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THE IDEOLOGY CONFLICT BETWEEN HOME RULE MOVEMENT AND NON BRAHMIN MOVEMENT – A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT:

The Home Rule movement launched by Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Annie Besant during the First World War, under serious constraints, was of unique significance as it was a positive movement for the realization of a lofty objective. The movement drew new regions and new groups of people who had seldom eluded capacity Nationalist leaders to mobilize them and thus effect qualitative and quantitative changes in Indian politics. But its success in capturing the Indian National Congress including its organizational bases intensified the National struggle against British rule and Home Rulers' involvement in constitutional dialogues with the administration released new forces, deepening the movement and going against the aims of the initiators. In spite of their failure to achieve their lofty objectives they did bring a seminal change in Indian politics. However, their success and failure should be viewed in the background of political stagnation of the preceding era and the remarkable activity of the Gandhian period.



This assumed a serious character in the South under the dynamic leadership of Dr. Nair principally because of the emergence of the Non-Brahmin castes like the Nayars who apprehended that Home Rule would establish perpetual Brahmin domination. While the Home Rulers alleged that the Non-Brahmins received Government Patronage, the Non-Brahmins retorted that the Home Rulers were German agents who created trouble during the war. Both the two sides used violent methods. While processions of 'untouchables' were stopped, meetings postponed, the Non-Brahmin technicians of Sivaganga brought pigs to drive out the Brahmin Home Rulers. But the Non-Brahmin Movement which ventilated its views through the 'Justice' was primarily for the Nayars-Chettiars and Mudaliars but the Panchamas or the 'lowliest' had no part in it. But the opposition was so intense that the headquarters of the Home Rule League was shifted from Madras to Bombay and the Home Rulers worked under serious constraints. But the Non-Brahmin Movement was not united. The South India Liberal Federation and the Madras Presidency Association had differences. The Madras Presidency Association joined hands with the Home Rulers who did not pay war subscriptions on the ground that they would not pay unless reforms were granted. This gave relief. But the South India Liberal Federation and 'Justice' were pledged to support war efforts and paid contributions for the war. Naturally, members resented this as they were equally unwilling to pay. In spite of such difficulties the Non-Brahmin Movement posed a serious threat to the Home Rule Movement.

The day after the manifesto appeared, the New India, objected that the statement showed distrust in the ultimate object of Independence. As long as India gained Home Rule, it mattered little whether

Brahmin or Non-Brahmins, Hindus or Muslims were most powerful, for after all, "we are all children of one mother". Mrs. Besant blindness to the possibility of sectional claims in the event of self-rule prevented her from realizing that by this time the questions of who would hold the reins of power, Brahmins or Non-Brahmins was developing into an issue of major importance in Madras politics.

Mrs. Besant was there being attacked almost daily by the Non-Brahmin press. The Dravidian printed headlines like "Home Rule is Brahmins Rule" Pamphlets appeared questioning her integrity and that of her Brahmin colleagues. One such pamphlet declared, "It is a misrepresentation to say that Brahmin belongs to the same Indian Nation Brahmins are more alien to us than Englishmen". The Non-Brahmin, accused Mrs. Besant of having herself fomented the Non-Brahmin movement by identifying herself with Brahmins and by 'attacking us incessantly". Dr. T.N. Nair, a staunch opponent of Mrs. Besant, accusing the Brahmins, said that they were using the Home Rule Movement to further their own ends and ensure the continuation of their power under a new constitution. The Non-Brahmins, who had no chance of gaining prestige and power under Brahmins, were against Home Rule, Dr. Nair said, "Because we are not ready for it".

By 1919, the popularity of the Home Rule League began to decline. It ended in 1920 when it elected Gandhi as its President and then finally merging with the Indian National Congress making it a political front. The growing popularity of Gandhi's Satyagrah Movement, his Non-Violence and civil disobedience too contributed to the decline of the League. The League also lacked effective organisation. Communal riots which happened during 1917-1918 too led to its decline. The League further got divided after Besant accepted the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms. The Moderates too started to stay away once there were talks of passive resistance by the Extremists. The Movement was left without a leader when Tilak had to go to Britain in connection with a case while Besant was undecided of her response to the reforms and thus was unable to give a positive lead.

The justice party regime established by the Non-Brahmin family in Tamil Nadu through the Montagu-Chelmsford Act brought by the British Government in 1919. To fall the Home Rule Movement launched by Annie Besant by the Justice party Government in Tamil Nadu.

