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3 Rewriting Histories of Nationalism* The Politics of 'Moderate Nationalism' in India, 1870–1905

Sanjay Seth

[...] What is [...] distinctive about narratives of nationalism is that [...] the process of constituting a historical narrative lends itself to a certain circularity. The identification/selection of what is part of the story of nationalism necessarily occurs at the level of ideas and consciousness; but this consciousness or sentiment has then to be situated, and is often explained, in terms of the social forms and practices in which it was embodied [...].

[...] It is this form of explanation, characteristic of the history of nationalism, that this essay seeks to call into question. It does so not by denying that nationalism is both material and discursive, and certainly not by seeking to reverse the causal order, but rather by problematizing the distinction between the social or material and the discursive.

I offer for this purpose an examination of Indian nationalism, more specifically of what in the historiography of Indian nationalism is usually characterized as an early, or beginning, period. I concentrate on early or 'moderate' Indian nationalism because its claim to being part of the story of nationalism is already problematic; how it comes to be written into the history of Indian nationalism brings out clearly the principles of selection involved in narrating the history of nationalism and the sort of historical problems this narrative sets itself. This essay, then, offers an alternative or supplementary reading of a period in the history of Indian nationalism and, in so doing, also seeks to problematize the narratives of Indian nationalism. It is an essay in history, as well as on historiography.

Most accounts of Indian nationalism include, or begin with, the last two or three decades of the nineteenth century. They do so despite the fact

that in the pre-Congress era, as in the early years of the Indian National Congress (INC), the goal of Indian nationalists fell well short of full national independence, and the methods they employed in pursuit of their goals included neither mass mobilization nor the extra-constitutionalist methods that were later to be characteristic of the Congress. Why this should qualify as part of the story of Indian nationalism at all is, therefore, itself a question. Part of the answer is simply that for many historical accounts the history of Indian nationalism is synonymous with the history of the Indian National Congress, and therefore all activities associated with the Congress form part of the history of nationalism. This is either taken to be so self-evident as to require no argumentation; or else the equation is justified by the claim that the Congress was the first body organized on an all-India scale, and that sought to speak for Indians, rather than (as with earlier organizations) Bengalis, landholders, Hindus, or Muslims, or their caste brethren.¹

[...]

Below, I offer a different reading of Moderate Nationalism [...]. As a first step, I identify the key elements of moderate nationalism; the individual elements that collectively constituted the discourse of Moderate Nationalism, and constituted it as 'moderate'.

First of all, this was a nationalism that raised very modest demands. The main demands articulated at the annual sessions of the Congress in its early years had to do with expanding the powers of the Provincial and Central Councils and introducing elected members into them, holding the civil service examination in India as well as England, separating the judicial and executive functions, extension of trial by jury to areas not covered by this, reduction of the increasing burden of the 'Home Charges' (particularly those charges debited to India that arose out of British military adventures), income tax reform, opposition to increases in the salt tax, extension of Permanent Settlement, reform of the police, and repeal of forest laws. The issue of 'poverty' was central to the concerns of the Congress, and resolutions to do with it generally expressed concern at the dimension of the problem and advocated measures—Permanent Settlement, Indianization of the civil service, reduction in Home Charges, the introduction of responsible government—that either by reducing the colonial drain of wealth or facilitating industrial development would alleviate the problem.

In general, this nationalism sought reform of the bureaucracy that ruled India, the key elements in such reform being Indianization of the

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Second, the means by which such goals were pursued were also exceedingly moderate. Indeed, it was this above all else that led to sharp criticism and charges of 'mendicancy'. The Moderate leaders prided themselves on, and reiterated at every opportunity, the gradualist and constitutionalist nature of their political activity. When the Congress adopted its first (short-lived) constitution in 1899, this declared, 'The object of the Indian National Congress shall be to promote by constitutional means the interests and well-being of the people of the Indian Empire', and the provincial units of the Congress were to engage in political activity 'on the lines of general appreciation of British rule and of constitutional action for the removal of its defects'.⁹

Thus Congress resolutions opposing government action or inaction would not 'condemn' but rather 'regret'; and resolutions proposing some course of action or remedy to the government would not 'demand' but rather 'suggest' or, at the most, 'urge'. More generally, the style of functioning of Moderate Nationalism was one that some came to find lacking in self-respect—Aurobindo Ghose, one of the early and trenchant 'Extremist' critics of the INC, referred to 'the general timidity of the Congress, its glossing over of hard names ... its fear of too deeply displeasing our masters'.¹⁰ Moreover, a great deal of Congress activity in the years immediately before and after 1892 (the year Councils reform was enacted by the British parliament) was centred in England and directed at persuading the English. Congress speeches, even when addressed to an Indian audience, seemed to presume a second, English audience.¹¹ Thus an essential device in this art of persuasion was extensively to quote English and Anglo-Indian officials in support of any argument—in the speeches of many Moderate leaders, such quotes often constituted one-third or more of the text. In 1917, that eminently moderate body the Deccan Sabha, in an address to the secretary of state for India, Edwin Montagu, and the viceroy, Baron Chelmsford, acknowledged 'the frequent reproach that Indian politicians are too fond of quotations', and went on to explain why that was so:

