

CHAPTER - IV :

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CHAPTER - IV :

HOME-RULE LEAGUE MOVEMENT IN INDIA

4:1 (A) A SURVEY OF INDIAN POLITICAL

SITUATION AFTER 1909 :-

Political condition in India after the Morley-Minto reforms was rather dull upto 1914. In 1907, there was a split in the Congress and the extremists were expelled from the Congress and after Surat Congress, it had passed into the hands of moderates. It had succeeded in winning faith of British Government but it had lost the support of the masses. Lord Hardings succeeded Lord Minto in 1910. He adopted the policy of conciliation and he succeeded in it. Some leaders were disappointed by the activity of the Congress and they wanted to make it active and united again.

Morley-Minto reforms were introduced when India was reeling under the oppression ^{as} ~~xx~~ the British Government started the prosecution of the extremists as soon as they were expelled by the moderates. The first victim of this relentless and unjust oppression was B. G. Tilak, who was external from India to Mandalay for six years' imprisonment. Lala Lajpat Rai was also deported from India and Sri Aurobindo was arrested and involved in Barisal Bomb case. This oppression almost silenced the extremist but it did not help the moderates who lost popular support. The situation became more continuing when the First World War started in 1914 and the British Government was

was greatly involved in fighting Germany. Due to the out break of the First World War there was lull in political life of India.

The out break of First World War strengthened the feeling of patriotism in India. It created consciousness among the Indian people. Annie Besant came to India to join the work of Theosophical Society. She joined Congress in 1914 and started taking active part in Indian politics. She had started the daily newspaper 'New India' in Jan., 1914. She wanted to make the Congress more active and united. She did not give any new political doctrine to India but she popularized the slogan of Home-rule or Self-Government in India. She demanded self-Government within the British empire.

B. G. Tilak was released from Jail in 1914 and he announced that he and his followers would start Home-rule League Movement as the Irish home-rule have been doing in Ireland for a reform of the system of administration and not for the ~~other~~ overthrow of Government.¹ This statement encouraged Mrs. Besant, but due to non-cooperation of moderates, Mrs. Besant and Tilak had to thought of organizing home-rule leagues separately. On 25th Sept., Mrs. Besant declared her decision to start home-rule league. She tried to get the support of the Congress Party but it was not forth coming hence she started her own home-rule league in 1916. She succeeded in attracting a large number of younger and more vigorous worker to her cause and through them she expected to spread the agitation.² At the same time, she believed that the formation of the league would ~~per~~

persuade the Bombay moderates like Mehta, Gokhale not only to readmit to Tilak but also to allow her to organize the agitation of home-rule under the Congress Organization.

Home-rule was popular word in Ireland and it was used as Swarajya in India. It may be pointed out that Sir Issac Bult was the inventor of the phrase 'Home-rule'. The first home-rule association of Ireland met in 1876 in Dublin to protest against legislative union with Great Britain. Tilak had referred to the concept of 'Home-rule' in his trial speech in 1908 and his famous letter to the Maharatta in Aug., 1914.

4:2 (B) RISE OF MRS. BESANT ON THE
POLITICAL SCENE OF INDIA :-

Mrs. Annie Besant came under the influence of Mr. Bradlaugh in 1847. Mrs. Besant made her first speech at co-operative institute at Castle Street, London and demanded political status and equality for women. She condemned the aggressive and oppressive policy of British Government in Ireland, Burma, etc.

She joined the Theosophical Society under the influence of Madam Blavatskay. After the death of Madam Blavatsky, she became a joint Head of the Esoteric Section of the Society. Later, she came to India in 1893 and started work in the field of religion upto 1903, later she changed her field and started to work in the field of education and social reforms.

