



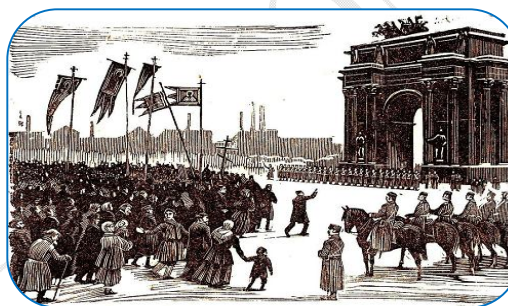
## RISE OF SWADESHI NATIONALISTS AND SPREAD OF EXTREMISM IN TAMIL COUNTRY

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### ABSTRACT :

National Movement gained momentum since the formation of the Indian National Congress in India. In the beginning it was influenced by the Moderates and their ideas. However the Moderates were not effective in the scenario of Tamil Country. Only a few moderates emerged and they were unable to enlist the support of the people for the cause of the liberation of the nation. Due to the ideological split in the Surat Congress Session, the young and energetic extremists came forward to lead the National Movement in India. In Tamil Counties the Swadeshi Extremists emerged who spread the swadeshi ideals. The role played by the Swadeshi Extremists like V.O.Chidambaram Pillai, Subramania Siva, Subramania Bharathi and many little known swadeshi leaders was remarkable in many counts. As the Swadeshi leaders of the Tamil Country were arrested and tortured, Swadeshi terrorists like Vanchinathan, Neelakanta Brahmachari and some others came to rescue. As result, Ashe, the Collector of Tirunelveli was assassinated. The Swadeshi extremists changed the course of the Nationalist Movement into the Mass Movement in Tamil Country. For the First time, in the National Movement the people whole heartedly plunged into action.



**KEYWORDS :** Swadeshi, Extremists, Tamil Country, V.O.Chidambaram Pillai, Congress.

### INTRODUCTION :

The tendency of Moderate leaders of the Congress Organisation towards British government in achieving the demand of concessions was considered 'political mendicancy' which created much dissatisfaction among the younger generation. A new school of thought aiming at promoting extreme nationalism was upheld by the younger generation in the Congress. These youngsters belonged to the Extremist School of Thoughts. The Extremists were the initiators of the Swadeshi Movement and they boycotted British goods and promoted Swadeshi Institutions. The background of 'Extremism' had drawn attention of all the people at all India level and the roots of this school also materialize in Tamil Country in the end beginning of the Twentieth Century. Indeed, it is very difficult to arrive at a total picture of the origin of Extremism and Swadeshim in Tamil Country. G. Subramania Iyer, had reflected Swadeshim by starting the Tamil Newspaper, *Swadeshamitran* in 1882.<sup>1</sup> He was the pioneer of the Swadeshi and Extremist Movements in Tamil Nadu. He spread swadeshi ideals through newspapers and by his oragnisational activities in Madras Mahajana Sabha and Indian National Congress. He was one of the spokesmen of Extremism in South India.<sup>2</sup>

### BIPIN CHANDRA PAL IN MADRAS

Bipin Chandra Pal toured the Madras City during April-May 1907. His visit had it own remarkable impact in diffusion the new doctrines among the several dissatisfied youngsters. He attended several daily meetings which were held on the Marina Beach and the Moore Market in Madras. He delivered fiery speeches on

extremist and swadeshi thoughts. In the beginning very few people attended the meeting. In due course there was a large attendance which increased to several hundreds. Processions were held in some public places attracting more people to the cause of nationalism.<sup>3</sup>

### **SURAT SPLIT AND ITS INFLUENCE IN TAMIL COUNTRY**

On 26<sup>th</sup> December 1907, the Congress session was held at Surat, on the banks of river Tapti. The Extremists were enraged by the news that the Moderates wanted to scuttle the four Calcutta resolutions. At the same time, the Moderates were deeply wounded by the ridicule and venom poured on them in mass meetings held at Surat on the previous three days. The delegates, thus, met in an atmosphere surcharged with excitement and anger. The Extremists wanted a guarantee that the four resolutions would be passed.<sup>4</sup>

A public meeting was organized under the chairmanship of Duraisami Iyer in 1907 at Madras. It wanted to implement their intentions at Surat session of the Congress and it passed four resolutions. Two resolutions were proposed by C. Subramania Bharati, one by Duraiswami Iyer and another by V. Chakkarai Chetti. One of the resolutions proposed by Subramania Bharati clearly illustrated the intention of the new party leadership. By passing the resolution, the meeting seriously condemned the action of the Congress Reception Committee at Surat which did not consult the other provinces in the matter of electing the president of the Congress and overlooked the claims of Lala Lajpat Rai. The two parties - the Extremists and Moderated travelled to Surat in the same train under the common banner of 'Madras Nationalists'. But the homogeneity the Madras delegation during its train journey ended at the very beginning of the Surat Session.<sup>5</sup>