First, that we can never command the weight and authority of your great men; secondly, that neither the strong language nor the stronger arguments used by British Statesmen may be permissible to Indian Politicians; and thirdly that the quotations may enable the statesmen and rulers of the present day to mark the departure from great traditions which we in India have so much reason to regret and to deplore.¹²

In the three sentences of this justification were summed up some of the defining features of the Moderates—the self-abnegation that was to

Indian civil service and the introduction of some measure of responsible government. Surendranath Banerjea, two-time president of the INC [Indian National Congress] and frequently the one to move resolutions on the twin issues of civil service reform and responsible government, explained in his autobiography that he felt that these 'lay at the root of all other Indian problems, and their satisfactory settlement would mean the solution of them all'.² In particular, it was argued that such administrative/political reforms were the key to economic improvement. Dadabhai Naoroji, three-time INC president in 1895 and the energetic propagator of the theory that England was 'draining' India of wealth, told the Congress that Indianization of the civil service 'will go far to settle the problem of the poverty of the Indian people'.³ In a similar vein, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, INC president in 1905, declared, 'It is with me a firm conviction that unless you have a more effective and more potent voice in the government of your own country, in the administration of your own affairs, in the expenditure of your own revenues, it is not possible for you to effect much in the way of industrial development'.⁴ Such a link was asserted by the Congress as a body from the beginning; its first resolution on the question of poverty, adopted at its 1886 session, immediately went on 'to record its fixed conviction that the introduction of Representative Institutions will prove to be one of the most important practical steps towards the amelioration of the condition of the people'.⁵

Such goals were modest enough. They were 'nationalist' almost by default, inasmuch as the petitioners were Indian and the petitioned British. Leading Moderates frequently referred to the 1833 Government of India Act and the royal proclamation of 1858—both of which had stated that natives would not be debarred from holding office in the bureaucracy that governed India—professing to desire nothing more than what was promised in those documents but had not in fact been granted.⁶ The Congress did imply that, some time in the future, India would be ready for self-government. This was not very radical an expectation, for the idea that the British were 'preparing' Indians for eventual self-government was gaining some strength even in official circles, especially since William Gladstone's return as prime minister in 1880 and Lord Ripon's viceroyalty.⁷ But all the Moderate leaders agreed that for the moment this was impractical, and what the Congress sought was much less. As Banerjea put it at the fourth annual session of the INC, at Allahabad, 'The people of India are, at present, neither asking for, nor thinking of, representative government, but what they do insist on is, that an appreciable portion of the advisers of Government should be their elected representatives'.⁸

distress many other nationalists, but then, in the second sentence, an admission that this was in part, at least, tactical, and, finally, the strategy underpinning all this revealed—to 'hold' the English to their own promises and 'traditions'.

If modesty of goals and moderation in aims were two factors constitutive of the Moderates' moderation, an active loyalism was a third, and one that underwrote the other two. However, to see this loyalism simply as a contingent 'limit' to their nationalism (and hence as something that could later easily be transcended) would be to miss an important aspect of Moderate Nationalism.

Loyalism was, among other things, an important part of the discursive strategy of Moderate Nationalism. Loyalty was frequently invoked to answer or preempt British accusations of disloyalty. Thus Congress leaders would avow that they were fully conscious of the benefits of British rule, and often proceed to enumerate these. Against the charge that the Congress represented a small and unrepresentative elite that had become disaffected with British rule, Badruddin Tyabji in his 1887 presidential address to the Madras Congress countered that it was this elite that was most conscious of the blessings of British rule: 'Who ... will better appreciate advantages of good roads, railways, telegraphs and post-offices, schools, colleges and universities, hospitals, good laws and impartial courts of justice?—the educated natives or the ignorant peasants of this country?'¹³

[...]

[...]Not all Congress leaders were as sanguine about, say, 'British justice' in India as their public pronouncements sometimes suggested. All had bitter experiences of European racial arrogance, and there is no doubt that such rhetorical excesses as those quoted above arose, in part, out of a desire to defuse the suspicion and antagonism of an autocratic colonial state that could at any time shut down the operations of the Congress and wreak its revenge upon what it perceived as a disloyal babu elite.

