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EMERGENCE OF MYLAPORE AND EGMORE CLIQUES IN MADRAS CONGRESS

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ABSTRACT:

After the sinking of the Surat Congress, the question that stirred the minds of all members of Congress was the future of that great body. The general feeling was that the events, which forced the suspension of the session sine die in Surat, seriously jeopardized the possibility of a session of Congress in 1908. For some experienced congressmen, not having sessions in 1908 was a devoutly desirable accomplishment. Wacha, Pherozeshah Mehta, and a few others supported this view, although they later changed it. Holding the session at Surat, Nagpur, Lahore or Calcutta was excluded. Although it was Allahabad's turn to invite the 1908 Congress, the famine in the United Provinces did not justify the burden of holding a Congress in either Allahabad or Lucknow. Since only Madras was solid in its essence, the choice naturally fell on that Presidency.



KEY WORDS: Mylapore Clique, Egmore Clique, S. Kasturiranga Iyengar, V. Krishnaswamy Iyer, Sankaran Nair, Congress, Madras.

INTRODUCTION

There was a unanimous opinion that Madras was the most suitable venue for the 1908 Congress. Krishnaswamy Iyer was asked to shoulder the burden of organising Madras Session.¹ For a while groupism prevailed in the Congress of the Madras Presidency. By virtue of the fact that Madras was the seat of the administration of the Presidency, the city served as a centripetal force towards which the social, political and economic life of the Presidency converged. Lawyers, businessmen, teachers and entrepreneurs made up the elites and as they were mostly residents of Mylapore, this suburb of Madras provided the centre of power for the movement of life in both the city and the mufossils. Mylapore, which had achieved considerable importance at the end of the Nineteenth Century, became a force to be reckoned with at the beginning of Twentieth Century. The driving force behind it was called 'Mylapore Clique'. In between 1880s and 1890s, its leaders were V. Bhashyam Iyengar, S. Subrahmania Iyer and R. Raghunatha Rao.² At the beginning of the Twentieth Century it was headed by V. Krishnaswamy Iyer, P.R. Sundara Iyer, LA Govindaraghava Iyer, V.C. Desikachariar and T.R. Ramachandra Iyer and later by P.S. Sivaswamy Iyer, V.S. Srinivasa Sastri, C.R. Pattabhirama Iyer, GA Natesan and others.³ Given their intellectual calibre and command of the English language, this group could easily capture all positions of power and influence in fields such as the High Court of the Judiciary, University Councils, the Legislative Assembly, government offices, Council of the Madras Municipal

Corporation, the Port Trust, etc. It also had control over the provincial branch of Congress. When extremists and moderates were at loggerheads across India, the Madras Congress was literally pushed into the moderate camp by the Mylapore Clique under V. Krishnaswamy Iyer. The rival of this group was christened 'Egmore Clique'. Its worthy leaders were Kasturiranga Iyengar, C. Sankaran Nair, C. Vijayaraghavachariar, and T. Rangachari.³ Since 1890, Kasturiranga Iyengar had fought in vain to eradicate the Mylapore Clique from their entrenched position. The inability of the Egmoreans to advance in the legal profession that the lawyers of Mylapore had almost monopolized, and their defeats at the hands of the Mylaporeans in the elections for various bodies, including university councils, had intensified the rivalry between the two groups. Both had supporters from other areas, most notably the Presidency's Andhra region. Many of the lawyer-educators such as N. Subba Rao, K. Viresalingam, Puranam Venkatapayya, Konda Venkatapayya, K. Perrazu and M. Ramachandra Rao were closely allied with the Mylapore group. Y.L. Narasimhan of Ganjam, T. Prakasam of Rajamundry, Pattabhi Sitaramayya and Krishna Rao of Masulipatam belonged to the rival group.⁴

