

CONTRIBUTIONS OF HOME RULE MOVEMENT TO THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT IN TAMILNADU

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ABSTRACT

Resistance to foreign rule on ideological grounds of nationalism, patriotism, self government etc. was a phenomenon which appeared on the Indian political scene only at the beginning of the last quarter of the 19th Century. In this situation Annie Besant came to India in 1893 to join the work of Theosophical Society. From 1914 to 1917 the pace was set for the Indian National Movement by Annie Besant. She was an unusually vigorous woman with a commanding personality and magnetic presence. She had developed her oratorical and journalistic skills. She played a vital role in Indian politics and started a Home Rule Movement in Madras Presidency and fight against the British for Self Rule in India

KEYWORDS: *Nationalism, Patriotism, Self Government, Home Rule Movement*

INTRODUCTION

During the later part of the 19th century and the first half of the present, Indian opinion was getting hardened against British rule. Tamilnadu in the early part of the 19th century was not an integral part of any larger political entity which could be called the government of India.

The latest variety of foreign rule that Tamilnadu has suffered was the English government of Tamilnadu in the first instance and later of the same territory as part of British Indian dominions. Resistance to foreign rule on ideological grounds of nationalism, patriotism, self government etc. was a phenomenon, which appeared on the Indian political scene only at the beginning of the last quarter of the 19th Century.¹

No kind of united political action took place in the Tamilnadu part of the Madras presidency till 1885, when Lord Dufferin was the viceroy, the Indian National Congress was founded and it is met for the first time in Bombay.² Some of the Englishmen who were lovers of India and who disapproved of the autocratic British rule in India, they wished to bring important and socially conscious Indians together for the purpose of demanding the privileges which had been denied to the people of the country by the British government. Among them, A.O. Hume and Wedderburn are important people. When the Indian National Congress met in Bombay, Madras opinion was represented by veteran G. Subramanya Iyer. Other Tamilians who took an active part in the early activities of the congress were C. Vijayaraghavachariar of Salem,

¹ N. Subrahmanian, Social & Cultural History of Tamilnadu 1336-1984, Udumalpet, 2007 p.66

² M.N. Das, Indian National Congress versus the British, Vol. I, 1885-1918, Ajanta publications, 1978, p.200

Kasturiranga Iyengar and Gopalacharlu. Slowly the congress and its principles spread all over India; the third annual session of the congress and its principles spread all over India.³The third annual session of the congress was held in Madras in 1887. Local organizations like the Madras Mahajana Sabha carried on a mild political activity.⁴

Following on the annual meetings of Indian National Congress, the 'Hindu' (an English daily with which G.Subramanya Iyer was associated) and the 'Swadesamitran' (a Tamil daily) were beginning to voice against the British government.

During the short period of 1907 to 1912 all the terrorist activity had occurred in Tamilnadu. Among the leading revolutionaries could be mentioned V.V. Subramanya Siva, Swadeshi padmanabha Iyengar. In 1911 District Magistrate Ashe of Tirunelveli was shot dead at Maniyachi by Vanchi Iyer.⁵This was the only notable instance of assassinations committed by Tamil terrorist nationalists. Another notable person in the National Movement V.O. Chidambaram pillai, an advocate of Tuticorin, started a Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company, which would ply steamers between Tuticorin and Ceylon competing with already existing British Companies. The British authorities tried to discourage the endeavour and the British companies harassed the new company and its directors. Chidambaram pillai was accused of making seditious speeches and organizing terrorist activities and jailed first in Coimbatore and later in Cannanore from where he was released in December 1912.⁶

In this situation, Annie Besant came to India in 1893 to join the work of the Theosophical Society. From 1914 to 1917 the pace was set for the Indian National Movement by Annie Besant. She was an unusually vigorous women with a commanding personality and magnetic presence. She had developed her oratorical and journalistic skills.