Nonetheless, Moderate leaders did believe in the 'providential' nature of British rule, if not in the justice of all particular facets and manifestations of it. After enumerating its various benefits, as above, they would frequently seek to clinch the argument by declaring that they and the INC, far from being sources of sedition, were themselves the product of British rule—shining examples of its virtues, proof of its beneficial effects. As Banerjea put it, in a representative statement, 'The National Congress is the outcome of those civilizing influences which Macaulay

and his co-adjustors were instrumental in planting in the government of this country'.¹⁴ Such loyalism was neither purely tactical, nor was it merely a contingent 'limit', the point at which the nationalist imagination faltered and began to peter out. It was rather a constituent element of this nationalism, one of its structuring principles. It did indeed place a limit to criticism, but it was also the very ground from which criticism became possible.

Hence the characteristic form, as well as limit, of Moderate Nationalism—it criticized British rule for failing to live up to its own promise. To urge the British to live up to their mission and their promises was part of the function of the INC—as Banerjea told the Pune Congress in 1895, 'In this Congress from year to year we ask England to accomplish her glorious work'.¹⁵ Naoroji in his magnum opus, *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India*, attacked 'un-British' rather than British rule, declaring that 'a truly British course can and will certainly be vastly beneficent both to Britain and India'.¹⁶ In his case as in others, Moderate Nationalists assailed the colonial connection for failing to fulfil its historic mission as the bearer of liberal and 'modern' institutions and values in India. British rule had been instrumental in the planting of some modern liberal institutions and values in India, and in the development of an elite class of educated Indians who had imbibed these values. However, Britain was failing to complete its appointed role, as evidenced by its selfish economic and political policies in India, and by its distrust of the very class that it had brought forth.

The fourth characteristic feature of moderate nationalism was an almost obsessive invocation of Indian poverty. It is indeed curious that a privileged elite should have been so preoccupied with the issue. For the last three decades of the nineteenth century, and into the twentieth, 'poverty' was the biggest stick with which the Congress beat the British. Apart from Naoroji's relentless publicizing of Indian poverty and the 'drain of wealth' from India to England,¹⁷ there was a veritable flood of literature investigating the subject. Some of the landmarks in this included P. C. Ray's *The Poverty Problem in India* (1895), William Digby's '*Prosperous*' *British India* (1901), Romesh Chandra Dutt's *England and India: A Record of Progress during a Hundred Years* (1897), his monumental two-volume *Economic History of India* (1901–3), and Subramanya Iyer's *Some Economic Aspects of British Rule in India* (1903). In the press and in books, in Congress speeches and resolutions, India's poverty and the 'drain of wealth' were constantly discussed and the blame laid at Britain's door.

There is no counterpart for such an obsessive concern with poverty in the history of the European bourgeoisie's struggle for power, and thus it is not surprising that this should be seen by some historians as the 'immoderate' or radical face of moderate nationalism, or even interpreted, as Bipan Chandra does, as evidence for how a colonial elite, because it too laboured under the disadvantages of colonialism, cast its lot with 'the people'.¹⁸

Before we accept any such readings, however, we would do well to pause and consider the meaning and significance of this preoccupation with poverty, given that it was not accompanied by any equivalent concern for *the poor*. The evidence on this is overwhelming. With a few exceptions—such as its sympathy for peasant protests at revenue enhancement, which affected the British Indian government rather than Indian landlords (and opposition to which fitted in neatly with the theory of a 'drain of wealth')—the Congress in these early years was either uninterested in or opposed to government measures purportedly directed at protecting and improving the lot of rural cultivators or urban workers. Thus the Congress expressed alarm at the cadastral survey being undertaken in Bengal at its 1893 and 1894 sessions, describing measures directed at granting tenants greater security as 'interference' and 'a national catastrophe'.¹⁹ Similarly, the Congress expressed its opposition to the Punjab Land Alienation Bill at its 1899 session and opposed the Bombay Land Revenue Code Amendment Bill of 1901. So, too, with legislation seeking to regulate and protect the rights of industrial workers, except where such legislation would strike primarily at British interests—as when the Congress called for an increase in the wages of Assamese coolies at its 1901 session. However, the Indian Factories Act of 1881 was condemned by the *Journal of the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha*, and on this occasion *The Hindu* went so far as to declare that 'all the so-called hardships of the factory men are a fiction'.²⁰ In 1900, the INC passed a resolution opposing those sections of the Indian Mines Bill that sought to regulate the employment of child and female labour.²¹

All this is well known, and the point here is not the polemical one that the Congress put a class interest before the national one. It is perfectly true that the Congress was composed of a privileged elite with little experience of how the lower orders lived,²² but that only makes their concern with the issue of poverty all the more remarkable. The point is rather that genuine preoccupation with *poverty* did not translate, by and large, into practical efforts to assist and protect the *poor*. What, then, did this concern with the question of poverty signify?

To answer this question, it is necessary to determine what it was that poverty was contrasted with; what was the desired state that poverty fell short of or negated? There are at least two ways of conceiving of poverty. One is as a brute, palpable reality, absolute or relative, which derives its force from a contrast with plenty. The other is to place it within a continuum, where it signifies not so much sheer lack as incompleteness. This narrative is a historically recent one. Its name is progress, its end point, modernity, and its engine or driving force, economic 'development'.