The popularity of the Home Rule League also began declining with the coming of the Satyagraha Movement by Gandhi. The Gandhi's mantra of Non-Violence and large scale civil disobedience appealed to India's common people, including his lifestyle, respect for Indian culture and love for the common people of the country. Gandhi led Bihar, Kheda and Gujarat up in a successful revolt against the Government, which eventually rose him to the position of a National Hero. By 1920 the Home Rule League elected Gandhi as its President and within a year from then it would merge into the Indian National Congress forming a united political front.

KEYWORDS: Nationalist leaders , Indian Nation Brahmins , large scale civil.

INTRODUCTION

The Home Rule movement launched by Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Annie Besant during the First World War, under serious constraints, was of unique significance as it was a positive movement for the realization of a lofty objective. The movement drew new regions and new groups of people who had selong eluded capacity Nationalist leaders to mobilize them and thus effect

qualitative and quantitative changes in Indian politics. But its success in capturing the Indian National Congress including its organizational bases intensified the National struggle against British rule and Home Rulers' involvement in constitutional dialogues with the administration released new forces, deepening the movement and going against the aims of the initiators. In spite of their failure to achieve their lofty objectives they did bring a seminal change in Indian politics.

However, their success and failure should be viewed in the background of political stagnation of the preceding era and the remarkable activity of the Gandhian period.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Annie Besant was not really interested in harming British interest in India. She launched the Home Rule Movement for three things 1) Continuous propaganda for Home Rule 2)Constitutional agitation and 3) A Free Nation

under the British Empire and her supporters published the Young India for 'God, Crown and the Country'.¹

OBJECTIVES OF THE HOME RULE LEAGUE MOVEMENT

1. To establish self-government
2. To build up an agitation for Home rule by promoting political education and discussion.
3. To build the confidence of the Indians against the suppression of the British government and to create an alternative movement to break the existing state of stagnation and the inertia.
4. To revive the political activity on their own while maintaining the principles of congress.
5. To demand for greater political representation from the British Government.

The All India Home league ended in 1920, when it elected Gandhi as its President, when within a year it merged into the Indian National Congress

FUNDS AND PATRONS

The League charged an entrance fee of RS.2/- from new members but this was done away with and a nominal annual subscription of Rs.1/- was collected.² Moreover, every Home Ruler was requested to set apart a pie of each rupee earned.³ However, huge sums were necessary to carry on mass movements. The financial position of the IHRL or the Tilak League was difficult – and the position began to change only when it was decided to collect money and in December, 1916 the total fund of the Tilak League was only, 6,000/- . But the raising of money for Tilak was warmly supported even by Moderates. In the C.P. and the administration viewed with concern its success. More than a lakh of rupees was presented to Tilak on his 60th birthday. When the Home Rulers captured the Congress at Lucknow it was decided to collect a huge sum of money principally from Bengal, Bombay, Madras and the U.P. to carry on propaganda for the congress-League scheme.

Another steady source of income was the remittance of provincial committees to the Central Committee. Thus, the Akola branch donated 1537/- including Seth Ratanlal Balchand's contribution of 1,000/-. The Yeotmal branch gave 2400/-. And the Nagpur branch donated 62,780/- to the Central office of the Tilak League.⁴ But Tilak League was the Principal fund raiser of the League and his collection tours fetched a lakh and a quarter of rupees. In May, 1918 the income of the Tilak League was 2,25,616-1-1 and its pamphlets sold 1,73,800 copies. Besant was more fortunate in having a large number of rich collaborators who made liberal donations. But Bomanji's princely donation of a lakh of rupees provided a solid financial foundation of the League.⁵ Miss Hamabhai Framji Petit and Ratansi Morarji contributed Rs.15,000/- and Rs.5000/- respectively to the Besant League.⁶ The Besant League also floated two schemes namely (1) the Besant Fund (2) Besant Home Rule League Fund to collect Money.⁷

However, collection of huge sums of money required from the experts who had vital links with the rich. Thus, the Besant League which claimed the U.P. as their stronghold found it extremely difficult to collect large sums and thought of utilizing Pandit Malaviya's contacts with the princes and the rich.

