

The moderates critique of colonial rule history essay



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The moderate critique of early Indian nationalism was proposed by India's Western educated elite in 1857. Moderate nationalists had become increasingly concerned with the exploitative nature of colonial rule and increasing poverty throughout India. In this essay I will assess policies and reforms demanded by moderate nationalism upon the colonial state attempting to place them on the political spectrum between elitist and all-encompassing. Firstly I shall discuss the policies adopted by Indian moderate nationalism to understand to what extent moderates attempted to tackle and lessen the economic exploitation of colonial rule of the masses. Secondly I will discuss how the interpretation of the poverty problem had elitist intentions and how the solutions proposed were based on self-interest and for the benefit of the native Indian elite. Thirdly I shall discuss how the moderates were alienated from general Indian public and did not look to include their views in a so called nationalist movement. I will explain how the moderates saw themselves as an elite movement above that of the general public who were not ready to be responsible for their own government.

Firstly I shall discuss the moderates' economic critique of colonialism with the view that it was for the benefit of the Indian peoples and the first move to break free from colonial rule. Moderate nationalists would have viewed themselves far from a selfish and elitist position, when they first sought to reform the colonial states held in India[1]. Although consisting of an elite Hindu majority, they were able to assess the economic plight the masses faced through exploitative colonial rule. Having been politically enlightened by liberal teachings through British education, the moderates sought to transcend their own class interests within the colonial system. By posing an

economic critique of colonial rule through Drain Theory, the moderates looked to inform the masses of the exploitation delivered by the British[2]. Moderates saw the foreign investment from the colonial state in railroads as not developments of the Indian economy but development of British trade maximisation[3]. To combat this exploitation, Moderate politicians demanded greater Indian control of the lavish military expenditure of the colonial state, protectionist policies for Indian industry and tax reform. Through their demands they wished to achieve a greater say in their own governance and the formation of a more prosperous, self sufficient India without the draining effect of the colonial state. They saw themselves as mediators between the colonial rulers and the Indian people and therefore in a prime position to influence colonial reforms to combat Indian poverty. The driving force for moderates' economic critique of the colonial state came from witnessing the poverty created by British liberal economic free trade[4]. Through their economic criticism they searched for ways to reduce the poverty afflicting India, wielding the ideology of swadeshi and swaraj to rebuild indigenous industry to take back Indian independence.

Britain had transformed its rule in India from mercantilism, to a sophisticated form of exploitation of Indian natural resources through free trade and capital investment.[5] India acted as a supplier of raw materials to Britain, which produced industrial products selling them back to India at a profit. This systematic exploitation crippled the Indian handicraft industry and imposed a dependent agrarian economic system upon India.[6] India was dependent upon the colonial state for development through technology and foreign investment, which were exchanged for the country's natural wealth. Drain

Theory explained this systematic exploitation and it was at the heart of the moderates' economic criticism of colonial rule. Not only did the colonial state drain India's resources but also imposed high taxes and had high military costs[7]. This directly impoverished India and, with the absence of Indian commercial protectionism, British manufactured products flooded Indian markets. The drain of wealth due to an artificial export surplus created by the colonial state, brought about the destruction of the native handicraft industry[8]. Increases in famines were also the hallmark of colonial exploitation of the peasantry. As a result of high land revenue costs and incentives for farming cash crops for export, Indian agriculture could not support its own people. In light of this, moderates chose to campaign against the colonial powers in order to demand greater social reform within colonial economic policy. The campaign demanded a reduction in taxes and land revenue costs as well as reallocation of military costs into the social sphere to decrease poverty. Also the introduction of protection policies was demanded in order to protect Indian industry against British product surplus to encourage industrial growth by which India could develop and modernise more independently. In light of this we can place the moderates' nationalistic aims in the social welfare bracket far from the elitist backgrounds they originate from. In spite of this however moderates remained close and loyal to the colonial power structure in India. The British had provided and maintained the moderate's elite status through education, infrastructure development and social law introduction[9]. They also retained close ties to the commercial elite within India such as the landowners and industrial elite. These commercial elite were the moderates' main financiers who created a conflict of interest within the moderates leading to the betrayal of the lower

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classes and peasantry. Thus hindering the mass appeal of the moderate economic critique and placing the moderate position in a more capitalist elite bracket, which I shall discuss my second paragraph.

