



HOME RULE MOVEMENT- A DISSIPATED RED HOT AGITATION-THE URDU PRESS AND PUBLIC OPINION IN MADRAS PRESIDENCY

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The grant of Home Rule to Ireland with its emphasis on internal self-government and the maintenance of the union, made home rule a respectable phrase. It was probably no accident that it was a British woman of Irish extraction who had settled in India- Mrs. Annie Besant-who first perceived the political potential of the demand for home rule in India. She was 67 years old in 1914 when she joined the Indian National Congress and began taking an active interest in politics. On 2 January 1914 she started a weekly paper *Commonweal* from Adayar (Madras) and on 14 July a daily called *New India*. Mrs. Besant gave India no new political doctrine, but she did supply her with a new political slogan. She herself explained why she chose the new slogan 'Home Rule': 'I used the words "Home Rule" instead of self-government. The first is shorter: self-government is four syllables and Home Rule only two.'ⁱ

Within a year after the out-break of the First world war, she launched what the Government itself a vowed as the 'red hot agitation' for Home Rule. Besant's association with the Congress began in 1914, When the twenty-ninth session of the Indian National Congress was held at Madras. This session saw her for the first time on the platform of the great National Assembly. At this congress, Besant supported a resolution demanding self-government for India. The movement aimed at creating the public opinion.ⁱⁱ

Besant planned to form a Home Rule League with two sections India and English. DadabhaiNaroji agreed to be the general president. William Wedderburn headed the English section and S.SubramaniyaIyer the Indian section. When she propounded the scheme of Home Rule at a private meeting with some leaders at Bombay in September 1915, none but Jinnah and petit received it with favour. In the presidency of Madras many congressmen opposed it on the plea that home owing allegiance to the congress should attempt to rise over it and do things independently. Tilak who was sentenced to 6 years imprisonment for some seditious articles in the *Kesari* and was deported to Mandalay was freed in 1914. The Maharashtra Home Rule league was started on 1st May 1916. Besant saw the advantage of coming to an agreement with Tilak.ⁱⁱⁱ

The Urdu Press About Home Rule in Madras Presidency

Quami Report referring to the address of the president of the Congress wrote that, "The man who declares that he does not desire Independence is a liar, he who says he has no grievance is a sycophant, he who is conscious of no ambition is a base fellow and above all is it true that the individual or nation that has recourse to improper means is an arch rebel. As to Home Rule the fact is we are certainly in accord with the idea, but we are first and foremost loyal servants of the government of Islam and of the rule of faith"^{iv}

The editor of **Jaridah-i-Rozgar** wrote that the president of the Congress in his address told, "India is quite prepared for Home Rule which should be granted very soon" in traversing the statement of the President that India quite prepared for Home Rule said: We know that not a single Mussalman can be found in India who does not view Home Rule with adherence, while he admits the blessings of the present government, our brethren should be asked to say what government gave them so much education, Where they have been trained to govern and through which Government they have obtained honour and respect."^v

The **Quami Report** wrote that, "Madras government has in a single attack but the three formidable supporters of Home Rule out of action. They can neither speak with their mouths nor with their heads. For the sake of Hindus an Irish Lady, have accepted the torture of silence, seclusion and friendlessness. We are not inimical to Home Rule but we do not wish to scratch it before time. It will come of its own accord and in such a manner that the whole world will be amazed at its sudden arrival. We shall be shartled and say: "They come into our house. Be hold God's power", sometimes we look at them and sometimes at outhouse".^{vi}

Among the supporters of the Home Rule agitation whose conduct attracted special notice. M. K. KrishnamaAchariyar who had been touring from place to place delivering lectures in praise of Mrs. Besant and in support of her Home Rule propaganda. She herself took part in the proceedings of the provincial conference at Cuddalore and it is now announced that she would preside at a district conference to be held in Coimbatore in the end of June.^{vii}