Expenses

Both the two Leagues spent only a fraction of their money in carrying on propaganda because there were few paid workers. While the Tilak League spent Rs.2800/- the Besant League spent Rs.20,000/- for propaganda. Possibly, a large amount was kept reserved to carry on propaganda in England in connection with the reform scheme. The Tilak League spent Rs.23, 089/- for Baptista's propaganda in England but a balance of Rs.1, 82,957/- was there to defray the cost of Home Rule deputations to England.⁸ When Tilak went to England a sum of Rs.1,09,712/- was sent to him.⁹ Thus, it was revealed that propaganda work in India cost little in the Moderate tradition and the lion's share was spent in England.

Even in Madras, Besant's admirers lacked her courage. Leaving aside the depressed classes movement the Besant League faced two dissimilar set of problems. Work in rural areas made it clear

that the masses were interested only in local problems and not in imperial problems. The people demanded relief from land taxes, less police tyranny, less usurious exactions and they bore no special ill-will against European Officers, as these officers did not come into daily contact with them. At a higher level, intensification of the movement created a distinct division among Besant's followers. At the Madras Provincial Conference G.A. Natesan, a noted Moderate, fought for the adoption of passive resistance without qualification which Sastri opposed. But it was passed by an everwhelming majority. But a distinct radical group was led by men like satyamurti who even challenged some of the Principle postulations of Besant. Thus, Satyamurti wanted to boycott Montagu which Besant and C.P. Ramasamy Aiyar resented. When Satyamurti moved a resolution in a brilliant speech he failed to convince the majority. Similarly, when Satyamurti proposed in the Madras Mahajan Sabha that a campaign in favour of the Congress-League scheme especially for 4/5 elected majority in the Legislative Council should be launched, C.P. Ramasamy Aiyar and Arundale not only moved amendments seeking to dilute it but even showed readiness to accept less than the Congress-League Scheme. Thus, two distinct trends were noticeable. While a section desired more than the Congress League scheme closer advisers of Besant were prepared to accept less than the Congress League Scheme. It became more and more explicit. Thus, While Yaqub Hasan condemed cancellation of passports of Tilak and his associates, M.C. Nanjunda placed no faith in Montagu's visit and asserted that passive resistance was the only answer. Besant's influence began to wane as the Moderates shunned her company and she also lost her popularity amongst the brands of Madras and elsewhere. Moreover, relations between the IHRL and worsened and at the AICC meeting Tilak and Besant even exchanged hot words. While Jinnah (of the Besant group) became unpopular, principally for his many with the young daughter of six Jehangir Petit, Gandhi steadily emerged as a National leader. His successes in Champaran and kaira made Besant a little jealous.

Besant Home Rule Fund

After her arrest, some of her followers launched the 'Besant Home Rule Fund', with C.Jinarajadasa, C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar, D. Morarji and Jamnadas Dwarkadas as the Trustees. It was Bhavana Char, a famous Home Ruler, who suggested the establishment of the fund and promised to contribute Rs.100 to form its nucleus. Sampad Abhyudaya reported that "every India, rich and poor man and woman, boy and girl, old and young, will respond to this patriotic call and make the Home Rule Fund an accomplished fact".¹⁰ The Home Rulers paid liberally to this fund. Miss. Hawabai Petit gave five thousand rupees to the Fund in Madras, and a sum of twenty thousand rupees to the Home Rule League in Bombay. S.R. Bomanji, another prominent member in Bombay, promised to pay a sum of one lakh rupees for the future activities of the League.¹¹ Davidson's report to the Secretary of State for India contained details about the fund rising in the name of Besant. "The subscriptions to the 'Besant Fund' up to the 13th instand amounted to Rs.52,391, while Rs.864 had on the same date been contributed towards the Besant Statue Fund". They began yet another fund for the Besant State. The contribution to the same was limited to one rupee.

The members, of a new body, called 'The Indignant Group of the Home Rule League' formed in Madras, began to wear the Besant pendant as a badge and took a pledge to make any sacrifices for freedom. Its followers were asked to take a vow to carry on any two of the following seven activities: a monthly subscription of 4 annas, the spreading of the vow of Swadeshi, the giving of weekly Home Rule lectures, the securing of at least one new member a week for the Home Rule League, the inducing of householders to fly Home Rule flags, the composition and popularization of National songs, and the organization of procession on National days. The local leaders of the Home Rule League also formed another committee called 'Parents and Guardians' Committee to look after the affairs of the students. The internment of Mrs. Besant Empire negatively and sound edits death – knell.

