
THE ROLE OF SWARAJYA PARTY IN MADRAS PRESIDENCY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO HARIJAN MOVEMENT AND AGRARIAN AGITATION

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Abstract

The "Congress - Khilafat Swarajist Party" better known as the "Swarajya Party" was formed on 31st December, 1922 at Delhi. After the withdrawal of Non - Co-operation Movement, two camps emerged in the Congress Party known as pro - changers and no-changers. The pro-changers, led by C.R. Das and Motilal Nehru, formed the Swarajya Party.

Keywords: Swarajya Party, Congress Party, Madras Presidency, Swarajists and Harijan Movement, Mahatma Gandhi's, Agrarian issue

The Madras Presidency

The British advent in India began from the South. The city of Madras has been rightly described the 'birth place' of British India. Madras was the first territorial acquisition, which the British obtained in 1639, and the first of the three Presidencies. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, Madras Presidency, was comprising of the whole of the present Tamil Nadu, part of Orissa, a large portion of Andhra Pradesh, and parts of Kerala and Karnataka. Its administrative and formal political unity marked enormous economic, linguistic and cultural distinction, not only divided Madras into regional components, but also ran through each region, separating one social group from another¹.

The Madras Presidency and Indian Nationalism

The origin of the Indian National Congress may be traced from the Madras Mahajana Sabha. It is said that seventeen leading figures including S.Subramania Iyer, P.Rangaiah Naidu, and P.Anandacharlu of the Madras Mahajana Sabha, met in the house of Rao Bahadur R.Raghunatha Rao, Deputy Collector of Madras, in 1884, for talks relating to the formation of a national organization and thus the Indian National Congress had its origin here². The first Annual Session of the Indian National Congress was held in Bombay in December, 1885. It was attended by P.Rangaiah Naidu, P.Anandacharlu, S.Subramania Iyer and G.Subramania Iyer of "The Hindu" from Madras and P.Kesava Pillai from Anantapur. Madras became the venue for the Third Annual Session of the Indian National Congress, in 1887 which helped for the growth of nationalism in the Madras Presidency³. During the Home Rule Movement 1916, Mrs. Besant emerged as a national leader in Madras Presidency and sharply attacked the British bureaucracy. Emergence of Mahatma Gandhi and his principles of Satyagraha and Non-violence made the people of the presidency to participate in the Non – Cooperation Movement and other nationalistic activities vigorously⁴.

Swarajists and Harijan Movement

The Congress leaders took measures to keep the Congress alive with some activities. They took on to Harijan Movement, and the Agrarian Agitation. The Harijan Movement in this Presidency was pursued vigorously. This movement could enlist new supporters to the Congress which was able to strengthen its position further. Rajagopalachariar took an active part in it. The Pro-Gandhians campaigned for opening up of temples to Harijans. Rajagopalachariar, even proposed through Subburayan, to bring a Bill, in the Madras Legislative Council, to the effect to decide, whether a particular temple would be opened to the untouchables or not, through referendum among the users of the temple. Such a move antagonized a section of the orthodox Hindus. The Constitutionalist leader Sathyamurthi, being an orthodox could neither welcome the movement nor appreciate any move through the legislatures. His sympathy was with the Caste-Hindus. When, C.Kumaraswami Shastri, a liberal minded Hindu condemned the interference of the Legislature on religious matters, as it would produce "more evil than good" and accentuate ill-feeling between the Caste-Hindus and the depressed classes without any considerable advantage to the latter, he was supported by Sathyamurthi. Endorsing the view of C.Kumaraswami Shastri that their state of depression could be improved only through concerted action for their material and educational advance, Sathyamurthi said, that the opponents of temple entry need not be worried about the proposed circulation of the Bill for eliciting public opinion, as the Government had expressed that their support to circulate the Bill would not be considered as their support to the Bill.⁵

Mahatma Gandhi's visit to Madras to propagate Harijan Movement was resented by many orthodox Brahmins. While he arrived at Madras on 20th December 1933, he was not welcomed by Sathyamurthi or Bashyam Ayyangar.⁶ He realized that the strength of the antagonistic forces were more formidable and his pronouncements came more guarded and conciliatory towards the orthodox section of the Community. Even the depressed classes showed neither enthusiasm for temple entry nor evinced eagerness to avail the opportunity of entering few temples thrown open during this tour. Many of the leaders were disappointed that Mahatma Gandhi kept rigidly to his self-imposed obstinacy from politics and harped on a single theme i.e., upliftment of the depressed classes. They deemed this a distraction from Civil Disobedience Movement.