In the beginning, she was interested in Theosophy and Hinduism. Her object was to improve the moral of Hindu students and to engender the love for Aryan simplicity. She suggested many social reforms e.g. she opposed caste system, criticized child marriages, untouchability. In 1897 she started working for Hindu college at Banaras and also she had opened many schools and colleges at several places. In 1906, she organized within the Theosophical Society the 'Son of India' and 'Daughter of India' organization to work for social reforms. She opposed Congress Swadeshi movement from the economic point of view. She advised the students not to take part in politics. During her early days she was in favour of gradual reforms and was of the opinion that India was not fit for self-Government.³

Due to this work in India from 1893 to upto this time, she got a large number of followers in India and England also. Mrs. Besant became increasingly critical of British rule. She observed that India was not ruled for the prosperity of her people but rather for the profit of her conquerer and her sons were being treated as the conquered race.⁴ She started her political career in India by delivering a political lecture in Jan., 1914 at Madurai. She supported the British Government in First World War. But she desired a promise from the Government that it would grant self-Government to India before the war ended. Mrs. Besant joined the Congress in 1914 and brought new ideas, new talent, new resources and altogether a new method of

organization and a out look. She demanded self-Government in the Congress held in 1914. She argued that it should be granted not as a reward but as a right. In a private meeting at Bombay, the Congress Session at China Bagh, it was first time that she expressed her idea of home-rule.

From 1914, Annie Besant started taking part in Indian National Congress. She wanted to start Home-Rule League Movement through the Congress Organization. Therefore, she made great efforts to get the demand of home-rule, recognized by the Indian National Congress. But Congress did not accept it completely. The Indian National Congress passed 'Self-Government' resolution in 1915. Indian National Congress held at Bombay. Resolution contained the following provisions.

- 1) The introduction of provincial autonomy, including financial independence.
- 2) Expansion and reforms of legislative council so as to make them truly and adequately representative of all sections of the people and to give them an effective control over the act of executive Government.
- 3) The reconstruction of various existing Executive Councils and the establishment of similar Executive Council in Provinces where they do not exist.
- 4) The reform or abolition of the council of the Secretary of State for India.
- 5) Establishment of legislative council in provinces where they do not exist.

- 6) The readjustment of the relations between the Secretary of State for India and Government of India.
- 7) Liberal measures to make local self.Government effective in the country.⁵

4:3 (C) MRS. ANNIE BESANT AND HOME-RULE :

She declared her idea of home-rule in 1915 at Bombay. She explained that the home-rule movement was launched not against the Great Britain but it was started to win liberty within the empire.⁶ Mrs. Annie Besant established her All India Home-Rule League on 3rd Sept., 1916 at Bombay Annie Besant's Home-Rule League had an executive council of seven officer bearers, elected for the term of three years by near ~~elected~~ ~~for the~~ about 50 branches. She was president of Home-Rule League and George Arundale was its Organizing Secretary and B. P. Wadia was a Treasurer. The Organization was simple. Any interested person could form the group and could choose one of the members as their representative. These supporters of Home-Rule League were expected to open a Home-Rule League room in every town and village and to call meeting to strengthen the propoganda.

The membership of Besant Home-Rule League was open to all men and women. A member had to pay Rs. 10/- as membership fee and life subscription. Member in return received a small silver badge and ribbons. Though she was a Theosophist, many other non-Theosophists supported her like Aiyar, Jawaharlal Nehru, Bankar etc. But most of the members belonged to Theosophical Society. In the beginning there were only 7,000 members of her

Society but later the number increased upto 27,000 in Dec., 1917.⁷ In the foundation of her All India Home-Rule League, she drew largely on the loyalty of members of Theosophical Society. Some theosophists took objection to her Home-Rule League programme but the more ardent believed that by launching the Home-Rule League she was carrying out the behests of those who control the affairs of the world.⁸ Her Home-Rule League movement was popular in Madras, U.P., Bombay and many other provinces. But it was more popular in Madras presidency where there were 132 branches and it was the Centre of Theosophical activities.

Mrs. Annie Besant laid down the following objectives of Home-Rule League :-

- 1) To secure self-Government for India through law abiding and constitutional activity, i.e. agitation and propoganda, the constitutional begins the best way to political evolution.
- 2) To maintain connection with Great Britain by becoming a free nation within the empire under the Imperial Crown of His Majesty, the King Emperor George V and his successors.
- 3) To support and strengthen the National Congress which had laboured for 30 years to lay the foundations of Indian self-Government.