This, I suggest, was what poverty signified for the moderate nationalists; it functioned as a metaphor for backwardness, which under colonial conditions meant powerlessness and humiliation. Thus it was that the solution the moderates advocated for poverty was not direct amelioration of the lot of the poor but rather economic and industrial modernization—a goal that could be seen to conflict with, and where it did so was seen as prior to, measures aimed at improving tenant security or labour conditions.²³ This explains why neglect of the poor was combined with such concern with poverty, and why economic reform, and in particular industrialization, was repeatedly invoked as the antonym of and solution to poverty.²⁴

The image of modernity that the Indian elites had in mind was Europe, more specifically England. England was seen to have conquered India partly because England was industrialized and economically 'strong', as India was not. Mahadev Govind Ranade, a social reformer and founding member of the INC, remarked, 'Commercial and Manufacturing predominance naturally confers Political ascendancy'.²⁵ Banerjea spelled out why the Congress devoted so much attention to economic issues: 'Ours is a political organization; but we cannot overlook considerations which affect the development of our industries and our manufactures. The economic condition of a people has an intimate bearing upon their political advancement'.²⁶ To become modern and strong, India had to emulate England—and the unspoken question behind the poverty debate was, 'Why, after more than a century of British rule, has India not become wealthy and powerful like Britain?' This is what gave the debate on poverty its sharp edge, its critical potential—in India, it was the colonial elite that reproached the metropolitan bourgeoisie for failing to modernize and transform India, and this bourgeoisie that invoked the peculiarities of Indian 'culture' and the Indian character as excuses for its inability, or unwillingness, to do so.

However, if this lent a cutting edge to the poverty debate, making it a crucial part of the nationalist critique of British rule, it also served to give this nationalism its specifically moderate character. England served not only as a model to be emulated but, more important, was seen as the font from which modernity must needs radiate outward, until it reached even the colonies. Ranajit Guha's remark in a somewhat different context also applies here—Indian nationalists 'put their faith in the universalist pretensions of British capital'.²⁷ Doing so decisively shaped the character of their nationalism; however sharp the criticisms, this enterprise shared much with and expected much of its target.

These, then, were the four constituent elements of Moderate Nationalism. In summary, one could say that it was at once nationalist and liberal. It was nationalist in that the goals Moderate leaders sought were sought in the name of India and the Indian people. It was liberal and modernizing because these national aspirations would be expressed through liberal and representative institutions and because Indian interests were to be furthered by the development of a modern and industrialized economy.

Was it *because* it was liberal that the nationalism of the late nineteenth century was 'moderate'? That is, did its liberalism compromise its nationalist militancy? This suggestion was made by contemporary critics and has often been made since. The Moderate leaders' adulation of British institutions and ways, so the argument runs, blunted the sharp edge of their nationalism. Since the liberal political life they sought was also seen by them to be a product of British (or European) culture and history, any politics predicated on this was bound to be imitative and timid.

There is obviously considerable truth in such an assessment. Inasmuch as the Moderates aspired to institutions and a political culture they saw as rooted in European soil, their nationalist politics could not but be imitative, and inasmuch as such institutions were seen to lie within the gift of the British, they were bound to plead rather than demand. But this is still only part of the story, even if the most often told part.

To understand the meaning of Moderate Nationalism, it is not enough to identify liberalism as lying at the heart of its nationalist project, and thereby constricting its militancy. For it is not just that the nationalism of the Moderates was timid or partial because of their liberalism but also that their liberalism itself was of a peculiar and weak sort, a fact connected, among other things, with how they conceived the people who constituted the Indian nation and perceived their own relation with them.

When the Moderate leaders imagined, and spoke of and to, an Indian 'public', this public was a body considerably smaller than the people of India; most of the rural population, all women, and a large section of the urban population were not included.²⁸ And when they asked for representation on the governing or advisory bodies of state, they were not, as we have seen, asking for fully representative government. Nor was the 'responsible government' being sought to be based on an extensive male suffrage (as was the case in Britain). At its first session in 1885, the Congress called for an expansion of the advisory councils and for the introduction of an elective principle. Since the viceroy's and the Provincial Councils were only advisory, this fell well short of a call for representative government. The following year, elaborating on this, the Congress also made it clear that the 'elective principle' it championed was 'to be conferred only on those classes and members of the community, *prima facie* capable of exercising it wisely and independently'.²⁹ [...]

Thus the degree of representation desired as well as the suffrage on which it was to be based were to be limited. The reason—one that seemed so obvious to Moderate leaders that they seldom bothered to spell it out—was that India was not, in their view, yet 'ready' for fully representative self-government, based on an extensive (male) franchise, as in Britain. That 'India' was not ready meant that some Indians were not ready; needless to say, the Indians not able to cast a vote and exercise power 'wisely' and 'responsibly' were not Indians drawn from elite groups [...]