Swarajists and Agrarian Agitation

The economic depression that broken out in U.S.A. in 1929, had its impact on the Madras Presidency too. The cultivators were heavily affected. The prices of the agricultural products fell by 50%. But the rent, land revenue, and interest charges that the peasants had to pay in money to Government, Zamindars and others were not adjusted in proportion to their reduced income. This made them to agitate against the Government, seeking reduction of taxes. So, the agrarian agitation was purely an economic question but the Government politicised it. This was because, the leaders of the Congress used the Agrarian agitation, to keep their organization alive and active. The involvement of the leaders in the Agrarian issue made the Government to suspect their move. The third and fourth session of the Tamil Nadu Congress held on 5th June, 1931, at Madura, under the Presidentship of Sathyamurthi, sympathized over the economic distress caused by the phenomenal fall in agricultural prices, without corresponding reduction in revenue demands or heavy debt obligations of millions of peasants. It also urged the Government to reduce the revenue demand at least in proportion to the fall of agricultural prices.⁷

Sathyamurthi in association with the United Nationalists in the Council, made them to move a resolution in the Council for the reduction of land revenue rate. A token cut-motion was moved in February, 1933 and carried by a large majority against the Government, in spite of the announcement made by the Finance Member in the course of the debate, that the Government had, consideration of the trend of prices, decided to grant a measure of relief by suspending the collection of 'two annas' in the rupee of the land revenue, in the districts which were affected by the resettlement made in or after 1918-19. The concession covered, out of Twenty six districts in this Presidency, ten districts as a whole and parts of three districts, to a tune of 31 Lakhs. Further, the Government asked the Collectors to make a general survey of the economic condition of the Presidency and give their views as to whether any further concessions were called for.

Meanwhile the ryots organisations made attempts to bring pressure on the Government. They convened meetings in many parts of the Presidency, and passed resolutions demanding reduction in land revenue upto as much as 50% .The Government smelt it a political stunt by the Congress and its sympathisers to embarrass the Government.

The chief danger the Government felt was from East Coast Telugu districts and Tanjore. While the agitation had so far been conducted on constitutional lines, it believed that at least in Telugu districts, underground propaganda was being conducted in favour of no-tax campaign by N.G. Ranga, an economic expert and a Congress leader.⁸ The Government felt, that the persons promoting the agitation were the Congressmen of the Pro-Gandhian group⁹ i.e., the agitational section in Congress, and Informed District Magistrates and the Commissioner of Police to watch the situation, and not to refuse deputations, appearing in orderly manner to represent grievances, but to take action on individuals if the agitation took the form of no-tax campaign, on the ground, that it was likely to disturb the public tranquility.

The Government was prepared to give liberal concessions and relief to revenue payers on such a scale, to remove any solid base for agitation.¹⁰ The officials were advised not to let Congress to reclaim its position as mediator between the Government and the people i.e., to relief in floods and calamities. The officials were asked not to arrest Nehru or Mahatma Gandhi without prior consultation with the Government, on their visit in the Presidency, and not to take action on any minor charges¹¹. Thus the Government took all measures to curb the image of Congress in the public. When in Andhra, the Agrarian agitation developed into an attack on Zamindari System, the Government appointed a non-official Commission for an enquiry into the economic condition of the Krishna and Godhavari Districts and suspended the enforcement of re-settlement rates, and thus avoided no – tax movement in Andhra.¹²

Though the Harijan movemenet and the Agrarian agitation, kept Congress active for some time, the leaders and the followers had become equally fed up with its programme. So, when the 'white paper', on the proposed Constitution for India, was published in March 1933, the Constitutionlists began to move their views for the discontinuance of the Civil Disobedience Movement. The abandonment of Civil Disobedience Movement synchronized with the amalgamation of the Swarajya Party with the Congress, the Parent body.

Conclusion

Thus through such protests and programmes, the Swarajists revived the Indian Nationalism. . Mahatma Gandhi's approval to Swarajists' demand for Council – Entry brought the Pro-Gandhians and the Swarajists close together. The Congress became united, the Swarajists' principle of contesting elections to fight for Swaraj was accepted

by the No – changers, after having learnt a lesson which took for them nearly 11 years. Since there was no need for a separate party with identical views for identical purpose, the Swarajya party merged with Congress in 1934.

The Swarajists who espoused the constitutional way of approach and showed the utility of the Council to demand for Constitutional Reforms, displayed to the British, the constitutional knowledge that the Indians possessed and their readiness to decide the destiny of their country. The Swarajists influence in the National Movement could never be less valued.

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