Origin of Home Rule League

In the year 1895 that a Memoranda on the Home Rule Bill for India was published under Tilak's inspiration as his practical statesmanship was not content with the advocacy of isolated Reforms. However, as the political feeling at that time was far less advanced, the idea did not pick up momentum. ⁷ Eleven years later, in 1906, Swaraj, defined as self-government in the colonial system, was definitely propounded by the congress as the ultimate aim. In 1907, the Surat Split put this aim as the first article of the congress creed. This had some success, and the congress leadership began to give it a serious thought. In the year 1913 the Muslim League adopted the formula of "Suitable government" as the aim of the Mohammedans. From 1914 onwards, however, it became a powerful movement. As explained in the preceding section, Annie Besant propagated it with all the vigor at her command. In 1915, she thought, it was time to start Home Rule League for India. For majority of Indian politicians though, self-government still remained in the distant and rather dim background. Mrs. Besant's policy was to "transpose the picture", "get self-government", and "all these other changes that you have asked for will follow as a matter of course".⁸

In September 1915, Mrs. Besant called for a vigorous Home Rule agitation. No doubt, she meant her agitation to

³ V. Krishnaswamy Iyer to Wedderburn, 23 April 1909, V.K.Iyer papers.

⁴ N.Subrhmajian, *op.cit.*,p.80

⁵ Dr. Besant's article in *Annie Besant builder* (Besant Spirit Series)TPH, Adyar, Madras 1942, P.62.

⁶ *New India* 1st September, 1918, TPH, Adyar, 1918

⁷ Dr. Besant's article in *New India* 6th, January 1916, Adyar, P. 10.

⁸ Annie Besant, *India : A Nation*, (A plea for Indian self-government) New India Office, 1923. Pp.51-53.

be thoroughly “loyal and law-abiding”⁹. She asked if the Indian leaders in every town and village would take up the cry of Home Rule for India- hold meetings, and explain to the masses and make them demand from the liberty-loving British race self-government for their country. She advised the Indian newspapers to keep on writing, till the “idea permeated Indian Society as a whole and the demand was clearly echoed”¹⁰. She declared:

Insidious onslaughts on Indians force us not to be bamboozled by this one-sided argument of not worrying the Government in times of war. If the Government, taking advantage of the situation, trample upon India’s hopes, aspirations, and ideals, would we be loyal to India and liberty-loving Britain to sit with folded hands and say nothing? There is a great war now going on, but in India there is another kind of Struggle to be perceived, as titanic as European one. It is the travail before the birth hour. And to those Indians who are afraid of the fight, to them. ¹¹

She believed that no nation gave liberty to another nation and sooner they realized it the better. A nation was fit for liberty the moment she was determined to have it. The Home Rule League, distinct from the Congress, was to take up work which the Congress did not and could not do with its annual sessions and the rare meetings of its committees. She made it clear that it would have nothing to do with all the reforms for which the Congress stood, save the one central claim, self- government for India, and it would work continuously and one-pointedly, in Press and on the platform, for this one thing. Some may say, she said, Why does this till after the War? Because, after the war, it will be too late. India should follow the example of the self-governing dominions, and clearly stated her resolve, as they have done, to share in the control of the Empire, as well as to enjoy Home Rule, as they already enjoy it. Such a demand is no more out of place, no more embarrassing than theirs. To feel any embarrassment over, it would employ a contemplation of refusal, and England has not invited India to fight for liberty in Europe, with the intention of refusing liberty’s soldiers and their people when they return home.¹²

The Government tried its best to persuade Annie Besant to drop her Home Rule propaganda till after the War.¹³ But she refused to drop even temporarily her Home Rule campaign.

Establishment of Home Rule League

On 25 December ,Annie Besant called a meeting to discuss the establishment of a Home Rule League. Those present (about 200) comprised the All- India Congress Committee, the Council of the Muslim League, and the signatories to the invitation, but it was a private meeting. Surendranath Banerjee presided over this meeting.¹⁴ Annie Besant placed her scheme before the committee. P.C.Mitter (Bengal) moved an amendment to refer the subject to the congress and the Muslim League. To legitimize her Home Rule League and give it a more universal appeal, Mrs. Besant sought the support of the Indian National Congress at its annual meeting at Bombay in December, 1915¹⁵.But her efforts were opposed by Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, because he thought that it might weaken the congress, where the hope was to strengthen it. It was because the congress showed little activity between its annual session that the need for a Home Rule League had

⁹ *The Commweal*, 5th January, 1917, Madras, P.11.