4) To cry-out continuous educative propoganda on the necessity of Home-Rule for India.⁹

The Home-Rule League was consisted of two divisions, one in India and other in England. The Home-Rule for India in England started on 7th June, 1916. The aim of the League was to educate the British democracy in relation to India and to place before them the demand of the Congress for self-Government. Oe La Illara, Miss Burbara Villars, and Mr. Lansbury were the prominent leaders of the League.

In India, Home-Rule League was inaugurated on 3rd Sept. 1916. First of all, the League wanted to give shape to 1915 Congress resolution of self-Government. Annie Besant believed that Swarajya could be obtained if the Extremists and Moderates, Hindus and Muslims came together and put forward their demands. She tried to bring Tilak and Gokhale together. She was encouraged by Tilak's statement that he and his followers were trying in India as the Irish Home-Rule had been doing in Ireland, for a reform of the system of administration and not for overthrow of the Government.¹⁰ She wanted a promise from the British Government that after the end of the 1st World War, India should be given self-Government immediately. Therefore, she started a vigorous propoganda. Tilak and Mrs. Besant worked together and started a strong propaganda for establishment of Home-Rule in country.

Mrs. Annie Besant explained her meaning of Home-Rule

necessity of Home-Rule, whether India is fit for Home-Rule or not, and importance of Home-Rule in her different speeches and writings. She made it clear that Home-Rule did not necessarily mean democratic Government. It was not the form of Government that made Home-Rule relevant. It meant, natural self-Government without the alien interference. At Calcutta Congress in 1917, in her presidential speech she told that the demand of self rule was not selfish demand for more rights, to enjoy happiness. She said, "Demand for self rule is demand for the evolution of its own nature for the service of humanity. It is demand of the deepest spirituality, an expression of longing to give its very best to the world."¹¹

Self-Government was necessary to the self respect and dignity of the Indian people. The white people considered Indians inferior and did not give them equal status. To gain self respect and to achieve self progress Indians should have Home-Rule in their country. She said in her presidential address at Calcutta that, "freedom was birth right of every nation and India wanted it for self respect. British Government had put aside the interests of Indian people, without their consent. All her resources were not utilized for the greatest needs. The money was spent on useless things."¹²

British Government argued that Indian people were not fit for democracy. They were not capable to rule. Annie Besant criticized British Government and made it clear that Indians were fit for democracy. She contended in her presidential

speech at Calcutta that not only she but many historians accepted that Indian was fit for democracy. She gave an example of ⁱMaurya, who recognized that democratic institutions were essentially Aryan and they spread from India to Europe. She was of the view that Indian village panchayat was some sort of village republic and it had been the most stable institution of India. In ancient India there existed many democratic republics. They got vanished because of politics of the East India Company. The democratic spirit still existed within the functioning of caste panchayat. Thus India is democratic in spirit.¹³

She criticized present British administration and argued that it was not ~~fulfill~~ to the Indian people to develop their life and personality. She said that the character of each man, woman and child was degraded and weakened by foreign administration. The moral of the people also degrading in British rule due to the policy of Government. Asquith called it, "intolerable degradation of a foreign yoke."¹⁴

She demanded rights from the British Government and argued that it was not a question of whether the rule was good or bad. "But what every British citizen feels in Britain for his own country, that it should have self-Government. This is the freedom for which the alieners are fighting, this is democracy, a spirit of age."

The second reason for putting forward the demand of

self-Government was that the British rule was not efficient in the matter of Indian interests. She continued in her presidential speech at Calcutta, "the present rule, while efficient in less important matters and in those which concern British interests, is not efficient in the greater matters on which healthy, life and happiness of the people depended."¹⁵

Thus, for the different reasons, she demanded Home-Rule in India. She wanted to change the present administration, so that Indian people could develop their life and personality, All the suffering of Indian people would stop if she had Home-Rule. Therefore, she requested the British Government to pass self-Government bill during 1918 on the lines of Australia.¹⁶

Mrs. Annie Besant wanted to change the whole system i.e. local self-Government, provincial Government and central Government also. She contended that India should have her freedom. She observed, "who has the right to give to her or to withhold from her the freedom ? She is no pauper begging for alms for the crumbs of freedom that fall from the table of western liberty. She is discrowned Queen claiming her heritage."¹⁷