The Non-Brahmin Movement

The educated Non-Brahmins by the beginning of the 20th century began to question the inferior position assigned to the Dravidian civilization in history. Most of the Non-Brahmin leaders in Madras

city as well as in the districts hailed from the landowning and merchant castes and they began to aspire to political power and official influence commensurate with their wealth and status in Society. The Brahmins hold a pre eminent position in education especially the University, and, as a consequence, in the higher and clerical grades of Government employment.¹²

Madras Presidency Association mentioned MPA

Madras Presidency Association was a faction within the Indian National Congress which existed before Indian Independence. While Justice Party championed the cause of Non-Brahmins in Madras presidency, Non-Brahmins within the Congress party founded Madras Presidency Association (MPA).

It was established on September 20, 1917 at a meeting of Non-Brahmin Congress leaders in Chennai. Prominent leaders of the association were E.V.Ramasamy, V.Kalyanasundaram, P.Varadarajulu Naidu and Gooty Kesava Pillai. Kesava Pillai was the Madras Presidency Association's President and E.V.Ramasamy one of the vice presidents. The MPA briefly published two journals – *Indian Patriot* and *Deshabhaktan* in Tamil.

After the Government of India Act 1919 was passed, the MPA slowly disintegrated. Frustrated by the hostility of Brahmin Congress leaders' opposition to the MPA's demand of reservation of seats for Non-Brahmins in the legislatures, Kesava Pillai resigned from the Congress and joined the Justice Party.

As early as 1909 an attempt was made in Madras City by two lawyers – P. Subramanyam and M. Purushotham Naidu to form an organization under the title 'The Madras Non-Brahmin Association'. These two provisional secretaries, in a statement to the press, explained that the Association had been started "for the purpose of ameliorating the condition of the Non-Brahmin classes, and lifting them up, as possible, to a higher social level, by affording pecuniary help to the poor and intelligent boys of the Non-Brahmin communities and helping them to prosecute their studies, and by giving scholarships to deserving young men to learn the various industries in foreign countries and by adopting such other methods as are calculated to improve the social status of the various Backward Non-Brahmin communities in the Madras Presidency". It was also stated that the Association was distinctly Non-Political and Non-Aggressive. Thus an association was conceived purely for social progress.

A few days after the above announcement a letter to the editor of the *Madras Mail* (6 May 1909) was written by a certain V.Vannamuthu, in which he argued that the Non-Brahmins of Southern India were all of Dravidian origin; therefore, he suggested the adoption of, the name '*The Madras Dravidian Association*'.

Another letter from M.Purushotham Naidu said: "The Non- Brahmins form the bulk of the population, and almost all the Zamindars, and rich landed proprietors, and the bulk of the thriving Merchants and dubashas belong to this community: But yet the community as a whole has not sufficiently realized the importance of the benefits of Western education, and it has, as a result of this apathy, been left behind in the race by other and more pushful communities, The Non- Brahmins is certainly not wanting in intelligence, if only he tries to develop it".

Even before the formal inauguration of the proposed Non Brahmin Association, objections were raised to a communal organization. E. Ekambara Iyer, a Brahmin correspondent from Nandyal, wrote in the *Madras Mail* (2 June 1909), criticizing the designation of the Association for in its scope it included "the improvement of the whole human race in India, except the poor Brahmin".¹³

Madras United League started in 1912 was the running of an adult education class in the evenings in which the members themselves played the role of teachers. At the first anniversary of the Madras United League, a resolution was introduced to change the name of the League on the ground that it was not indicative of the constituents of the organization or its objectives.

A few suggested that the League might be called the Non Brahmin Association. There was much opposition to a negative name and it was suggested that the League might be called the Dravidian Association. This was accepted and the name of the Madras United League was changed into the Madras Dravidian Association. However this was not the first time that the word 'Dravidian' was used to denote castes other than Brahmins. As early as September 1892 an association called the Adi Dravida Jana Sabha was founded in Madras by Panchamas who claimed themselves as Adi' or Ancient Dravidians.

Similarly a member of the Pariah Mahajana Sabha (founded in October 1894 in Madras city), “resented the names ‘Pariah’ and Panchama’ and claimed to be called by their racial name the Dravidians”.