What, in the perception of the moderates, was the nature of the gulf separating them and their class from the masses, a gulf, one effect of which was that the elite were fitted for representative institutions, while the masses were not? What, more generally, was the attitude of the politically active elite toward the poor, and what place, if any, did they occupy in the discourse of Moderate Nationalism?

For the elites who constituted the bulk of the INC (and in this period they were primarily an urban, British-educated and English-speaking elite), the 'poverty-stricken masses' of India were something of an unknown quantity, a rhetorical abstraction. The divide between the nationalist elite and the bulk of the Indian population was real and vast. Recognizing this, the historiography of Indian nationalism has sometimes characterized this gap as the 'alienation' of the nationalist elite from the lower orders,³⁰ and pointed to this as the explanation for many of the characteristic features of early Indian nationalism. In this 'sociological'

reading, of which there are many versions, a cause external to the actual discourse of moderate nationalism is invoked to explain the 'timidity' of that discourse. Versions of this historiographical approach differ precisely in that they identify different causes: class distinction between the elite and masses may be seen as the essence of alienation and hence of moderation, or else a cultural divide between an 'anglicized' leadership and a pre-modern population. In all cases, this gap and the inability of the nationalist elite to bridge it are cited as the explanation for the hesitations and half-heartedness of moderate nationalism.

I do not wish to displace such explanations, for to varying degrees, they are persuasive. I do wish, however, to problematize the sharp distinction between the social and the discursive on which such explanations are premised, and which allow for the former to stand as cause and the latter as effect. Let us then note, first of all, that it is not that the nationalist elite 'failed' to bridge the gap between itself and the masses, for it never sought to do so. Aurobindo Ghose's trenchant indictment was precisely that the Congress 'has never been, and has made no honest endeavour to be, a popular body'.³¹ While the Congress made some efforts to involve non-English-speaking elites in its activities, it made next to none at mobilizing non-elite groups. [...]

The Congress made no such efforts because it believed that the gap between it and the peasant masses was too vast to bridge through its efforts. Such bridging would require a great deal of time and would be effected not through overtures from the Congress but rather through the civilizing impact of British rule. Prolonged exposure to the rule of law, to good government, and the extension of education would enlighten and uplift the masses, raising them closer to the level of the elite. In the meantime, it was in fact necessary to convince the foreign rulers that their regenerating mission would be better accomplished if the educated Indians who comprised the nationalist elite were to be involved in the governance of the country. Thus the nationalist elite were not only aware of the division between themselves and the mass of their countrymen, they constantly drew attention to it.

This is the second complication: the gap between the moderate nationalist elite and the mass of Indians was not simply a social cause, operating from 'outside' the discourse of nationalism to shape it but rather was very much present 'in' that discourse. It was a central theme of this nationalism that the nationalist elite be accorded a more important place in affairs of state because it occupied a halfway point between the British and the natives. [...] Consequently, they were better able to explain

the intentions and procedures of the foreign ruler to the masses than that ruler was. On the other hand, they were closer to their fellow countrymen in manners, dress, religion—closer to them, in short, in 'sentiment'. As a result, they were much better fitted than the British to recognize the needs and aspirations of India's masses and transmit these to their foreign rulers. [...] Naoroji told those attending the second session of the Congress, 'we, the educated classes, have become the true interpreters and mediators between the masses of our countrymen and our rulers'.³²

The idea that the new elites would function to translate and disseminate the British mission was one that in ruling circles was at least as old as Thomas Babington Macaulay's Minute on Education (1835). Almost thirty-five years after Macaulay's Minute, Lord Napier was to tell the graduates of Madras University that Macaulay had succeeded: 'you, the adopted children of European civilization, are the interpreters between the stranger and the Indian, between the Government and the subject'.³³ However, soon after the founding of the Congress, official circles began vigorously to deny the obverse: the idea that these elites could lay any claim to representing the peasantry. Indeed, it became a standard means of dismissing Congress criticism of the British administration to declare that the Congress only spoke for a small, sectional class interest. [...] The rejoinder of Pherozshah Mehta, eminent Indian lawyer and Moderate leader, was representative: 'the microscopic minority can far better and far more intuitively represent the needs and the aspirations of their own countrymen than the still more microscopic minority of the omniscient District Officers'.³⁴

The gap between the nationalist elite and the masses will not, then, serve to explain fully the character, and limits, of this nationalism. This gap did not simply operate as an external cause, shaping the discourse of moderate nationalism; it occupied a prominent place *in* that discourse. Drawing attention to the gap was part of the discursive strategy of moderate nationalism; it was part of the nationalist case as to why British rule needed to take a different form, one in which the Indian elites would play a greater role in administering the country.