The **Mukhbir-i-Dakhan**wrote that an ill-timed agitation had been going on in Madras for a long time and Mrs. Annie Besant and her supporters have been most persistent in leveling reproaches at the Government. It repeatedly written about the difficulties and disagreeable things connected with home rule and had gave it as its opinion that India should first of all advance herself educationally and industrially. Mrs. Annie Besant, however made home rule the aim of her life and a few of her well-wishers made common cause with her. The editor inviting the attention of his indulgent readers to Lord Pentland's speech at the legislative council on the subject of



home rule observes. "We regret to find that the apprehension which we entertained from the very beginning, proved to be well founded by the internment of Mrs. Besant, Mr. Mundale and Mr. Wadia on Saturday. In our opinion politics do not constitute a sin or a crime. They could have made use of this in moderation and fairness but they wanted to establish English liberty and English freedom in India where they would do more harm than good because of differences in religion, nationality and dispositions"^{viii}

Jaridah-i-Rozgar wrote that the Muhammadans unanimously agreed that the Home Rule, self-government or Swaraj plant would never thrive in the Indian climax. The editor referring to his previous articles on this subject observes that unless the essential qualities and national conditions required by the Muhammadans, they could not derive any advantage from the grant of home rule. In conclusion the editor told that his articles had been supported by such cogent reasons and well-balanced arguments readily understood by the general public that even the opponents said that really India does not yet require home rule.^{ix}

Jaridah-i-Rozgar wrote that the meeting held at the Gokale Hall under the presidency of Sir SubramaniyaAyyar in connection with the cancellation of the passports for the home rulers. Among the speakers Yakoob Hasan expressed his personal opinion and said that the people of India have been asked to prepare to fight with the Germans. "Why should we fight the Germans? The people of India were ruled by an alien Government. The power which threatens to attack Indians also an alien one. The whole world knows that one of the results of British rule in India is peace and tranquility which she did not enjoy in the part. The editor told that if there is any change in the form of government would be the ruin of India and perhaps Yakoob Hasan desired by substituting home rule for existing administration to see the state of affairs that existed before the advent of British Raj. In conclusion the writer quotes Roosevelt that, "India is not yet fit for self-government".^x

In Besant's view the Rowlatt Act was vastly changed from the recommendations of the report of the sedition committee and contained nothing that a good citizen could object to! Towards the end of 1919 Besant was staying in Southampton. But she sailed all the way to India to attend the Amritsar Congress in order to urge acceptance of Montford Reforms proposals. Within three years of her unanimous election as President of the Indian National Congress Besant stood alone with merely five of her lieutenants against thousands who favoured Gandhiji's plan of Non-co-operation at the Nagpur session of the Congress in December 1920. Besant had turned thoroughly pro-British. While the rest of the country was thus plunged into the Non-co-operation movement, she was engaged in preparing for the next stage in India's political advancement. It is imperative to say a word about the Madras Parliament founded by Besant in 1919, the deliberations of this Parliament which met periodically at Gokhale Hall in Madras.^{xi}

Conclusion

The crux of the whole issue in the immediate context is that Besant changed her stand on the Montford reforms proposals which she as president of the Congress had opposed. She engineered an embarrassing defection of the moderates from the Congress. These erstwhile moderates who called themselves "Liberals" and formed their own federation subscribed to the reform proposals in principle and co-operated with the government in its implementation. The Congress consistently opposed the reforms with all its might and main. The vicissitudes of the reforms proposals vis-à-vis the Indian National Movement constitute the subject of the ensuing chapters. The demand for home rule was simple and forceful, but it had the great disadvantage of being impossible to satisfy in the short run. After 1917, as Gandhiji took more and more active part in politics infusing greater tenacity and vigour of Home Rule Movement which was from the beginning contemplated to be a "Pioneer Movement" to do the 'spade work' got dissipated and ultimately lost its identity in the Non-cooperation Movement of 1921.

References

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