An important achievement of the Madras Dravidian Association was the establishment of a hostel in Madras city for Non-Brahmin students in July 1916. Non-Brahmin students who came for collegiate education from districts had difficulty in getting hostel accommodation in Madras city because of caste barriers. The hostel was called ‘Dravidian Home’ and it was run under the care of C.Natesa Mudaliar. The Dravidian Home had a literary Society for the benefit of its inmates. The establishment of the Dravidian Home was the first practical step of a small but influential group of Non-Brahmins in Madras city to organize themselves.

The Madras Dravidian Association became a popular organization among the Non-Brahmin and it attracted the attention of Non-Brahmin politicians like P. Theagaroya Chetti (1852-1925) and Dr. T. M. Nair (1868-1919). They saw the possibilities of building on the basis of the Dravidian Association a more powerful political movement to voice the grievances of the Non-Brahmins.

The Non-Brahmin consciousness and the current feelings of despair among the Non-Brahmin youth were clearly brought out in Non-Brahmins letters, a book published in Madras in 1915. It contains 21 letters and they are signed by and addressed to different persons by name. The names include caste suffixes such as ‘Chatti’, ‘Raddy’, ‘Naidu’, ‘Mudaliar’ and ‘Row’. The letters in general reflect the growing consciousness among educated Non-Brahmin youth of their lowly position in society. The letters urge Non-Brahmin to educate them and to organize in order to compete with the Brahmins. It was suggested in one of the letters that a Dravida Maha Sabha should be formed in Madras city with branches in each district, taluk, town and village with the object of uplifting the Non-Brahmin community.

In 1920, the party achieved success in the elections and formed government. Subburayalu Reddiar was elected the Chief Minister or Premier of Madras Presidency. Tamil Nadu’s legacy of social justice owes its existence to the formative years of Justice Party in power. The party introduced what is called as communal G.O to legislate reservations. Incidentally, Periyar quit the Congress after the party failed to pass the communal G.O Women were given voting rights and noon-meal scheme was introduced when Justice Party was in power.

The party also played a vital role in allowing women to contest elections paving way for Dr.Muthulakshmi Reddy to become the first woman legislator in India. The pioneering efforts of Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy saw the abolition of Devadasi system when the Justice Party was in power.

When Justice Party lost power in 1936, veteran Congress leader Satyamurti called it its ‘burial’. In 1967, when the DMK came to power, Chief Minister Anna Durai would have his sweet revenge at Satyamurti. He said Justice Party was not buried but sown to sprout back in 1967.¹⁴

This assumed a serious character in the South under the dynamic leadership of Dr. Nair principally because of the emergence of the Non-Brahmin castes like the Nayars who apprehended that Home Rule would establish perpetual Brahmin domination.¹⁵ While the Home Rulers alleged that the Non-Brahmins received Government Patronage, the Non-Brahmin’s retorted that the Home Rulers were German agents who created trouble during the war. Both the two sides used violent methods. While processions of ‘untouchables’ were stopped, meetings postponed, the Non-Brahmin technicians of Sivaganga brought pigs to drive out the Brahmin Home Rulers.¹⁶ But the Non-Brahmin Movement which ventilated its views through the ‘Justice’ was primarily for the Nayars-Chettiars and Mudaliars but the Panchamas or the ‘lowliest’ had no part in it.¹⁷ But the opposition was so intense that the headquarters of the Home Rule League was shifted from Madras to Bombay and the Home Rulers worked under serious constraints. But the Non-Brahmin Movement was not united. The South India Liberal Federation and the Madras Presidency Association had differences. The Madras Presidency Association joined hands with the Home Rulers who did not pay war subscriptions on the ground that they would not pay unless reforms were granted. This gave relief. But the South India Liberal Federation. and ‘Justice’ were pledged to support war efforts and paid contributions for the war. Naturally, members resented this as they were equally unwilling to pay. In spite of such difficulties the Non-Brahmin Movement posed a serious threat to the Home Rule Movement.

Political Idea

From the beginning of the second decade of this century there was widespread political agitation in India for securing Self Government. In view of the active participation of India in the war effort Britain indicated that steps would be taken towards responsible representative self-government after the war. At this juncture the catalyst which triggered the formation of a Non-Brahmin political organization was the foundation of the Home Rule Movement by Mrs. Annie Besant. Already the Non-Brahmins looked with suspicion at Congress as a Brahmin controlled organization.

When Mrs. Besant extended her activities of the Congress and initiated the Home Rule League in Madras in September 1916, Non-Brahmins felt that the success of the Home Rule Movement in the event of Reforms would result in the entrenchment of Brahmins in the administration of the country. Therefore the Non-Brahmin leaders felt that there was greater need among them to unite and counteract Mrs. Besant's Home Rule Movement than ever before.