The bitterness between the two factions came on the verge of ruining the Tenth Session of the Indian National Congress (I.N.C.) held in Madras in 1894, although the disputes involved matters of a relatively minor nature. To cite one or two cases, Kasturiranga Iyengar on the one hand and P.R. Sundara Iyer and V.C. Desikachari, on the other hand, quarreled over the printing and distribution of tickets. T. Rangachari and P.R. Sundara Iyer fought for the membership of the Subjects Committee.⁵ Later, at the Madras Provincial Conference held at Ranipet in the North Arcot District in May 1904, personal disputes between the two groups were brought to the conference forum. N.K. Ramaswamy Iyer, professional lawyer and opponent of Mylapore Clique and was a very frustrated man by his unsuccessful war for over four years (1900-1904) against L.A. Govindaraghava Iyer to gain local domination. The latter was an eminent legal authority and also a prominent Congress leader of the North Arcot District and was also the chairman of the reception committee of this conference. The grieving advocate demanded in this conference that the rules of Congress be changed to in such a way as to reduce the influence exercised by the capital city that was, Mylaporeans. But he was not successful.⁶

The feud between Mylapore and Egmore continued and with the purchase of *The Hindu* in 1905 by Kasturiranga Iyengar, the organ was used as an effective weapon to denounce Mylapore's malice in general and V. Krishnaswamy Iyer in particular.⁷ After the Congress of Surat, the political situation in Madras was characterized by the confrontation between moderate and extremist elements represented respectively by the Mylapore and Egmore groups. The first, under the leadership of Gokhale-Krishnaswamy Iyer Surendranath Bannerjee, the trio opposed the Swadeshi and boycott programmes and was widely agreed the Morley's reform scheme. The Egmore Clique, gravitating towards the Tilak-Pal group, took an anti-British position, maintaining resistance to the proposed reforms in the most absolute form. G. Subrahmania Iyer, the oldest enemy of the Mylapore group, lent support to the Egmore group. The Pal's tour of the Madras Presidency in 1907 and the serious and peremptory tone with which he pronounced the gospel of Swadeshi or Swaraj also gave impetus to the activities of this section of the Congress.

To all this was added the personal enmity between Krishnaswamy Iyer and Sankaran Nair, the legal rivals. People who enjoyed perpetuating the mutual misunderstanding between the two of them did everything possible to deepen the discord.⁸

Such was the puzzling situation that prevailed in Madras when the leaders of the Bombay Congress asked Krishnaswamy Iyer to look into the holding of the Congress session of 1908 in Madras. When the appeal was launched in August 1908, Krishnaswamy Iyer was one of the main citizens of Madras, whose career as a public figure, as a distinguished lawyer, as a prominent member of the Madras Mahajana Sabha and, above all, as a moderate congressman, was individually so brilliant. He was a firm exponent of the constitutional methods of political warfare and a believer in the British mission to India. He once told himself as not a radical but a conservative politician. Indeed, he was not just a staunch moderate, but a rabid anti-nationalist. By claiming that the nationalist wing of Congress was the "sick man" of the Indian National Congress, Krishnaswamy Iyer went so far as to recommend

that the gangrenous limb be amputated.⁸ He did not however prove in this case for the nationalists remained safe and sound and returned to the fold of Congress to once again make it a united whole.

Krishnaswamy Iyer wholeheartedly accepted the proposal to hold the Congress in Madras, confident that the Presidency could be up to the challenge and rise to the occasion. Consequently, the Madras Provincial Congress Committee decided to invite the Congress to Madras with its resolution of 26th August 1908, despite the immense responsibility that he had to assume to stage the big event in the coming months.

From the last decade of the Nineteenth Century, circumstances in Madras began to change. Madras City was emerging as more of a focus for the province than it had ever been before. The protagonists of the emerging new politics in Madras were the men who understood the principle of gaining power and influence in a state that was essentially bureaucratic based on the sound knowledge of English. Around the turn of the Nineteenth Century, one group of men in Madras City emerged as dominant in the business of mediating between the newly important institutions of the provincial capital. The men of the group was called 'Mylapore Clique'. The members of this clique were mostly moderates. The another group was 'Egmore Clique' and its members were mostly extremists. This group was a mixed one of Brahmins and non-Brahmins. This group consisted of professionals and contested the domination of the Mylaporeans in the public and political domains of the Madras City and its politics. The notable leaders of the group were T.M. Nair, C.Sankaran Nair, S. Kasturiranga Iyengar, A Rangasami Iyengar and T.Rangachai. The leader of the Mylapore Clique was V.Krishnaswami Iyer. In a stage, the Egmore Clique was headed by S. Kasturiranga Iyengar.

END NOTES

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