¹⁰ Annie Besant, (ed), 'Famous Congress League Scheme' in *New India*, Madras, June, 22, 1918.

¹¹ *The Commonweal*, 8th June, 1917, Op. Cit., Pp.438-434.

¹² A. Besant, *How India wrought for Freedom*, Madras 1915,p.532

¹³ A. Besant, *Article in young India*, reprinted in *New India*,p.2

¹⁴ Annie Besant’s papers on Madras Parliament, Adyar, Madras.p.23

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.26

aroused.¹⁶She therefore had to be content with two important resolutions which she was instrumental in getting passed at the meeting. One outlined the type of constitutional reform that the Congress considered satisfactory. The second, and more important, resolution authorized the All India Congress Committee to draw up a scheme of constitutional reform in the meantime congress would carry on a program of “Continuous work, education and propagandist.”¹⁷The second of these two resolutions obviated the need for a Home Rule League, at least until September 1, 1916 when the constitutional scheme commissioned by the congress was due to be published. However, Mrs.Besant felt that if the scheme was not complete by that date she would be justified in going ahead with her own plans.¹⁸

Using the influence that she already had in Madras politics, she pressed for the establishment of educative and propagandist activities by the Madras provincial committee of congress, and persuaded some of her friends, including C.P.Ramaswami Iyer, a lawyer, and A. Rangaswami Iyengar, an enthusiastic political worker, to give lectures on constitutional topics at the Madras Mahajana Sabha Hall.¹⁹ The lectures attracted some attention, and a number of college students became interested in Home Rule.

Simultaneously, she increased the tempo and sharpness of her propaganda work through press, Propaganda Fund and “Groups”. She began a definite propaganda for Home Rule in her paper *New India* from 5 January, 1916. It was entitled “Home Rule Section” covering three pages “printing” therein articles in favour of self-government from all shades of opinion.²⁰

The supplement and in vigorate the campaign Mrs. Besant also published a series of articles entitled “Winning Self-Government”, in her weekly paper *The Commonweal*.²¹Her write-ups, speeches and activities provoked the government greatly.

Home Rule League in Tamilnadu

The Home Rule was started on the 1st of September 1916, but the League was formally inaugurated on 3rd September in YMIA (Gokhale Hall) Hall in Madras by Mrs. Besant who initiated the first attempt at mass appeal. ---The word ‘Home Rule’ were for popular cry making the fact that struggle was not against Great Britain, but for liberty within the Empire. The main idea of the Home Rule was to achieve self-government for India. Home Rule involves a home to rule. It was the cry of a nation for self rule or self-government. Mrs. Besant observed that the real object of the Home Rule League was defined as:

- To secure Home Rule for India through all law-abiding and constitutional activity.
- To maintain the connection with Great Britain by becoming a free nation within the British Empire.
- To support and strengthen the Indian National Congress, which has labored for thirty years to lay the foundations of Indian Self-Government.

¹⁶ *The Common Weal*, 2 January, 1918

¹⁷ The Evolution of Mrs. Besant, Being the Life and public Activities of Mrs. Annie Besant, Madras 1918, p.313

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, P.320

¹⁹ A. Besant, ‘Internment Diary’, July 21 to 30, 1917 p.22.

