means, then there should be no hesitation in adopting other lesser means. For Tilak it was the purity of the goal of 'Swaraj', which mattered the most. Gandhi did not agree with Tilak's ambivalent position about ends and means. He believed that the means must be ethically right, pure and non-violent; if not, the end itself would lose its value. He did not agree with Tilak's view that 'falsehood should be paid in the same coin'. To Gandhi, falsehood and untruth could only be countered by truth.

13.4 THE REVOLUTIONARIES

Though the Indian National Movement was largely non-violent, a small revolutionary movement did emerge in the early decades of the 20th century. In 1897, the Chapekar brothers had assassinated two unpopular British officials at Poona. In 1904, V.D. Savarkar had established a secret revolutionary society known as the Abhinav Bharat. However, it was the failure of the Swadeshi movement that gave real impetus to revolutionary activities, a first of its kind. The brutal suppression of the Swadeshi movement by the British and the ineffectiveness of passive resistance advocated by the extremist leaders provoked the youth of Bengal to engage in individual heroic actions like assassinating unpopular officials.

In Bengal, a number of societies like 'Anushilan Samiti' and 'Yugantar' came into existence and planned assassinations of unpopular British officials. Revolutionaries like Khudiram Bose and Prafulla Chaki made attempts to kill unpopular British officials. Syamji Krishnavarma, V.D. Savarkar and Lala Har Dayal, Madame Cama and Ajit Singh

coordinated the revolutionaries in Europe. The British framed a number of draconian laws to suppress the revolutionaries. In this early phase, the revolutionaries did not try to organise a mass armed revolution; instead, they focused on acts of individual heroism.

The second wave of revolutionary activities commenced in the early 1920s. The withdrawal of Non-Cooperation in 1922 made the youth more radical. In North India, revolutionaries organised themselves under Hindustan Republican Association (HRA), and later, under the leadership of Bhagat Singh and Chandrasekhar Azad. In Bengal too revolutionary activities were revived under the leadership of Surya Sen.

13.4.1 Ideology and Methods

The revolutionaries questioned the non-violent strategy of struggle adopted by the INC, as they believed passive resistance could not be effective against the British. They believed in adopting violent methods and aspired to organise an armed mass revolution to drive away the British from the country. However, they adopted the path of the Irish nationalists and Russian Nihilists in the short term- the path of heroic action or revolutionary terrorism. The assassination of unpopular British officials was done by the revolutionaries to achieve three things: (a) to strike fear in the officials (b) to remove the fear of the Indian people and (c) ignite a feeling of national consciousness.

The second wave of revolutionary activities in the 1920s had a different character. The revolutionaries gradually moved away from individual heroic action and were attracted by the possibility of armed mass struggle. A number of them also came under the influence of Socialism. In 1924, the Hindustan Republican Association was formed with the aim of organising armed revolution against the British. But the British suppressed the movement by arresting a number of revolutionaries and implicating them in the Kakori Conspiracy Case in 1925. The revolutionaries of North India like Bhagat Singh and Chandrasekhar Azad came under the influence of socialist ideas. In September 1928, they renamed their organisation as the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association (HSRA) to reflect their newly acquired ideology, which gave importance to socialist principles and revolution by the masses. Bhagat Singh and B.K. Dutt made a public propaganda of this changed ideology during their trial in a court for throwing a harmless bomb in the Central Legislative Assembly in 1929. In Bengal too, individual heroic action was replaced by group action. A group of revolutionaries, led by Surya Sen, carried out a large-scale armed attack on the Chittagong armoury of the government in April 1930.

13.4.2 Role of the Revolutionaries

The revolutionary movement in India could not survive the harsh measures initiated by the British against its leaders. Bhagat Singh and his fellow revolutionaries were tried for the murder of Saunders in the Lahore Conspiracy Case and were hanged on 23 March 1931. Chandrasekhar Azad was killed in a shooting encounter with the police at Allahabad in February 1931. Surya Sen was arrested in February 1933 and hanged. Many other revolutionaries were arrested and sentenced to jail; some were sent to the Andaman Jail.

The revolutionaries could not sustain their activities because they failed to get a consistent and active support of the people and failed to develop a base among the Indian masses. Moreover, their use of violence as a political weapon gave a justification to the British to counter them by using more violence. The revolutionaries failed in achieving their long-

term goal of armed mass revolution against the British. Nevertheless, the selfless sacrifice of the revolutionaries like Bhagat Singh, Chandrasekhar Azad, Surya Sen and hundreds of others gained for them unparalleled popularity among the people. Many, however, did not agree with their method of using violence for achieving independence.

