CHAPTER V
THE HISTORIC BELGAUM CONGRESS SESSION.

The withdrawal of Non-cooperation movement by Gandhiji after the Chauri-Chaura incident made many leaders feel that Gandhiji had unnecessarily suppressed the splendid mass enthusiasm in the country for the sake of an insignificant incident in a remote corner. They could not yet realize the value which Gandhiji attached to the moral fundamentals of the struggle which he had started, and they thought that deviation as at Chauri–Chaura from the path marked out by Gandhiji were not only negligible but inevitable in a large country like India. Still, the phenomenal response given by the country to Gandhiji’s call for non-cooperation and the readiness with which more than thirty thousand people, women as well as men had gone to prison for the cause of the motherland, had shown that the hearts of the people had been gripped by a grim resolve to end the despotic rule of British. The differences within the Congress led to the split in the congress and formation of Swaraj Party under the leadership of Motilal Nehru and Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das. With this, the whole national movement seemed to have been thrown into confusion.¹

Though after Chauri-Chaura, there was lull elsewhere in the country, Karnataka was not quiet, as we have seen in the preceding chapter. “There was a remarkable rise of enthusiasm for carrying on Congress work after 1920, as the result of the formation of the new ‘Congress Province’ of Karnataka. The constructive programme of the Congress was taken up all over Karnataka. A remarkable and significant feature of this activity was the feeling of oneness, which spread among all Kannadigas. Most of the national leaders who visited Karnataka expressed their admiration for the response Karnataka gave to the national call”.²
In order to bring out properly the importance of the Belgaum session of the Congress on the area under study in particular and on the nation in general, it is necessary to narrate some more events that took place prior to that momentous session. Gandhiji was released in February 1924, after a successful operation of appendicitis. When he came out of prison he found that students had gone back to schools and colleges, and many lawyers had resumed practice at the bar. There was also a marked decline in the popular enthusiasm for the Charkha and Khaddar, the symbols of national pride and self-reliance. Many of the intellectuals had formed themselves into a militant wing of the Congress and determined to pursue a policy of constitutional obstruction from within the councils. These men led by C. R Das and Motilal Nehru applied their great organizing abilities and forensic talents to demonstrate the hollowness of the British claim that, the new reforms (1919 Act) were a definite step in India’s political advance and also to show to the world, how the very men who had been instructed by the British king and parliament to work for the reforms in the spirit as well as in the letter had betrayed their trust. The British, in the inebriation of restricted power over the millions of India and in their supercilious attitude towards the ‘inferior race’ of Indians, could not brook what they regarded as the insolence of the Swarajists, and started a campaign of columny against them, calling them agent of the third international and inventing stories of revolutionary plots.  

Gandhiji knew that the secession of respected leaders like Motilal Nehru and C.R.Das would be national calamity of the first magnitude, for it would destroy the primary condition of a successful fight for freedom and unity. Hindu–Muslim riots all over the country had already distressed him considerably, and this fight within the Congress ranks sorely wounded him.  He had now to concentrate his attention chiefly on three things: the restoration of unity in the country, at least in the nationalist ranks, the removal of untouchability, and the spread of the
Charkha and Khaddar cult. The last two were closely connected with the political struggle, for without them there could be no social justice and concord, and concerted action would be impossible; they were bound up with deeper aspects of freedom, and with the ultimate Progress of the nation. He was now thinking of strengthening the foundation for the independent India of the future, and not of the fight for that Independence. Obstructions in the path must be removed and the way made clear before any advance could be made.  

Gandhiji was shaken by the communal incidents that took place at Amethi, Sambhal and Gulbarga in August 1924. He undertook 21 days fast to make people understand the significance of communal harmony for peace and prosperity. A conference of the leaders of all communities and parties was held at Delhi and resolutions were passed prescribing immediate measures for promoting communal harmony. There was sudden decline of communal quarrels, and in some places there was active fraternization between Hindus and Muslims. Gandhiji, however, did not head the impunities of the leaders to break his fast, and it continued for full three weeks.  