²⁰ *The Common Weal*, 12 March 1915, p.188

²¹ *New India*, 1 January, 1915

To carry on a continuous educative propaganda on the necessity of Home Rule for India.²² Further clarifying the concept of Home Rule, Dr. Besant wrote in *New India* that: 'India to be governed by her own men, freely elected by herself, to make and break ministers at her will, carry arms, to have her own army, to have her own navy, to levy her own taxes, to make her own budget, to educate her own people to irrigate her own land, to be a sovereign nation within her borders, owning the paramount powers of the Imperial crown and sending her sons to the Imperial Council'. Dr. Besant explained why India should demand the Home Rule: India demands Home Rule for two reasons. First, freedom is the birthright of every Nation. Secondly, her most important interests are now made sub-servant to the interests of the British Empire without her consent, and her resources are not utilized for her greatest needs. It is enough only to mention the money spent on her army, not for local defense, but for Imperial purposes, as compared with the money spent on primary education.²³

The all India Home Rule commenced its work with Dr. Besant as its President, C.P.Ramaswamy Iyer as its General Secretary, and B.P. Wadia and G.S. Arundale as its Treasurer and Organizing Secretary respectively. The strong base of the League was in the south, where the Theosophical Society's followers spread the Home Rule Message.²⁴ *New India* and *The Commonweal* her two papers, rendered tremendous service for her intensive campaign for home-rule. *New India* stood for home-rule news and G.S. Arundale, edited the news. The resolutions, most important speeches with summary, were published as 'Home-Rule Series' under 'published for the Editorial Board of the All-India Self-Government found' this was started by Annie Besant in 1916.²⁵ This was the least aggressive way in which propaganda for Home Rule, while arousing and educating the country. By her political writings in *New India*, the League membership increased from 7,000 in March to 27,000 in December 1917.²⁶

New India and Common Weal was the main streamline of spreading the ideas of freedom to every corner of India. Dr. Besant's intention was to lead a political campaign in favor of Swaraj and Liberty. She strongly felt that:

'To be free in India, as the Englishman is free in England. To be governed by her own men, freely elected by her, To be sovereign nation within her own borders. Britain and India hand in hand, but on India free as is her birth right'.²⁷

Annie Besant toured all over India to spread her ideas among the masses. The Home Rulers followed the constitutional method of political agitation. For them, this was the best method for political evolution. Madras was the centre of Besant's Home Rule activities. Through out the presidency, the Home Rulers formed reading rooms and libraries. Special Home Rule classes have been started and are to be held twice a week in the hall of the Young Indian Association at Madras; the first meeting was taken by a member of the Theosophical Society under the presidency of Mrs. Besant herself. The members of the league organized lectures and group discussion in cities like Karachi, Bombay, Calcutta, Madurai, Trichirappalli, Masulipatnam, Madras, Vijayawada and other places. Mrs. Besant made effective campaign for Home Rule for India through the Theosophical Society. The society's followers spread the Home-Rule message to every corner.

One of the facts is that Mrs. Besant was president of both the Theosophical Society and Home Rule League. This

²² *New India*, 6th January 1916, Madras, P. 10

²³ Dr. Besant's article on 'What does India want?' in *Annie Besant Builder of New India*, Op.Cit., Pp.272-273.

²⁴ Gokhale to Annie Besant, 10 January, 1915, Adyar Archives.

²⁵ *The Common Weal*, 12 February, 1915, pp.125-6.

²⁶ Gokhale to Mrs. Besant, 25 June, 1914, Adyar Archives, Madras, p.48

²⁷ Annie Besant, *The Future of Indian Politics*, Adyar, Madras, 1922, p.30

resulted in many Theosophists becoming members of the League.²⁸ Several branches of the League were established in all important towns in Tamilnadu such as in Tirunelvely, Madura, Trichinopoly, Tanjore, Tiruppur, Coimbatore and also many prominent persons became members and spread Home Rule under the direction of Mrs. Besant.²⁹

Mrs. Annie Besant's teachings and ideas had great impact on the younger section of the society, especially on the Western educated Indians. George Joseph was one among them. As a part of her activities, Annie Besant visited some rural districts of Tamilnadu, and she visited Madurai also. Madurai was a major centre of activity for George Joseph. On 20th March 1916, George Joseph met Mrs. Annie Besant for the first time on one of her visits to Madurai. From that day onwards Joseph became a great supporter of Home Rule Movement. The methods and teachings of Annie Besant had made a deep impact on George Joseph. Madurai soon became one of the major centers of Home Rule activities and George Joseph became a strong activist of the Home Rule League.³⁰

In Madurai, another campaign started by Mrs. Besant. As per an order issued by the British government on 7th June 1917, Mrs. Besant and other leaders of the Home Rule League were banned from visiting urban centers like Madras and Madurai. The British government also prohibited students from attending any Home Rule League agitation. Mrs. Besant condemned all such actions of the government through various meetings held in Madurai.