Secondly I shall discuss the elitist nature of the moderate economic critique. The aims of moderate nationalism can be seen as an exercise in self interest and a method by which elite could re-consolidate their power and increase their wealth. The main criticism of the moderate politicians towards the colonial state was the increased poverty it was inflicting upon the country and its people as was stated in their Drain Theory. However, the poverty the moderates envisioned was not that of the people and their personal plight, but that of India's overall industrial backwardness compared to European states[10]. Moderates did not want to improve the living conditions of the public, instead they wished to industrialise and develop India towards a modern state to rival the British. In order to solve this backwardness inflicted by colonial rule, the moderates did not want to reform the welfare structure of the state but instead focus upon protecting and developing Indian industry by taking a stronger hold over the bureaucratic side of Indian government[11]. In addition, moderate politicians showed supported to peasants and working class uprisings against colonial oppression, all the while maintaining close ties to the oppressive landowning native Indian elite agreeing conveniently well with Drain Theory[12]. The moderates consisted of a landowning and commercial majority who were more likely to support native elites in the face of peasant and working-class protest. Politically consisting of a aristocratic elite majority the moderates were unable to effectively deliberate on the demands of the peasantry[13]. As a result

moderate policy took a pro-tenant position supporting the land owning zamindars over native rural disputes with their support of the pro-zamindar amendment in the Bengal Treaty act of 1898[14]. Moderate support for peasant protest only came when it aligned itself with Drain Theory and exploitation by the colonial state on the native poor, caring little when Indian landowners and factory owners administered the same oppression. Moderate politicians actually showed very little interest in supporting rights and bills that acted to improve the lives of India's poor, effectively tackling the poverty issue moderates' used to criticise the colonial state[15]. Moderates took a pro-bourgeois position to urban disputes with the statement of factory owner support and working class abandonment. The moderates actively opposed the Mining Bill in 1900 which aimed to fight underage labour of women and children[16]. They aimed their support of the lower classes when it benefited their cause by attacking British interests, but using legislation to protect the oppression of their fellow industrial and land owning elites, citing examples of exploitative Indian mill factory owners in Bombay[17]. Moderate demands put class interest above the social welfare of the masses to enable Indian capitalism to prosper[18].

Thirdly I shall argue how the alienation of the elite status of the moderates detached them from the nationalist aims of the moderate movement. The moderates saw the native population as ill educated and unfit for self government and so required the continuation of British rule but under the control of the native elite. Moderate nationalists did not identify with the general Indian public and therefore refused to represent them, when they talked of an Indian public they excluded the backward classes[19]. They did

not seek representative government or male suffrage as seen in Britain, but instead believed that a responsible government could only be championed by those deemed able, ergo the elite classes within society[20]. They believed that if the moderate elite educated public were provided with correct tools, they would be able to modernise and industrialise India along the capitalist model set by the British[21]. The moderates wished to create a system by which the elite would be in a position to advise and distribute colonial power industrialising India and tutoring its people into their vision of the modern age[22]. Having been afforded access to English education they believe they have the privilege and tools by which to lead the dumb masses to modernity as they would not be able to on their own.

In conclusion the moderates can be placed at the elitist end of the political spectrum of Indian nationalism. Fighting for the interests of the native elite by providing protective legislation it strived to reclaim the power that was taken by the colonial state. This need for the development of native Indian industry through elite protectionism was a major influential factor within the policies of the moderates. Although correctly identifying the exploitative nature of colonial rules effects upon Indian industry and resources, they chose to combat the poverty through the elite channels of commercial industry not looking to improve the situation of the lower classes. The Moderate's strong commercial family ties and their method of tackling Indian poverty through the means of indigenous capitalism consolidated their elitist political position[23]. The moderates were mainly interested in attempting to emulate the success of Britain's modern industrial model and develop India

into a modern state based on elite driven capitalist theory rather than adopt a more socialist form of nationalism.