### **The Swadeshi Movement**

Swadeshi Movement aimed at the attainment of Swaraj. The Swadeshi Extremists, as a whole, considered political independence was the most important one. This movement had taken an anti-partition agitation into a passive resistance campaign against all forms of suppression under the colonial rule. It made all efforts to boycott of British goods and educational institutions, law-courts, municipalities and legislative councils. It wanted to uproot the colonial Government, by striking at the root of British prestige. Administration was made in standstill by an planned refusal to help British enterprise to exploit and British bureaucracy to oppress the Indians.<sup>6</sup>

V.O. Chidambaram Pillai founded the Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company in Tuticorin on the east coast of the Madras Presidency.<sup>7</sup> There was great response to the Swadeshi Movement in the Madras Presidency. The movement was headed by V.O. Chidambaram Pillai in the southern part of the Tamil Country. He posed a great challenge the monopoly of the British trade. He was praised as the 'Tilak of South India'. He was successful in gathering the masses against the excesses of imperialism. By organizing a meeting along with Subramania Siva, he celebrated Bipin Chandra Pal's release for prison in 1908. Both of them were arrested and sentenced to life imprisonment which led to riots and hartals in Tinnevely and Tuticorin. These riots were called 'Tirunelveli Riots'. The sentence was later reduced to six years rigorous imprisonment.<sup>8</sup>

On the other hand, Sir Arthur Lawley's Government endeavoured to preventing the seditious movement in the Madras Presidency by suppressing the acts of violence and disorder. The agitators were chased but the utterances and speeches of the swadeshi leaders and the nationalists indicated the discontent among the people. But freedom of speech, by this time, the British Government considered disorderly conduct of the nationalists. In 1908, Sir Arthur Lawley's Government had undertaken a number of prosecutions for inflammatory writings and speeches of the Swadeshi nationalists.<sup>9</sup> Punitive measures were undertaken against the nine Swadeshi nationalists. They were: 1) Ethiraj Surendrenath Arya, a member of the managing committee of the "Chennai Jana Sangam", an organization of the extremist party in Madras. 2) G. Subramaniya Iyer, editor of the *Swadeshmitran* 3) G. Harisavortharna Rao, proprietor of the *Swaraj* newspaper, Bezwada. 4) B. Narayana Rao, editor of the *Swaraj* newspaper, Bezwada. 5) P. Lakshminarayanan, Treasurer of the *Swaraj* news paper. 6) M. Srinivasa Aiyangar, editor of *India*. 7) A.Krishnaswami Sharma, a "Swadeshi" Lecturer 8) L. Basavayya, Manager of the "Swadeshi" stores, Bapatla, Kistna district and 9) Tirumalachari, proprietor of *India*.

### Terrorism in Tirunelveli

The Minto-Morley Reforms of 1909 introduced communal representation. It triggered the revolutionary attitude of the Congress people.<sup>10</sup> The young terrorists, however, did not try to plan or organize a revolution based on violence. They did not involve the whole country with the masses participation. Their idea was to strike terror in the minds of the rulers and thus awaken the people politically and ultimately to drive the British out of India. By its very nature, the planning, organizing, recruiting and training paved the way for 'secret underground activities'.<sup>11</sup> On 10<sup>th</sup> April 1910, the Bharatha Matha Secret Society was established at Tenkasi.<sup>12</sup>

A small section of the Swadeshi nationalist in Tamil Country showed readiness to adopt the terrorist method of agitation. As a result, very soon the world heard the detonation of terrorism in Tirunelveli in 1911. The Collector of Tirunelveli R.W.D.E. Ashe who was involved in the harassment of the Swadeshi Company was assassinated in a railway coach at Maniyachi junction by a pistol shot fired at him by a member of terrorist group of Swadeshi nationalists. The assassin was Vanchinathan of Shenkottai who killed himself after finishing his target.<sup>13</sup> In this Ashe murder case, fourteen persons were committed for trial to the High Court of Madras.<sup>14</sup> The key figure in the conspiracy was Neelakanta Brahrnachari. He was a political preacher and anarchist who engaged in seditious Journalism at Pondicherry as editor of the vernacular paper, *Suryodayarn*.<sup>15</sup> The outbreak of the First World War in 1914 gave a new impetus to the nationalist movement which had been inactive and lull since the heady days of the Swadeshi Movement. The British position in India was critical. Britain's difficulty was considered India's 'opportunity'. This opportunity was seized in different ways and with varying success. Lokamanya Tllak and Annie Besant formed their Home Rule League in India. The Home Rule Leagues launched a countrywide agitation for securing 'Home Rule' or 'Swaraj'.<sup>16</sup>

### CONCLUSION

The Swadeshi nationalists spread the wave of extremism replacing the influence of the Moderates in Tamil Country. The boycott of foreign-made goods and the promotion of Swadeshi enterprises were the twin pillars of the Swadeshi Movement. This movements engulfed the political developments and nationalist movement in Tamil Country from 1906 to 1908. The rise of Swadeshi Extremists in the politics of the Tamil Country brought profound changes both to content of the nationalist platform and to its methods of propagation and struggle. In the context of the Swadeshi Extremist politics, new methods initiated to mobilize a huge number of people than ever before. This movement became a mass-based one and turned the people against the exploitation of the British both politically and economically.

### END NOTES

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