Mrs. Annie Besant made it clear her full idea of self-Government in the following paragraph. She wrote, "India wanted every thing that any other nation might claim for herself. To be free in India as, the English man is free in England. To be governed by her own men, freely elected by her self. To make and break ministry at her will. To carry arms, to have her own

army, her own navy, her own volunteers, to levy her own taxes, to make her own budget, to educate her own people, to irrigate her own land, to mint her own coins, to be sovereign nation without her own borders. Owing the paramount power of the Imperial Crown, and sending her son to the Imperial Council. There is nothing to which any man can aspire in his own land from which the India must be shut out here."¹⁸

ACTION BY GOVERNMENT :

Lord Pentland, a Governor of Madras issued her a warning to stop the activity. 'New India', a daily newspaper was an active organ of propoganda. Annie Besant exposed the policy of Government and portrayed true conditions of India on it. Due to this, she had to pay security of her Vasant Press and New India. Like Madras Government, Bombay Government also issued an order that she should not enter Bombay presidency. When the Government failed to persuade Mrs. Besant, in regard to the Home-Rule propoganda the Government arrested her in 1917. She was rearrested on 17th Sept., 1917.

All India Home-Rule League led by Mrs. Besant was quite popular in Bombay, Madras and U.P. provinces and she succeeded in getting the support of students and young people. She and Tilak raised out cry against the British rule and succeeded in making things difficult for British Government. The first world war ended in 1918 and the British Government decided to give few more political concessions to the Indians. As it is pointed out by Mehrotra, "The Home-Rule League appealed not only a

Western educated Indians but also to masses groups and they presented a formidable challenge to British authority.¹⁹ Thereafter on 20th Aug., 1917 the British Government's announcement was very largely the result of Home-Rule agitation.²⁰

Dr. Besant's Home-Rule league movement deeply stirred educated Indians. She demanded self-Government within the British empire and put forward the frame-work of reconstruction of India in different sector of Indian politics.

4:4 (D) TILAK'S HOME-RULE MOVEMENT :

Tilak had decided to start his Home-Rule League. Even when the Congress refused to entertain the idea of Home-Rule League. The idea of Home-Rule was quite old. Baptista suggested to Tilak that he should form Home-Rule League for India in 1899. Baptista suggested that this should be based on the model of Irish Home Rule League. The subject was again discussed in 1906 at Calcutta Congress.

Home Rule League took its birth in Bombay Provincial Conference which was held in 1914. In that conference, it was decided that Second Conference of the representatives would be held at Belgaum to decide the future programme of Home Rule.

On 1st May, 1916, Tilak formed Home Rule League at Belgaum. The aim of Home Rule League was to concentrate solely on Indian's demand for Swarajya. He expressed in his speeches that the spirit of liberty like Atma existed in every heart

and it was his bounden duty to awaken the people to the ideal of Home-Rule.²¹ In the month of Sept., 1916, Mrs. Besant also started her Home Rule Leagu Movement.

On 28th April, 1916, at Belgaum Conference, the following office bearers were elected by resolution. Mr. Joseph Baptista was elected President, N. C. Kelkar was elected Secretary, D. V. Gokhale was Asstt. Secretary. Membership of Home Rule League was open to all adult persons who accepted the aims and objects of the League. A member had to pay Rs. 2/- as entrance fee and Rs. 1/- as membership fee.

At the First Annual Conference held in April, 1917, a democratic constitution was adopted by the Conference. There was a provision of the election of office bearers by the members present at the Annual Conference, an Executive Committee was formed from these office bearers and they had to co-opt a representative from each of the league's six branches, Central Maharashtra Bombay City, Karnatak, Berar (where there were two branches) and the Central Province.²² Tilak decided that each major town and area covered by the League should have representation on both the Managing Committees. In fact day-to-day working of the League was supervised from the Poona Office of Tilak and his newspapers by the League Executive Assistant, D. V. Gokhale in consultation with Tilak and his close Lieutenant, Kelkar.²³

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES :-

The word Home Rule League applied to a variety of things generally Home Rule was applied to the Constitution obtained by Canada, Australia etc. The most important business of the League was to get a Home Rule Bill drafted and then to get it introduced in the British Parliament..