Another meeting was held in Madurai in February 1918, in which Mrs. Besant commented that for achieving Home Rule, people should agitate within India and she also recommended for sending representatives to England for demanding self government to India.³¹ The congress session held in Calcutta in 1917, made Mrs. Besant its president. It was considered as a great triumph for the Home Rule Movement and its ardent supporters as well as followers.

The Following Notice had been Issued from the Home Rule League Office

"It is proposed by Mrs. Besant that a more vigorous campaign must be done throughout the Tamil districts of the presidency to form as many branches of the Home Rule League and enlist as many members as possible. To do this, fluent speakers in Tamil are required. Those who like to take part in this will please meet me at 4.p.m on Wednesday and give their number and names".³²

Mrs. Annie Besant's speeches awakened the students and elite group of Tiruchirappalli. The first Home Rule Convention of the students was presided by Varadarajulu Naidu in Tiruchirappalli. The second Home Rule convention was held at the National College, Tiruchirappalli presided over by Mr. Arundale. Lectures given on the topic of education emphasising the need of the services of Youngman for the country.

To intensify the Home Rule movement, public meetings were conducted under the auspices of the Congress. In 1917, the Tiruchirappalli district Congress Conference placed on record that the people would not be happy unless self government was established. Another meeting was held in the Tiruchirappalli town hall on 28th August 1917 under the auspices of the local Home Rule League when Chandra Sekhara Sarma and Mantreswara Sarma were stated to have delivered lectures on 'students and politics'. A large number of students participated in the meeting. In their speeches, to

²⁸ Ibid., pp.32-38

²⁹ Fortnightly Reports, Public Department (Confidential), 18th May, 1918, p.3

³⁰ Fortnightly Reports, Public Department (Confidential), 19th April, 1918, p.2

³¹ *The Common Weal*, 12th April, 1918, p.25-28

³² Fortnightly Reports, Public Department (Confidential), 18th May, 1917, p.42

take the swadesi vow, the boycott of foreign articles and the adoption of the method of passive resistance. In 1917, 6th June Mr.Kalyanasundra Mudaliyar, the editor of the *Desabhaktan* (the organ of the Madras Presidency Association); the District Magistrate mentions that in addition to advocating passive resistance and the spread of Home Rule propaganda in rural areas, the speaker laid special stress on the need to organize in each village bands of a hundred or more men to be drilled and trained “to put down the wicked and prevent offenders”.³³ The Home Rule propaganda became active in Tiruchirappalli district under the directions of the Hon’ble Mr.B.V.Narasimha Iyyer of the of the local legislative council. He held a number of special meetings and founded additional branches of the league in various places.³⁴

In 1917, Dr.P.Varadarajula Nayudu who was the secretary of Tamilnadu Branch of League, lectured on Home Rule in North Arcot district, he spoke entirely in Tamil. His lectures drew large crowds, for the first time, perhaps to many non-English speakers, he was making available the content and participation of politics. In the decade after the inauguration of the Home Rule, Varadarajula Naidu and other politicians used the vernacular with much success. There was a strong statement for India Home Rule by Mrs.Besant in 1916 at the Cuddalore political conference, Lord pentland who was then Governor of Madras sent for her and asked her to leave India.³⁵

In Tanjore the Home Rule meeting presided over by a pensiones Sub-Judge. In Coimbatore and the meeting was conducted by Mr.B.V.Narasimha Ayyar. The two Home Rule meetings in the Salem district, a prominent part in these meetings was taken by Adinarayana Chetti, formerly an Honorary Magistrate of Salem town. The two meetings publicly advocated the demand of a declaration regarding self-government.³⁶