Gandhiji survived the ordeal, and the work of the unity conference settled, though temporarily, the burning problem of the day. Hardly had Gandhiji recovered from the effects of the fast, when he was called upon to attend an all–parties conference to consolidate popular opinion on the savage repressive policy of government, especially in Bengal, and the criminal law Amendment ordinance promulgated by the Bengal Government. Soon after, Gandhiji, C.R.Das and Motilal Nehru met and arrived at compromise in the matter of ‘Council Entry’ and this compromise was later accepted by the All–India Congress Committee. Thus the breakup of the Congress into two antagonistic groups was avoided, though the Hindu–Muslim tension remained inspite of the labours of the unity conference. Besides, there was a need to ensure unity between the Sikhs and the Muslims.
These momentous events constitute the background for the Belgaum Congress. Many vital issues had to be solved at this session, affecting the whole struggle for freedom in the coming years. At this juncture, there were cracks within the Congress committee members. There were the ‘No Changers’ the orthodox group in the congress, who wanted the struggle to continue inspite of stray deviations from the path of non-violence as at Chauri-Chaura, they had to be propitiated into accepting the suspension of non-cooperation and induced to meet the Swarajists half-way. The Swarajists were uncompromising and sometimes irascible on the question of council entry, and their sentiments had to be assuaged in order to safeguard the interests of national unity. The Hindu-Muslim question seemed almost insoluble, and attempts had to be made at least to check any deterioration. The Harijan question was of fundamental importance to the survival of all that was valuable in the ancient culture of India, and the Hindus had to be prevailed upon to take the helpless untouchables into their fold. But, the problem that exceeded in importance all these, and the solution of which would decide the final issue of the national struggle, was the problem of the Charkha and the revival of village industries; for this was the key to the moral, social and political uplift of the rural masses, who alone constituted real India, the India that mattered. All these problems demanded immediate solution, so that the ship of national struggle should not founder”.

Kaujalagi Srinivasa Rao of Vijapur (Bijapur) who had participated in the Kakinada session desired that the next session should be held in Karnataka and offered an open invitation, moved a resolution to that effect and succeeded in getting approved. Accordingly, a declaration was made to the effect that the next congress session of 1924 would be held in Mumbai Karnataka. But, the decision on the venue of the Congress session in Karnataka had not yet been made. Hence, the historic Belgaum Congress session.
Conferences prior to the Congress Session.

The Karnataka provincial Congress committee met in Hubli in March 1924 to select a suitable place for holding the session of the Congress; and after a very keen contest the choice fell upon Belgaum. Belgaum is by no means a very large or populous city; but it afforded a number of facilities suited for making the best possible arrangements with a view to convenience and comfort of all concerned. Belgaum could, more over with some pride claim to have contributed its humble mite in the recent political activities of the nation. It was in Belgaum in the year 1916 that the 16th Bombay provincial conference held its session when the basis was laid for the unity between the two wings of the Congress, namely the Moderates and the Nationalists. With the results that both the parties once again came under the common flag at the next Congress at Lucknow. It was in Belgaum again that Lokmanya founded Indian Home Rule League in 1916.  

The Karnataka provincial Congress committee at its meeting formed the Reception Committee under the chairmanship of Gangadhar Rao Deshpande (The Lion of Karnataka). Sixteen sub-committees were formed to conduct this historic session in befitting manner.

Tours of Leaders.