We must look, therefore, not only to the relation between 'moderate' discourse and the 'social' but the place of the social in that discourse, not only to the relation of the nationalist elite to the masses but to its perception of that relationship. We know that the elite that made up the Congress in this period made a point of sharply distinguishing between itself and the masses, and we know further that it was integral to moderate nationalist discourse to declare that the masses could not represent

themselves but needed to be represented. We need now to find what precisely it was that, in the eyes of this elite, made it an elite, very different from the rest of its countrymen, and also why in its view its countrymen could not represent themselves but needed the good offices of the elite to do so for them.

[...]

Homages to English education were staple fare of the nationalist rhetoric of this period. R.C. Dutt's remark—'Western education is perhaps the greatest of blessings India has gained under British rule'—was but one of a great number in this vein.³⁵ Histories of the introduction, progress, and effects of English education abounded, each of which hypostatized its object, so that sometimes education appeared not so much as an aspect of British rule but rather British rule as the necessary precondition to the introduction of English education. One of the earliest and more sober of these histories began as follows: 'The origin, rise and progress of English education in India ... constitute[s] one of the most significant episodes, not only in the annals of India, but in the history of the civilised world'.³⁶

What led to such encomiums was the perception that education was not just the transmission of skills or literacy—indeed, it was hardly that, given the small numbers affected by it³⁷—but rather the means to a much greater end, namely the transformation and regeneration of India. There were, of course, other aspects of British rule that were pointed to by Indians as well as their rulers as having the effect of 'regenerating' and civilizing India. Good government, which India was held to have lacked, was frequently pointed to as both evidence of India's regeneration and the necessary frame for further advance. In a similar vein, the 'rule of law', which had replaced arbitrary and despotic rule, was pointed to as an advance that paved the way, or provided the necessary conditions for, India's regeneration. Representative institutions and a free press were frequently singled out as providing the necessary framework for that 'material and moral progress' of India that was annually charted by its rulers. If out of all these, education was often singled out, as in R.C. Dutt's case, as 'perhaps' the greatest of all the blessings of British rule, it was because it was seen as that which enabled the other blessings to fully function. English education, and higher education in particular, was seen as structurally different from the other benefits of British rule, and hence especially important. Whereas the latter transformed the political and other structures of India, education created the people capable of understanding and operating these institutions; while the rule of law and bureaucratic government created new 'public' spaces, education

created the public to occupy these spaces. As Banerjea explained to the Congress in 1902,

The three great boons which we have received from the British Government are High Education, the gift of a Free Press and local Self-Government ... But high education is the most prized, the most deeply cherished of them all. It is high education which has made local Self-Government the success that it is admitted to be. It is again high education which has elevated the tone of the Indian Press.³⁸

The institutional changes effected by British rule transformed India 'externally', but this would have remained purely external had not education created a class of Indians capable of 'internalizing' the regenerative effects of British rule. [...]

Education, then, occupied a special place in the discourse of moderate nationalism and, indeed, elite nationalism more generally. The dissemination of European knowledge was accorded a privileged role in the 'regeneration of India', because it 'generated' a new class of Indians, Indians who had imbibed the spirit that animated all institutional and other transformations effected by the British. [...] Education, which gave access to the spirit animating the transformation of India, consequently gave those who possessed it 'voice' in the new institutions of that new India. By that same logic, it rendered many others, who did not have access to this new spirit and these skills, mute; or, if they were the many without voice or influence even in pre-British India, rendered them further mute.

Thus it was that education came to be singled out for special attention in elite nationalist discourse. It served, on the one hand, as an important factor that, in the domain of a new 'public' life dominated by British-created institutions, distinguished elite from the non-elite. Further, the grounds of the distinction were such that distinguishing between elite and masses on the grounds of education simultaneously explained why the latter could not represent themselves but needed to be represented; education gave voice, and thus the 'dumb masses' could not speak for themselves but needed the elite to do so.

The nation, Benedict Anderson tells us in his work of the same title, is an 'imagined community'. Once a nationalism has made good its claim that a certain 'people' exists, by founding a state, a particular form of national imagining comes to be officially sanctioned and embodied in numerous practices and institutions—in constitutions, a parliament that represents the people and pursues the national interest, in tombs of unknown

soldiers, in museums of national art and culture, in public holidays such as 4 July or Republic Day. Other forms of imagining the community continue to exist, of course;³⁹ but one mode of imagining the nation is given official sanction and material embodiment, and is to that extent the most visible and dominant form. By contrast, where nationalism is oppositional, where its longings have not yet yielded its own state but where, as in colonial India, it faces a hostile, colonial state, the 'evidence' for the existence of nationalism, and therefore that which allows us to write its history, can only be found in the diverse imaginings of national community: in nationalist organizations, in programmes, in literature and songs—in short, in all that which can plausibly be construed as expressing a national imagining.