The first anniversary of the League was celebrated on the 14th September 1917 at the hall of the Young Men’s Indian Association, the speech delivered by Mrs.Besant. Mrs.Besant also gave a public address on Home Rule at the Tanjore District Conference in Negapatnam on the 23rd September 1917.The attention of Government has been drawn to another pamphlet issued by her, bearing the title “Under sentence of death” which reproduced with commends the orders passed against her two printing presses under the Indian press Act,1910; the Law officers Government are being consulted as to whether this pamphlet is not liable to forfeiture under section 12 of the Act.³⁷

In this situation, Lord Pentland raised strong objection with Mrs. Besant, on her publishing articles in *New India* campaign for Home Rule.He imposed severe repressive measures against the Home Rule Movement and to stop Besant ‘s journalistic Campaign. They invoked both the Defense of India Act and sections of Indian press Act of 1910.

At the time of the registration of *New India* in 1914, it was exempted from the liability to deposit security. But, the authorities felt that Mrs. Besant did not deserve this concession. In view of the continued aggressive tone of *New India* and the sharpness of the articles appearing in it, the Government of Madras moved the Chief Presidency Magistrate’s Court on 15 May 1916, to cancel the order which exempted Mrs. Besant from the obligation to deposit security in connection with *New India*. The Madras Government served a note on 26 May 1916, to Mrs. Besant levied a security of Rs. 2,000 on *New India*. It was to be paid before June 15th, 1916. And Government served another order to her, that demanding a fresh

³³ Raj Kumar, *Annie Besant’s Rise to Power in Indian Politics*, Concept Publishing House, New Delhi, pp.96-100

³⁴ NNPR, Swadesamitran, 19th May 1917.

³⁵ Eugene F.Irschick, *Politics and Social Conflict in South India, The Non-Brahman Movement and Tamil Separatism, 1916-1929*, University of California press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1969, pp.29-35

³⁶ Fortnightly Reports, Public Department (Confidential), 18th January, 1916, p.5

³⁷ Fortnightly Reports, Public Department (Confidential), 18th May, 1917, p.42

security of Rs. 10,000 for continuance of *New India* on August 28th 1916. The Press Act gave to her the option of paying in cash or in government promissory notes. The Law Officer of the Governor General, Mr. Sinha promised that interest should be paid on security levied. But, Madras Government paid no interest. By the strong repression of press, *New India* was only suspended for three days, on June 18th, 19th and 20th of 1917 and reappeared on June 21. Mr. P.K. Telang became the editor of *New India*.

The Nationwide protest was carried out against Lord Pentland and his repressive measures against Mrs. Besant and her paper *New India*³⁸. The New India security affair spread political consciousness in the entire nation. National leaders like Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, M.A. Jinnah Tej Bahadur Sapru and C.Y. Chintamani raised their voice against Pentland's Government. Large number of public meetings witnessed in Madras Presidency in Bengal, Bombay and the United Provinces. Congress Committees in Tirupur, Tanjore, Erode and Cuddalore, Ahmadnagar, Bombay, Allahabad and other towns in India made protest against the Government.³⁹ *Amrita Bazar Patrika* declared that 'Liberty of the Press in India is a myth'.

By the Government's repression and efforts to suppress Mrs. Besant's agitation and her activities, the idea of Home Rule became more popular. And also by repressing on her press, Lord Pentland and his government became a chief propagandist of Home Rule in an indirect way. Dr. Besant built for the Home Rule unemotional mass support. The Indian National Congress was an auxiliary of the Home Rule League, because of her inspiring leadership. It was an instrument for carrying the message of Home Rule as a birthright to remote villages as much as to urban Population.⁴⁰

As Gandhi once said, Annie Besant within a few years brought Home Rule within the consciousness of every Indian village and as no other Indian worker, she embodied Swaraj or self-rule for India with the whole of her being. The Home Rule Movement spread to every corner of India and as Gandhi said in 1917, 'the Home Rule' became a mantra in every cottage.⁴¹