At a meeting held in Madras in November 1916 by a group of about thirty Non-Brahmins, including P. Thyagaraya Chetti and Dr. T. M. Nair, it was resolved to start a company for publishing newspapers advocating the cause of the Non-Brahmin community. The idea to bring out daily newspapers came foremost in the minds of the Non-Brahmin leaders because of the Brahmin control of the two of the three leading dailies in Madras city. The English daily *Hindu* (started in 1878 as a weekly and was turned into a tri-weekly in 1883, and into a daily in 1889) was published by S. Kasturiranga Iyengar, while the only Tamil daily *Swadesamitran* (started in 1882 as a weekly and became a daily in 1889) was published by A. Rangaswami Iyengar.

Both were highly Nationalistic in spirit and both vigorously advocated Home Rule. The Brahmin hegemony over journalism stemmed from two factors: first, as pointed out earlier, the Brahmins constituted an elite group in society, and secondly, their recognition of the Nationalist movement. Therefore the Non-Brahmin leaders found the South Indian People's Association primarily for conducting daily newspapers to guide, define and publicise the views of the Non-Brahmins on public questions. The first issue of the Association's English daily *Justice* appeared on 26 February 1917. The Tamil daily *Tiravitan* was started in June 1917. For the Telugu readers the well established Telugu weekly *Andhraprakasika* (founded in 1885) was acquired and was changed into a daily. On the occasion of the first anniversary of the *Justice*, the *Madras Mail* (26 Feb. 1918) wrote: "Two or three years ago no one would have been bold enough to predict success for an Indian paper in Madras hostile to Home Rule".

Home Rule and Non-Brahmins

Annie Besant was selected the first woman in Indian National Congress. On 16th October 1916, in the *New India* there appeared an article seeking the clarification with regard to some sensitive issues relating to Non-Brahmin communities.

"Now a days the one topic on everybody's lips is Home Rule under British sovereignty. With many the question follows?

What will be the position of Non-Brahmin population who form the major portion of Indian Empire under the Home Rule?

I wish as a Non-Brahmin to ask:

1. Will every Indian whether be a Brahmin or non-Brahmin (Muhammadan and Christian included) have a voice in the Govt. by way of representations.
2. Will there be representation in the Indian Parliament according to the proportion of population in each community.
3. With every religion, Hinduism, Mahammadian, Christianity be equally represented.
4. Will the Govt. allots a certain number of high posts reserved to each community without holding free competitive examinations?
5. Will there be free scope for a deserving man to go from the lowest to the highest stage as regards religion and politics in spite of his low birth.

In order to have a clear understanding before hand, I look to you as the originator of the Home Rule Propaganda, to throw some light upon the problem.¹⁸

By 1916, signs of non-Brahmin distrust of Brahmin intentions in South Indian Politics were beginning to appear in numerous letters to the daily press. Many non-Brahmins eager to enhance the position of their caste-groups in the educational hierarchy as the Presidency had long felt the need of some sort of hostels and in June 1916 the Dravidian Association Hostel was established in the Madras city. On 20th November 1916, some thirty non-Brahmin leaders, including Dr. Nair and D. Thiagaraja Chetti, met at the Victoria Public Hall in Madras city. This meeting can be considered as the real beginning of a non-Brahmin party, although this meeting decided simply to form a joint stock company to be called the South Indian People's Association Ltd., for the purpose of publishing English, Telugu and Tamil newspapers to voice non-Brahmin grievances. On 20th December 1916, in the Hindu and in Mrs. Besant's New India, this group made its public announcement, in the form of a non-Brahmin Manifesto. The tone of the manifesto was more militant and in direct opposition to the Home Rule agitation. This manifesto clearly defined in distinct terms that non-Brahmins could never support any measure that, 'in operation, is designed, on tends completely, to undermine the influence and authority of the British Rules, who alone in the present circumstances of India are able to hold the scales even between creed and class and to develop that sense of unity and National solidarity without which India to be congeries of mutually exclusive and warring groups without a common purpose and common patriotis'.