The first task of the historiography of nationalism, in this latter instance, is to identify its object, which it can only do by identifying what it takes to be genuine, and socially significant, expressions of a will-to-nationhood. Its second task—logically distinguishable from the first but not separable from it—is to distinguish and connect the inevitably numerous and varied forms of national imagining. These may be characterized as 'moments' in the natural unfolding of nationalism, or as competing tendencies, or as temporal phases or stages in the evolution of a movement; in all cases, to connect these is part of the process of transforming a chronicle of nationalist happenings into a historical narrative of nationalism.

Nationalist historiography homogenizes the history of nationalism, either because it stumbles over the first step—its blinkered vision results in its only identifying one form of imagining the nation—or because, in telling the story of Indian nationalism, it assimilates all other forms of national imagining to this one form. A much superior historiography is one that is more sensitive to the varieties of imaginings of the nation and is particularly interested in the social and material circumstances in which these were embedded. However [...] having identified certain forms of imaginings, this historiography then takes the circumstances in which they are embedded to be the explanation, or even the cause, of what is imagined. In the case of Moderate Nationalism, for instance, the fact that this was an elite nationalism is quite correctly pointed out (because it serves to characterize this nationalism): but it is then made to double up as an explanation or cause for its moderation.

In this essay, I have sought to show the difficulties such a procedure encounters in writing the history of Moderate Nationalism. The loyaltyism of Moderate Nationalism cannot simply be explained as an externally

imposed limit to the nationalist imagination, because it was part of the rhetorical and political strategy of this nationalism; the incessant invocation of the 'poverty of India' resists explanation in terms of the class origins of the nationalist leadership, given the privileged status of Moderate leaders, but it also resists explanation as evidence of their identification with the poor; and the distance between elite and masses, while real enough, was not simply the cause of a discursive consequence but present in that discourse as an important, structuring element. I have instead offered another account, in which the moderation of Moderate Nationalism lay not in a failure to imagine the nation, in an insufficiency or lack of nationalism to be explained by an external cause, but rather in the fact that its imagination was one in which the 'nation' included people unfitted for political rights, in which politics was identified with that domain of public life created and made possible by British rule, in which the inadequacies of 'the people' were measured by their distance from this domain, in which the educated elites had to represent the poor, rough, and ignorant masses, and where the *continuation* of British rule was necessary for its eventual supersession.

[...]

NOTES

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1. For a recent example, see B.N. Pandey, gen. ed., *A Centenary History of the Indian National Congress, 1885-1985*, 4 vols, New Delhi, 1985, vol. 1, especially the 'Foreword' by the then Prime Minister of India, Rajiv Gandhi.
2. Surendranath Banerjee, *A Nation in Making: Being the Reminiscences of Fifty Years of Public Life*, 1925; rpt edn, Bombay, 1963, p. 126.
3. Banerjee, *Nation in Making*, p. 17.
4. 'Our Political Situation' (public address, Madras, 25 July 1904), in *Speeches and Writings of Gopal Krishna Gokhale*, D.G. Karve and D.V. Ambedkar, eds, 3 vols, London, 1966, vol. 2, p. 178.
5. A. Moin Zaidi and Shaheeda Zaidi (eds), *The Encyclopedia of the Indian National Congress*, New Delhi, 1976-, vol. 1, p. 138.
6. Daniel Argov points out that, until 1908, all Congress reports had a cover sheet consisting of quotes from these acts and from British officials, under the title 'Some of England's Pledges to India'. Argov, *Moderates and*