A meeting of Home-Rule League Committee was held on 28th April at Belgaum. The following resolutions were passed in the meeting.

- 1) That a League be established is called, "The Indian Home-Rule League".
- 2) The object of the League is to attain 'Home-Rule(or 'Self-Government(for India within the British empire by all constitutional means and to educate and organize public opinion in the country towards the attainment of the same.
- 3) That the membership of the League is open to all adult persons who accepted the objects of the League.²⁴

Tilak told that many people developed misunderstanding about the word 'Swarajya'. He had explained the work 'Swarajya' at Belgaum Conference. The idea of Swarajya was old one. He told that the ruler who was ruling over you did not belong to your race, religion or even country. The question was not about good or bad Government. It was about own Government or

alien Government. He explained the term 'alien' also. He made it clear that the one what was beneficial to the people of their country was not alien. The insisted that he be a Muslim or an Englishman. It was King's duty to make efforts for the prosperity of the nation and to bring it on par with other nations. That the King who did their duty could not be considered alien.²⁵

At Belgaum Conference, he argued that the Management of our affairs should be in our hands was the meaning of demand for Swarajya. He made it clear that Indians wanted to remain within British Empire. He said, "we do not want State Secretary. We want at least our men elected by us on his Council." He demanded changes in the system of administration and argued that, "there were many complaints from the people about injustices, but we could not do anything because the authority was not in our land-India did not have Swarajya."²⁶

Tilak criticized present administrative system also and opined that the present administrative system was such that some able men who had been educated in England and had received college education came to India and the State administration of India was carried on through them.²⁷

Tilak explained that sovereign authority is always divided into two parts, one the advisory body and the other executive body. The question of Swarajya was related to those who were to rule over India (and) according to whose leadership,

by whose order and under whose guidance that rule was to be exercised.²⁸ Tilak had not opposed British empire or King. He wanted self Government under the British empire, but he opposed, executive body of the British Government meant the officers in India.

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Tilak/of the opinion that these Beaurocrats did not want change in the Government but he wanted Indian administration in the hands of Indians ~~epop~~ people. The Swarajya agitation now launched in India was then about to change in such a ministry who would rule in India.²⁹

He complained, that "we have to take permission of the Government even for such negligible things like use of grains, grounds of forest department. If this power came in our hands, if you had been the officer in their place, ^{if} their authority had been responsible to the public opinion, these things would not have happened."³⁰ He was of the opinion that one of the causes of these complaints was non participation of the people in the Government. Therefore, Tilak demanded that the management of our affairs should be in our hands. This was the ~~central~~ central meaning of the demand for 'Swarajya'.

He told the people that if they did not attain Swarajya, there would be neither industrial progress, nor would there be spread of education useful to the nation either primary or higher.

Some people argued that the Indians were not fit for Swarajya but Tilak answered then that the Indians were fit for administration. He said the proof of this was that before the advent of English Government in this country, there was at least some order. There was no disorder every where.

A man did not kill another since there existed such an order how could we to say that the Indians were not fit to rule.³¹

Tilak demanded that at least we want our men elected by us in the council. He was of the opinion that the following things decided according to our opinion that who was to expend India's revenue, how much money he was to collect, how many taxes he was to impose. He argued that power should be in people's hands; in the hands of men elected by the people.

Tilak inaugurated his Home Rule League at Belgaum and explained the meaning of Home Rule at Belgaum and Ahmednagar public meetings. Later on he started the propoganda of Home Rule League all over Maharashtra and Karnataka State. He held several meetings in Vidarbha region also.

He delivered a speech at Akola and explained the meaning of Home Rule. He made it clear that it meant representative Government, a Government over which the people would have control. It was a solution unanimously accepted by Hindus, ~~Mul~~ Muslims and extremists and moderates alike.³² He delivered a lecture at Telhara also, ~~ave~~ Great mob assembled at the place of

meeting. He explained the term Swarajya. He said the demand of Swarajya was not against British Government. What he wanted was in administration. This demand was not anti-Government. In fact he argued that those people opposed the Government could not be considered antinational, The Government must take our advice because we pay taxes to the Government.³³

Thus, he explained his Home Rule movement in several speeches and got the support from the people.

