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document packet: british rule & indian nationalism

Document 1

The English are people who overthrow all religions. You should understand well the object of destroying the religions of Hindustan; they have for a long time been causing books to be written and circulated throughout the country by the hands of their priests, and, exercising their authority, have brought out numbers of preachers to spread their own tenets {beliefs}: this has been learned from one of their own trusted agents. . . . [The English] ordered the Brahmans and others of their army to bite cartridges, in the making up of which fat had been used. The Mussulman [Muslim] soldiers perceived that by this expedient the religion of the Brahmans and Hindus only was in danger, but nevertheless they also refused to bite them. On this the English now resolved on ruining the faith of both. . . . It is now my firm conviction that if these English continue in Hindustan they will kill every one in the country, and will utterly overthrow our religions. . . .Under these circumstances, I would ask, what course have you decided on to protect your lives and faith? Were your views and mine the same, we might destroy them entirely with a very little trouble; and if we do so, we shall protect our religions and save the country. . . . All you Hindus are hereby solemnly adjured, by your faith in Ganges, Tulsi, and Saligram; and all you Mussulmans, by your belief in God and the Koran, as these English are the common enemy of both, to unite in considering their slaughter extremely expedient {convenient}, for by this alone will the lives and faith of both be saved. It is expedient, then, that you should coalesce and slay them….

SOURCE: Moulavy Syad Kutb Shah Sahib, Indian Muslim leader, 1870.

Document 2

British brains, British enterprise, and British capital have, in a material sense, transformed the face of India. Means of communication have been developed: innumerable bridges, over 40,000 miles of railway, 70,000 miles of metalled {hard-surfaced} roads testify to the skill and industry of British engineers. Irrigation works on a stupendous scale have brought 30,000,000 acres under cultivation, and thus greatly added to the agricultural wealth of a country which still lives mainly by agriculture….Thanks to improved sanitation (much resented by the more ignorant beneficiaries), to a higher standard of living, to irrigation, to canalization, to the development of transport, and to carefully throughout schemes for relief work, famines, which by their regular occurrence formerly presented a perennial problem to humane administrators, have now virtually disappeared. To have conquered the menace of famine in the face of greater longevity {length of life}, of diminished death-rate, and the suppression of war, is a remarkable achievement for which India is wholly indebted to British administration.

SOURCE: Sir John A. R. Marriott. British historian, early 20c.

Document 3

Let us speak out like men and proclaim that we are loyal to the backbone {cheers}; that we understand the benefits English rule has conferred upon us; that we thoroughly appreciate the education that has been given to us, the new light which has been poured upon us, turning us from darkness into light and teaching us the new lesson that kings are made for the people, not people for their kings; and this new lesson we have learned amidst the darkness of Asiatic despotism only by the light of the free English civilization {loud cheers}.

SOURCE: Dadabhai Naaoroji, former president of the Indian Congress, late 19c.

Document 4

One fact is that this alien government has ruined the country. In the beginning, all of us were taken by surprise. We were almost dazed. We though that everything that the rulers did was for our god and that this English government has descended from the clouds to save us from the invasions of Tamerlane and Genghis Khan, and as they say, not only from foreign invasions but from internecine {civil} warfare. We felt happy for a time, but it soon came to light that the peace which was established in this country did this….—that we were prevented from going at each other's throats, so that a foreigner might go at the throat of all of us. *Pax Britannica* {British peace or rule} has been established in this country in order that a foreign government may exploit the country. That this is the effect of this *Pax Britannica* is being gradually realized in these days. It was an unhappy circumstance that it was not realized sooner….English education, growing poverty, and better familiarity with our rulers, opened our eyes and our leaders….

Your industries are ruined utterly, ruined by foreign rule; your wealth is going out of the country and you are reduced to the lowest level which no human being can occupy. In this state of things, is there any other remedy by which you can help yourself? The remedy is not petitioning but boycott. We say prepare your forces, organize your power, and then go to work so that they cannot refuse you what you demand….Every Englishman knows that there are a mere handful in this country and it is the business of every one of them to befool you in believing that you are weak and they are strong. This is politics. We have been deceived by such policy so long. What the new party wants you to do is to realize the fact that your future rests entirely in your own hands….We shall not give them assistance to collect revenue and keep peace. We shall not assist them in fighting beyond the frontiers or outside India with Indian blood and money. We shall not assist them in carrying on the administration of justice. We shall have our own courts, and when time comes we shall not pay taxes. Can you do that by your united efforts? If you can, you are free from tomorrow….

SOURCE: Bal Gangadhar Tilak, *His Writings and Speeches* (Madras: Ganesh and Co., 1923), pp. 55-67.

Document 5

The British who came to India were not political or social revolutionaries; they were conservatives representing the most reactionary social class in England, and England was in some ways one of the most conservative countries in Europe….They encouraged and consolidated the position of the socially reactionary groups in India, and opposed all those who worked for political and social change. If change came, it was in spite of them or as an incidental and unexpected consequence of their activities. The introduction of the steam engine and the railway was a big step toward a change…but it was intended to consolidate their rule and facilitate the exploitation, for their own benefit, of the interior of the country….

I remember that when I was a boy the British-owned newspapers in India were full of official news and utterances; of service news, transfers and promotions; of the doings of English society, of polo, races, dances, and amateur theatricals. There was hardly a word about the people of India, about their political, cultural, or economic life. Reading them, one would hardly suspect that they existed….

Racialism in India is not so much English versus Indian. It is European as opposed to Asiatic. In India every European, be he German or Pole or Rumanian, is automatically a member of the ruling race. Railway carriages, station retiring rooms, benches in parks, are marked "For Europeans only." This is bad enough in South Africa or elsewhere [many Indians had migrated to South Africa], but to have to put up with it in one's country is a humiliating and exasperating reminder of our enslaved condition.

SOURCE: Jawaharlal Nehru, 1920s.

Document 6

At present the Government of India is responsible to the British Parliament, which is the oldest, the least unwise and the most democratic parliament in the world. To transfer that responsibility to this highly artificial and restricted oligarchy {small group} of Indian politicians would be a…shameful act. It would be an act of cowardice, desertion and dishonor. It would bring grave material evils, both upon India and Great Britain; but it would bring upon Great Britain a moral shame which would challenge forever the reputation of the British Empire as a valiant {courageous} and benignant {good} force in the history of mankind.

The faithful discharge of our duty in India is not only a cause, but a symbol. It is the touchstone {excellent example} of our fortunes in the present difficult time. If we cannot do our duty in India, be sure we shall have shown ourselves unworthy to preserve the vast Empire which still centers upon this small island. The same spirit of unimaginative incompetence and weak compromise and…drift will paralyze trade and business and prevent either financial reorganization or economic resurgence {renewal}. What we require to do now is to stand erect and look the world in the face, and do our duty without fear or favor.

SOURCE: Winston Churchill in a speech in 1931.