

First Phase of the Indian National Movement

Programmes and Achievements of the Early Nationalists

Early Nationalists (1885–1905)

The early nationalists dominated the Indian National Congress (INC) from 1885 to 1905. Prominent figures included W.C. Bonnerjee, Rashbehari Ghosh, Surendranath Banerjee, Dadabhai Naoroji, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, and A.O. Hume. Many of these leaders were educated in England and believed in the British system of justice and fair play. They aimed for constitutional reforms and greater self-governance within the British Empire.

Beliefs of the Early Nationalists

- Faith in British justice and fair play.
- Belief that the British would grant ‘Home Rule’ to Indians.
- The British had positively influenced Indian society (e.g., banning social evils).
- Agitated through constitutional, peaceful methods like petitions.

Demands of the Early Nationalists

Constitutional Reforms

- Abolition of the India Council.
- Control over the public purse, with the slogan, ‘No taxation without representation.’
- Adequate Indian representation in the Executive Council of the Viceroy and Governors.
- Demand for ‘Swarajya’ or self-government within the British Empire.

Economic Reforms

- Reduction of land revenue and protection of peasants.
- Reduction in military expenditure, with funds redirected to public welfare.
- Inquiries into recurring famines and poverty.
- Protection for Indian industries, abolishment of salt tax and duties on sugar.

Administrative Reforms

- Hold Indian Civil Service exams in India and England.
- Separate executive and judicial wings of government.
- Increase powers for local municipal bodies, and repeal the Arms and License Acts.
- Spread primary education and restore civil liberties (freedom of speech, assembly).

Methods of the Early Nationalists

The early nationalists used peaceful, constitutional methods to press their demands:

1. **Education and Awareness:** Held meetings, delivered speeches, and criticized the government in the press.
2. **Influencing Government:** Used the ‘Three P’s’—Petitions, Prayers, and Protests. Established a British Committee in 1889 to present India’s case in Britain.

Achievements of the Early Nationalists

- **National Awakening:** Fostered a sense of unity and nationalism among Indians.
- **Promotion of Democracy and Civil Liberties:** Spread the ideals of secularism, democracy, and nationalism.
- **Exposing Economic Exploitation:** Dadabhai Naoroji highlighted how British rule drained India's wealth.
- **Key Reforms:**
 - Public Service Commission in 1886.
 - Civil Service Examinations to be held in India and England simultaneously.
 - Indian Council Act of 1892 passed.

Criticisms of the Early Nationalists

- Their reliance on petitions and prayers was seen as ineffective for achieving independence.
- Failed to understand that British interests clashed with those of Indians.
- The movement was mostly confined to the urban educated class, excluding the masses.

Attitude of the Government towards the Congress

- Initially, the British viewed the Congress with favor. Over time, as Congress became politically active, the government criticized it.
- In 1890, government officials were banned from attending Congress sessions.
- The British attempted to undermine Congress by promoting anti-Congress movements.

Prominent Early Nationalists

Dadabhai Naoroji (1825–1917)

- Known as the "Grand Old Man of India".
- Played a key role in raising awareness about India's exploitation in Britain.
- His book *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India* explained how India's wealth was drained to Britain.
- Promoted the idea of self-government for India within the British Empire.

Gopal Krishna Gokhale (1866–1915)

- Criticized British military spending and racial discrimination.
- Played a role in passing the Minto Morley Reforms (1909).
- Advocated for reducing land revenue and toll taxes in India.

Surendranath Banerjee (1848–1925)

- Founded the Indian Association (1876) to unite Indians against British policies.
- Convened the Indian National Conference (1883), which later merged with the Indian National Congress.



- Known as the Father of Indian Nationalism for his significant contributions to the political movement.