Very soon the Government wanted to stop Tilak's Home Rule agitation. In July, 1916 a band of Rs. 40,000/- was demanded from him on the ground that his speeches were seditious and also Government announced that people should not support his movement. Tilak appealed in Bombay High Court against it and got the decision that Home Rule movement was not seditious.³⁴

Later six branches became the recruitment centres of the League. To encourage the people to join the League Rs. 2/- entry fee was stopped. Due to this membership was increased in large number as there were only 1,000 members in Nov., 1916 but the number increased to 14,000 in April, 1917 and 32,000 in early 1918.³⁵

HOME RULE LEAGUE AFTER LUCKNOW CONGRESS :

Tilak and Mrs. Besant were hoping to win control over Congress through their respective Leagues. They wanted to achieve this objective at Lucknow Congress. But it did not

happen. Later Tilak and Mrs. Besant started triumph and joint tour and addressed several meetings throughout northern, eastern and central India. The government of Bombay, Madras and the Central Provinces banned students from attending the meetings. But the Government could not stop the agitation as it became vigorous. The prominent persons who were initially aloof from the Home Rule League, now joined it. Moderates like S. N. Banerjee, Wacha and Shastri did not join the League, but condemned the Government's action of suppressing the movement. The younger men of Bombay sought guidance from Tilak and Gandhi for passive resistance. Mrs. Besant expressed her approval of passive resistance and strove to think out method so as to adopt passive resistance to Indian condition.³⁶

Later on Edwin Montague, Secretary of State, for India announced on 20-8-1917 that some political reforms would be granted to India towards the establishment of responsible Government. He announced that he would very soon visit India with the Viceroy, Lord Chelmsford to learn and hear the opinions of Indian about the future political set up.

4:5 (E) COMPARATIVE STUDY :

There is no doubt that Home Rule movement played a very important role in National Movement of India and succeeded in making the Congress as the main instrument of Indian Nationalism, as it increased the educated Indians craving for getting more

political rights and it deeply stirred villages and towns in different parts of India. Dr. Besant's League was more national in Character because it gathered momentum and received support in provinces like Madras, U.P., Sind, Gujarat and Bombay City. That was largely due to the wide spread network of Theosophists established by Dr. Besant. Tilak's Home Rule was limited to Maharashtra Central Provinces and Karnatak. But as far as membership of both Leagues was concerned, Tilak's League had a larger following as there were 32,000 members in his League against 27,000 members of Dr. Besant's League. Dr. Besant succeeded in propogating the idea of Home Rule in India because she had some links in Britain.

Tilak's Home Rule League was supported by the political workers who earlier participated in his movement. Therefore, it was supported by politically conscious people. But Dr. Besant drew her following from the theosophical youth and students. Therefore, there were certain emotional overtones could be sensed in her movement. Secondly, Tilak was quite consistent and lucid about his political programme and he vividly put forward his views on political set up of India, and made it clear that he stood for the establishment of democratic form of Government in India. Dr. Besant was not clear about her political goals and she did not consistently put forward her views on the future set up of India. One can say that largely she was sympathetic to the idea of establishment of democratic set up in India. But sometimes she failed to identify self Government with democracy.

Since basically she was a theosophist, she mixed her political ideals with metaphysical and spiritual goals of theosophy that wanted India to guide the world.

The movement gathered momentum and got wide supports when the British Government decided to grant some more political concessions to India and when the declaration of that import was made by Edwin Montague, Dr. Besant was one of the most popular leaders of Indian National Movement. The declaration succeeded in putting halt to the spread of movement. But during the crucial period after 1918 Dr. Besant followed very inconsistent and sometimes duplicate policy which cost her the leadership as she kept on changing her opinions. Tilak got involved in Chirole Case and the ground was wide open for Gandhi to assume the leadership of the Congress Party.

The Home Rule League movement first time brought a large number of Indians in the agitational politics and gave them important training in that field. It also succeeded in making Indians more politically conscious by educating them in the concept of Swarajya and its different ramifications. The movement was a true firecursor of the Great Gandhian mass movements of 1921, 1930 and 1942.

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CHAPTER - IV

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