13.4.3 Bhagat Singh (1907-1931)

Bhagat Singh was born on September 28, 1907 at the village Khatkar Kalan, tehsil Banga, district Jalandar. Bhagat Singh's family background and the political events happening in Punjab played an important role in shaping his ideas. His grandfather, Sardar Arjan Singh was a member of the Arya Samaj, which represented nationalist aspirations in Punjab. His father Kishan Singh and uncle Swaran Singh were political activists and were involved in a number of agitations against the oppressive British rule. Bhagat Singh's elder uncle was the famous revolutionary nationalist leader, Ajit Singh, who had founded the Bharat Mata Society (Mother India Society) along with Lala Lajpat Rai in 1907. Bhagat Singh was educated in Dayanand Anglo Vedic High School in Lahore, where he came into contact with nationalist leaders like Lala Lajpat Rai and others. Bhagat Singh was inspired by the Ghadar Movement, especially by the sacrifice made by the young revolutionary Kartar Singh Saraba. He considered Saraba as his role model. The Russian Revolution of 1917 also made a deep impact on him by attracting him to socialist ideas. Events like Jallianwala Bagh Massacre (13 April 1919) and failure of Gandhi's Non-cooperation movement to bring Swaraj disillusioned Bhagat Singh. He began to search for new ways to achieve independence. In 1926, he established the 'Navjivan Bharat Sabha' to train and recruit youth for revolutionary activity. Though Bhagat Singh started as a believer in individual heroic action, after 1927 he gradually moved away from it and began espousing radical socialist belief and mass armed action, and played an active role in the H.S.R.A. But the brutal lathi charge on an anti-Simon Commission demonstration on 30 October 1928 led to a sudden change. The great Extremist leader, Lala Lajpat Rai was killed due to the blows of lathis. In retaliation, Bhagat Singh, along with Chandrasekhar Azad and Rajguru, assassinated Saunders, the British officer in charge of the lathi charge. Later, on 8 April 1929, Bhagat Singh and B.K. Dutt threw a harmless bomb in the Central Legislative Assembly to protest against the suggested black laws and used their trial proceedings as a forum for propaganda of their changed socialist and revolutionary ideas. Bhagat Singh was tried in the Lahore Conspiracy Case and executed on 23 March 1931, in spite of massive protest by the Indian masses.

13.4.4 Bhagat Singh and Gandhi

One of the reasons why Gandhi wrote 'Hind Swaraj' was to counter the ideology of violence adopted by the Indian revolutionaries. He wanted to tell them that they were following a 'suicidal policy' as violence would beget violence, and that it was no solution for India's ills. Only the 'use of a different and higher weapon' would protect India's civilisation. He did not agree with the arguments of the revolutionaries who justified the using of force for the British expulsion. According to Gandhi, use of force would only get us what the British got. It will not result in 'Swaraj'. Unlike the revolutionaries, Gandhi did not believe that mere physical expulsion of the British was necessary to gain Swaraj for India. Gandhi's concept of Swaraj had a much higher connotation than the Swaraj of the revolutionaries. He also attacked the view of the revolutionaries that there was 'no connection between the means and the end'. For him, ends and means were equally important.

Bhagat Singh criticised the political methods used by the Congress under the leadership of Gandhi, though he accepted that it was Gandhi who aroused political consciousness in the masses, started a mass movement and trained them to fight against injustice. As Bhagat Singh felt the withdrawal of the Non-cooperation movement without a sufficiently important reason clearly showed that Gandhi and the Congress were in not favour of 'revolution' and were inclined towards 'conciliation' with the British. To Bhagat Singh, the Congress was a party of the middle classes, white collared people and small traders; it did not represent the peasants and the workers. In his opinion, the Congress could never provide revolutionary leadership until it broadens its base to include the peasants and workers.

Gandhi clarified his stand on the activities of the revolutionaries in many of his writings. He admired their courage, commitment and sacrifice but not their use of violence, as violence is counterproductive and harmful and was a wrong course to achieve Swaraj.

Gandhi and Bhagat Singh were opposed to each other in approach; Bhagat Singh believed in violence, and did not shy away from using it to achieve independence. Gandhi believed that only complete adherence to non-violence would free the country. Gandhi and Bhagat Singh represented two different strands of India's struggle for independence.

13.5 SUMMARY

In this unit we have studied the ideology, methods and contribution of the three different strands of Indian National Movement- the moderates, extremists and revolutionaries. The moderates stood for the constitutional method of attaining responsible government, believed in petitioning and prayer, and had faith in the goodness, justice and fair-play of the British. The extremists advocated both constitutional and extra-constitutional means for the achievement of 'Swaraj', which was considered by them as a birth-right of every man. To counter the British rule, they developed the four-point programme of Swadeshi, Boycott, National Education and Passive Resistance against the British. The revolutionaries abhorred British rule and advocated the use of violence to get rid of the British from India. Initially they undertook acts of individual heroic action by assassinating unpopular British officials, but later began advocating collective armed action against British rule.

We have also reviewed the contribution of Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Bhagat Singh and studied the similarities and differences of their ideas and methods with those of Gandhi. Gandhi considered Gokhale to be his 'political guru' and was influenced by his ideas about spiritualisation of politics, communal harmony and education. Tilak gave a mass orientation to the struggle against British rule by mobilising the masses, and set an example for others to follow by undergoing imprisonment and making tremendous sacrifices for the sake of the country. Gandhi further improved upon and continued their programme and considered himself as a 'true disciple' of Tilak. Bhagat Singh was attracted by Marxist and socialist ideology and tried to reorient the objective of the revolutionaries from individual heroic action to mass armed struggle against colonial rule. He criticised the Congress for being 'conciliatory' towards the British and not supporting revolution. Gandhi appreciated the sacrifice and commitment of the revolutionaries but disapproved of their method of violence. Thus, there was a fundamental difference in their approach though their common goal was to achieve independence for India.

13.6 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

- 1) Critically examine the ideology and methods of the moderates.
- 2) Discuss the four-point action programme developed by the extremists.
- 3) Explain the statement 'Mahatma Gandhi further improved upon and continued the programme of the extremists'.
- 4) Assess the contribution of Bhagat Singh to the Indian Freedom Struggle.
- 5) Explain Gandhi's critique of the revolutionaries.

SUGGESTED READINGS

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