

Establishment of Indian National Congress

The Indian National Congress was established by Allan Octavian Hume, a retired Civil Servant of British Government, in 1885. He saw a growing political consciousness among the Indians and wanted to give it a safe, constitutional outlet in the form of 'Safety Valve Theory' so that their resentment would not develop into popular agitation against the British rule in India. He was supported in this scheme by the Viceroy, Lord Dufferin, and by a group of eminent Indians. Womesh Chandra Banerjee of Calcutta was elected as the first President. The Indian National Congress represented an urge of the politically conscious Indians to set up a national organization to work for their betterment. Its leaders had complete faith in the British Government and in its sense of justice. They believed that if they would place their grievances before the government reasonably, the British would certainly try to rectify them. Among the moderate leaders, the most prominent were Firoz Shah Mehta, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Dada Bhai Naoroji, Ras Behari Bose, Badruddin Tayabji, etc. From 1885 to 1905, the Indian National Congress witnessed the "Moderate phase" having a very narrow social base. Its influence was confined to the urban educated Indians only. The early aims of this organization were limited only to communicate with British government on behalf of the Indian people and voice their grievances through petition, prayer and protest popularly known as PPP.

Initial stages of Indian National Congress (Period of Moderates)

The congress placed its demands before the British government always in the PPP mode. It was for this reason that the early Congress leaders were referred to as 'Moderates'. During its first twenty years(1885 to 1905) the Congress made moderate demands. The members placed their demands before the Government always in the form of petitions and worked within the framework of law. Their demands were: (a) representative legislatures, (b) Indianization of services, (c) reduction of military expenditure, (d) education, employment and holding of the ICS (Indian Civil Services) examination in India, (e) decrease in the burden of the cultivators, (f) defense of civil rights, (g) separation of the judiciary from the executive, (h) change in the tenancy laws, (i) reduction in land revenue and salt duty, (j) policies to help in the growth of Indian industries and handicrafts, (k) introduction of welfare programmes for the people of India. Unfortunately, their efforts did not bring many changes in the policies and administration of the British in India. In the beginning, the Britishers had a favourable attitude towards the Congress. But, by 1887, this attitude began to change. They did not fulfill the demands of the Moderates. The British Government which earlier supported the Moderates, soon realized that the movement could turn into a National movement that would drive them out from India. This idea changed their attitude towards the Indians. Only minor concessions were given so as to win over some Congress leaders. Lord Curzon, a staunch imperialist and who believed in the superiority of the English people, passed an Act in 1898, making it an offence to provoke people against the

British government. He had also passed the Indian Universities Act in 1904, imposing stiff control over Indian Universities as he wanted to suppress the growth of Indian nationalism .