- Extremists in the Indian Nationalist Movement, 1883-1920*, Bombay, 1967, p. 39 (the cover sheet is reproduced on 38).
7. See Sarvepalli Gopal, *British Policy in India, 1858-1905*, Cambridge, 1965, pp. 144 and following.
 8. Zaidi, *Encyclopaedia of the Indian National Congress*, vol. 1, p. 249.
 9. *Ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 479.
 10. Aurobindo Ghose, *New Lamps for Old* (1893-94), Pondicherry, 1974, p. 11.
 11. Douglas E. Haynes makes the point that, before the advent of a Gandhian style of politics in Surat, 'public meetings were means of presenting a cause to the colonial rulers rather than a method of stirring popular enthusiasm': Haynes, *Rhetoric and Ritual in Colonial India: The Shaping of a Public Culture in Surat City, 1852-1928*, Berkeley, California, 1991, p. 221.
 12. 'Address of the Deccan Sabha', mimeographed, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, p. 20.
 13. '1887 Presidential Address', in A. Moin Zaidi (ed.), *Congress Presidential Addresses*, 5 vols, New Delhi, 1985-89, vol. 1, p. 44.
 14. '1895 Presidential Address', in Zaidi, *Congress Presidential Addresses*, vol. 1, p. 223.
 15. *Ibid.*, p. 286.
 16. Dadabhai Naoroji, *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India* (London, 1901), p. v. A few pages later, Naoroji declared (pp. xii-xiii), 'My whole object in all my writings is to impress upon the British People, that instead of a disastrous explosion of the British Indian Empire, as must be the result of the present dishonourable un-British system of government, there is a great and glorious future for Britain and India to an extent unconceivable [sic] at present, if the British people will awaken to their duty, will be true to their British instincts of fair play and justice, and will insist upon the faithful and conscientious fulfilment of all their great and solemn promises and pledges'.
 17. The economic complaints of the nationalist elite—over excessive taxation, wasteful government expenditures, military adventures paid for by India—were knitted together by Dadabhai Naoroji into a more comprehensive and damning claim, namely that England was enriching itself at the expense of India, via a 'drain of wealth'. For a good summary and appraisal of Naoroji's economic theories, see Birendranath N. Ganguli, *Dadabhai Naoroji and the Drain Theory*, New Delhi, 1965. See also Bipan Chandra, *The Rise and Growth of Economic Nationalism in India*, New Delhi, 1966.
 18. See Chandra, *Economic Nationalism*.
 19. John R. McLane, *Indian Nationalism and the Early Congress*, Princeton, New Jersey, 1977, p. 236.
 20. Quoted in Chandra, *Economic Nationalism*, pp. 334, 336.
 21. Chandra, *Economic Nationalism*, p. 353.
 22. On the social background of Congress leaders in this period, see McLane, *Indian Nationalism and the Early Congress*.

23. Thus opposition to regulation of land tenure, factory hours, and so on was usually voiced on the grounds that it would throttle infant Indian industries; and, moreover, that this, rather than philanthropy, was behind such government measures.
24. By the 1890s, almost every presidential address to the Congress dilated, usually at length, on the importance of industrial development. Lord Curzon was to complain that the twin subjects of technical education and industrial development had 'an extraordinary fascination for the tongue in India'; quoted in N.G. Chandravankar's presidential address at the 1900 (Lahore) Congress, in Zaidi, *Congress Presidential Addresses*, vol. 1, p. 495. M.G. Ranade, one of the most articulate and influential champions of industrialization, flatly declared, 'there can be no doubt the permanent salvation of the Country depends upon the growth of Indian Manufactures and Commerce'. Ranade, *Essays on Indian Economics*, Bombay, 1899, p. 121.
25. Ranade, *Essays on Indian Economics*, p. 186.
26. '1895 Presidential Address', in Zaidi, *Congress Presidential Addresses*, vol. 1, p. 257.
27. Ranajit Guha, 'Dominance without Hegemony and Its Historiography', in Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies VI*, Delhi, 1992, p. 227.
28. Haynes makes the same point in relation to the municipal politics of Surat—that when the educated elite spoke of the public, 'No one ... suggested that the public meant anything as broad as the entire urban population'. *Rhetoric and Ritual*, p. 157.
29. Quoted in Sarkar, *Modern India, 1885-1947*, p. 90.
30. See, for instance, Sumit Sarkar, 'Popular Movements and Middle Class Leadership in Late Colonial India', Calcutta, 1983, p. 35.
31. Ghose, *New Lamps for Old*, p. 26 (emphasis added).
32. '1886 Presidential Address', in Zaidi, *Congress Presidential Addresses*, vol. 1, p. 26.
33. Lord Napier, Speech at 12th Convocation of Madras University, in K. Subba Rao, ed., *Convocation Addresses of the Universities of Bombay and Madras* (Madras, 1892), p. 53.
34. '1890 Presidential Address', in Zaidi, *Congress Presidential Addresses*, vol. 1, p. 88 (emphasis added).
35. Romesh Dutt, *The Economic History of India in the Victorian Age*, 7th edn, London, 1950, p. 198. Half a century later, an 'Address' to Montagu and Chelmsford delivered by a delegation of the All-India Congress and Muslim League, including Banerjee, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, and Mohandas Gandhi, described 'liberal English education' as 'Britain's most imperishable monument in India'. Mimeograph, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, p. 1.
36. Syed Mahmood, *A History of English Education in India: Its Rise, Development, Progress, Present Condition and Prospects* (1895; rpt edn), Delhi, 1981, p. 1.

37. In 1901-2, the total number of students in colleges in India was only 17,148. *Progress of Education in India, 1897/8-1901/2*, Calcutta, p. 81. In 1928, only 4.51 per cent of the total population was enrolled in any educational institution, at any level. *Progress of Education in India, 1927-32*, 2 vols, Delhi, 1934, vol. 1, p. 15.
38. '1902 Presidential Address', in Zaidi, *Congress Presidential Addresses*, vol. 2, p. 118.
39. Not least of all in South Asia, where the elites who sought to lead the struggle against colonialism sometimes secured dominance but never hegemony. See Guha, 'Dominance without Hegemony'.