The day after the manifesto appeared, the New India, objected that the statement showed distrust in the ultimate object of Independence. As long as India gained Home Rule, it mattered little whether Brahmin or Non-Brahmins, Hindus or Muslims were most powerful, for after all, "we are all children of one mother".¹⁹ Mrs. Besant blindness to the possibility of sectional claims in the event of self-rule prevented her from realizing that by this time the questions of who would hold the reins of power, Brahmins or Non-Brahmins was developing into an issue of major importance in Madras politics.²⁰

Mrs. Besant was there being attacked almost daily by the Non-Brahmin press. The Dravidian printed headlines like "Home Rule is Brahmins Rule", Pamphlets appeared questioning her integrity and that of her Brahmin colleagues. One such pamphlet declared, "It is a misrepresentation to say that Brahmin belongs to the same Indian Nation Brahmins are more alien to us than Englishmen". The Non-Brahmin, accused Mrs. Besant of having herself fomented the Non-Brahmin movement by identifying herself with Brahmins and by 'attacking us incessantly". Dr. T.N. Nair, a staunch opponent of Mrs. Besant, accusing the Brahmins, said that they were using the Home Rule Movement to further their own ends and ensure the continuation of their power under a new constitution. The Non-Brahmins, who had no chance of gaining prestige and power under Brahmins, were against Home Rule, Dr. Nair said, "Because we are not ready for it".²¹

The Justice Party which streamlined the Non-Brahmin movement began holding conferences to set up branches throughout the Presidency. The first and one of the most important of these conferences was organized in Coimbatore during the same days during which the Congress Conference was also scheduled to be held in Coimbatore (August 19 and 20, 1917). Ramalingam Chettiar (Tiruppur District), a prominent member of the Congress, asked all persons attending the conference to sign a statement affirming that the aim of the Congress would be to attain self government only by gradual steps and further agreeing that all representative bodies in future should contain the proper proportion of all communities and interests. In the meanwhile the announcement of Montagu intensified the communal tension in Madras and gave a new urgency to the demands that were being drawn up. The most importance question was that of political enfranchisement and the amount of responsibility that would be granted to the Indians.

Newspaper's opinions about her desire to become the President

Many newspapers disliked Mrs. Besant's desire to become the President. The West Coast Spectator advised her to play the part of an advocate and bring the Congress to her views.²² In its opinion, the Home Rule League had no right to dictate terms at a time when the Congress had not yet

identified itself with the Home Rule League. The Dravidabhimani considered it not advisable to elect her the President because "she has been agitating the public mind a good deal in connection with her having been directed to Day Security". It further said that if elected to the presidential gaddy, she might vent her wrath against the authorities, making confusion more confounded. In its opinion, making her the President of the Congress was just like adding fuel to the fires. Indian patriot criticized the Reception Committee for its foolish act of recommending her as the President of the next session. The Hindu criticized the Provincial Congress Committees of both Bihar and the United Provinces for nominating her even after the Madras Provincial Congress Committee had withdrawn her name from the contest for the provincial nomination. Kerala Patrika was also against her. It said: "She first tried to become the Chief Guru of the Hindus, and, as she failed in that attempt, she is now trying to start a Home Rule League and be its President. She thinks that this object of hers can be easily achieved, if she becomes the President of the Congress. We cannot now say in what character she will appear next. We trust that our countrymen are too wise to be misled by such tricks".²³

Papers like Sampad Abdhyudaya supported her candidature saying that as the presiding minister Mrs. Besant might be able to produce patriotic citizens who regarded the securing of a just administration for India's the end and aim of their existence.²⁴ Swadesamithran supported the election of Mrs. Besant as the President of 1916, on the ground that "She has served India in numerous ways and has proved herself to be a sincere friend of the Indians and a sympathizer of their ideals and aspirations".²⁵ The Bharathi supported the election on the ground that by sowing the seeds of self-government in the heart of every India, Mrs. Besant "is going from house to house, from village to village, and from bazaar to bazaar and like electricity she is drawing the student population towards the current of liberty".²⁶

Mrs. Besant's political knowledge was so great that after hearing her lecture. Sir Seshadri Ayyar called her 'a Sharada, a Gargi and a Meitreya'.²⁷ Arundale, in his article titled Manaest veritas declared his firm intention to oppose the resistance to the executive action threatened against Home Rulers. In one of Besant's articles, she asked her followers to form a Prayer Union and direct their prayers to the abolition of the press Act and the modification of the Defense of India Act. She even prepared a prayer entitled 'God helps those who help themselves', and asked her followers to add the same to their daily prayers. The daily prayer ran as follows.