Non –Brahmin Reaction to Home Rule

The Home Rule Movement failed to reach the masses. The control of the national movement by the Brahmins excited a Dravidian reaction. It found expression in the organization of their own political associations. The non-Brahmin movement arose out the jealousy of the non-Brahmins towards the Brahmins who occupied dominant positions in politics and public offices. The non-Brahmin dominated congress world reap out of Home Rule. They pushed forward their programmes through Justice party to counteract the policies of the Congress. To the non-Brahmin the Congress party was not an instrument for social change. The Congress Committees in the village failed to carry the masses with the organization due to the racial complex deep in the minds of both the Brahmins and non-Brahmins. The congress tried to compromise the evils of the society with a view to get the support of the upper classes. But the non-Brahmins continued to challenge them from outside.

The activities of Mrs. Besant evoked a vigorous counter movement. The Justice party wanted to exploit the political opportunities by posing themselves Champions of the non-Brahmins. They were willing to co-operate with the

³⁸ Peter Robb article on 'The Government of India and Annie Besant' in *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol.X, No.1, 1976, P.107.

³⁹ Annie Besant's article on "Steps to Freedom" in *The Besant Spirit Series*, Vol.3, TPH, Adyar, 1939, Pp.74-75.

⁴⁰ Pande. B.N., (ed) *A Centenary History of Indian National Congress, Vol.1*, (1885-1919), New Delhi, 1985, p.48

⁴¹ Dr. Besant, *The Future of Indian Politics*, TPH, Adyar 1922, p.83

British bureaucracy, in order to gain political and administrative positions for the non-Brahmins and at the same time keep the Brahmins from monopolizing political powers. Their party paper Justice and their programmes had a headway, in rural areas which became a weapon of attack and defense.⁴²

One writer from the South Arcot district, for instance, argued that “the Brahmin vs non-Brahmin hatred is found supreme in every Taluk”. The leading Zamindars in Madras published a manifesto to disassociate themselves from the Home Rule. The Dravida sangam organised a meeting of the non-Brahmins at Uraiyur in Tiruchirappalli on 24th November 1917. One of the speakers said that the Indians would become fit for Home Rule when they did away with the caste system. An anti-Home Rule Movement meeting was held at Udayarpalayam in which the non-Brahmin leaders like K.A.P.Viswanadham criticised the congress and the activities of Mrs.Besant.⁴³

Another meeting was held at Madras by Adi Dravidians in opposition to the Home Ruler and the Brahmins. This meeting headed by the Zamindar of Telaprole, who has been a prominent leader of the non-Brahmanas.⁴⁴

Mrs. Besant was now being attacked almost daily by three Justice party papers namely, Justice, Dravidian, Andhra prakasika. The Dravidian headlines like “ Home Rule Is Brahmana’s Rule.” Pamphlets appeared questioning her integrity and that of her Brahman colleagues. One pamphlet mocked her attempts at social reform by remarking that she refused to introduce interdining in the organisations she sponsored because she regarded the sudras as mere” younger brothers”.⁴⁵

CONCLUSIONS

Annie Besant was associated with India for more years than any other foreign friends of India’s freedom and was more deeply involved in Indian development. Her Home Rule League grew from strength to strength, and the tempo of her agitation of the movement in India picked up almost all sections of people including peasants and workers joined her Home Rule League.

Her political idiom had brought about a wonderful change in the political climate of the nation and her spirit of agitation stung people into higher pursuits and action. However, if on one side she brought passion, enthusiasm and vigor in politics, on the other side, she infused the quality of restraint and discipline in public struggle.

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⁴² Dr.T.Sundararaj,*History of Tiruchirappalli*,Sundar Publications,Tiruchirappalli, 2003,pp.154-55

⁴³ Fortnightly Reports, Public Department (Confidential), 16th February,1918, p.2

⁴⁴ Eugene F.Irschick.,*op.cit.*, p.51

⁴⁵ Mrs. Annie Besant, *Why India Wants the Home Rule*, Edinburg, 1919 p.80

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