Most High God, who rulest the kingdoms of men, we pray thee-as our Rulers do not heed our protests-that thou wilt so change their hearts that they may refrain from confiscations and internments, that they may punish none without open trial, conviction, and sentence, and that they repeal the Press Act, and restrict the Defense of India Act to the punishment of treason and rioting, so that these may no longer be turned to the injury of loyal subjects of Thy servant, the King-Emperor.²⁸

It is hereby resolved that Invoking the blessing of Almighty God, and making appeal to His Justice, for the purpose of winning for ourselves and for unborn generations the elementary rights of freedom of person and security of property until deprived of them by judicial sentence after open trial, we make the solemn vow to purchase home-made goods in preference to foreign ones even at a sacrifice. And may almighty God give us strength of will to carry out this our solemn vow until these rights be restored to the Indian Nation.²⁹

She emphasized in her article 'To My Brothers and Sisters'. That "only by winning Home Rule can India secure her material prosperity, only thus can she save what is left of her trade, her industries and her agriculture, improve them and reap the rights of her own labour".³⁰ She added, "I am old, but I believe that I shall see India win Home Rule before I die. If I have helped even so little to the realization of that glorious hope, I am more than satisfied". In the same article she made it clear that she worked vigorously for Home Rule only to save India from becoming a Nation of coolies. She clarified that she would happily suffer in her campaign of achieving Self-Government, which alone would secure prosperity to India. She continued her work without any fear.

The British bureaucracy which was till then engaged in suppressing terrorist and extremist movements, was forced to gear up to face a situation created by a 'constitutional and law-abiding agitation,. Platforms, Libraries, street processions turned to be the venues from where the

constitutional means of agitation began to be transmitted to the people by means of newspapers, literature, pamphlets and display of placards and flags. The intermittent educative propaganda demanding Home Rule caused the tradition of the Indian National Congress in meeting periodically to pass resolutions, to pass into oblivion. The meetings at various levels made the message of Home Rule reach every nook and corner of India rapidly and the British bureaucracy was caught unawares in the waves of a high level political current.

CONTRIBUTION OF HOME RULE LEAGUE

1. It organized congress party when it was decaying.
2. It popularized concept of home rule.
3. It created organizational links between town and country.
4. It revived the old lost confidence of the Indians and created a generation of ardent Nationalist.
5. Declaration of Montagu and the Montford Reforms were influenced by the Home Rule League agitation.
6. For the first time, widely disseminated the idea of Swaraj via the journals, something which was followed even by Gandhi.

DECLINE OF HOME RULE MOVEMENT:

1. The British government realised the seriousness of the demonstrations and decided that it needed to appease the Nationalists so that there is no hindrance in the British war effort. As a result, it promised through its August Declaration of August 1917 that India will be awarded a responsible government after the war.
2. The Early Nationalists who had joined the movement after Annie Besant's arrest were pacified with the promise of reforms and Annie Besant's release.
3. The scheme of reforms offered by the British government left the Indian Nationalists divided. While some wanted to accept it outright, there were others who wanted to reject it.
4. Towards the end of 1917, Tilak went to England and was away for many months. Annie Besant was unable to provide firm leadership to the movement without the aid of Tilak.

By 1919, the popularity of the Home Rule League began to decline. It ended in 1920 when it elected Gandhi as its President and then finally merging with the Indian National Congress making it a political front. The growing popularity of Gandhi's Satyagrah Movement, his non-violence and civil disobedience too contributed to the decline of the League. The League also lacked effective organisation. Communal riots which happened during 1917-1918 too led to its decline. The League further got divided after Besant accepted the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms. The Moderates too started to stay away once there were talks of passive resistance by the Extremists. The Movement was left without a leader when Tilak had to go to Britain in connection with a case while Besant was undecided of her response to the reforms and thus was unable to give a positive lead.³¹

The popularity of the Home Rule League also began declining with the coming of the Satyagraha Movement by Gandhi. The Gandhi's mantra of Non-Violence and large scale civil disobedience appealed to India's common people, including his lifestyle, respect for Indian culture and love for the common people of the country. Gandhi led Bihar, Kheda and Gujarat up in a successful revolt against the Government, which eventually rose him to the position of a National Hero. By 1920 the Home Rule League elected Gandhi as its President and within a year from then it would merge into the Indian National Congress forming a united political front.

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