The leaders of Dharwad soon after the KPCC meeting of 1924 held at Dharwad resolved to organize whirlwind tour of the whole district to make the people realize the importance of the Belgaum Congress session and hasten the spirit of nationalism in their minds in order to spread the message of Gandhiji viz, non violence, Satyagraha, Swarajya, social reforms and national unity. R.R.Diwakar, N.S.Hardikar Alur Venkat Rao, Krishna Rao Mudvid, Ananth Rao, Dabade, Abdul Sahib Khalasi, Abdur Rehman organized extensive tours in Dharwad district and explained the people. They appealed them to attend the Belgaum session and lamp the spirit of nationalism and patriotism. Umabai Kundapur and Krishnabai, Panagikar, through their
Bhagini Mandal and Hindustini Seva Dal brought large number of women out of seclusion and exerted an immense influence on the minds of the women to attend this Congress and support Gandhi for freedom and progress. Umabai Kundapur by her untiring tours and selfless efforts recruited 150 women for Hindustani Seva Dal Women wing to work for Belgaum session.  

Paramanna Hosmani an ardent Non-Brahmin leader of Dharwad district conducted village to village visits to enlist the support of non-Brahmins for the Belgaum Congress. He met the staunch non-Brahmin leaders like Siddappa Kambli to bury the differences, which prevailed between Brahmins and non-Brahmins over power politics and made them work with greater understanding and harmony for the success of Belgaum Congress and honour the principles of Gandhi.

Not satisfying with the result of these hectic tours, the K.P.C.C. and D.D.C.C conducted conferences from 18th to 25th December 1924, at Belgaum, Dharwad, Haveri, Bijapur and Hirekerur. At Haveri the Dharwad district conference was held on 25th under the presidentship of Hardekar Manjappa (Karnataka Gandhi). Khadi Exhibition, cattle show and recitation of national songs were conducted. The president spoke chiefly on the importance of Gandhian social programmes of Khadi, Cow protection, village welfare and on economic self-sufficiency. He also spoke about the significance of national unity for waging war of Non-violence and Satyagraha for the liberation of motherland from the clutches of the British. His speeches left deep impression on the tender minds of thousands of youths and inspired them to attend the conference. He emphasised the role of Vachanakaras under the leadership of Basaveshwara in revolting against monarchical and despotic rule of Bijjala and called upon people to adopt the technique of Satyagrah to root out the British rule for the peace and prosperity. Thousands of people were influenced by the socio-political thoughts Manjappa and joined the congress
movement. The *Khadi* and cattle exhibitions were organised at Haveri and Hirekerur mainly to attract the peasant community and to enlist their undivided support to the leadership of Gandhiji for the preservation of rights and liberties of farmers and workers.\(^{15}\)

As a result of these efforts large number of people flooded into the Belgaum Congress session to listen to Gandhi and to act with sense of sacrifice for national cause.

**Delegates and Congress Workers.**

Dr. N.S. Hardikar, the Hindustani Seva Dal Supremo, Alur Venkat Rao, Sakkari Balachari (Shathakavi), Krishna Rao Mudvid, Ananth Rao Rama Rao Alagvadi, Jayarao Naragund, Venkat Rao Mudvid, Abdul Sahib Khalasi, Abdur Rahman, Siddappa Kambli, Parmanna Hosmani were the prominent leaders of Dharwad district who attended the Belgaum Congress session.\(^{16}\) Along with these leaders, the youths and students such as, Shrinivas Venkatesh Malagi, Shankar Dixit Karmath, Ananth Bhat Keshav Bhat Hurlikuppi, Shankar Kurthkoti, Siddappa Humbi, Murugeppa Motgi, Fakirappa Dundur, Channabasappa Upavasi, Veerana Gowda Patil, Narayan Rao Kabbur, T R Neswi, Venkatesh Magade and P Ranganath Nayak and hundreds of Hindustani Seva Dal volunteers were drafted to work for the success of Belgaum Congress session. They were influenced by socio-political thoughts of Gandhiji and by the presence of other national leaders.\(^{17}\) Women leaders, namely Umabai Kundapur, Krishnabai Panajikar along with co-workers like Nagamma Patil, Siddamati Mylar, Yashaodharamma Dasappa, Gangubai Mirjankar and 150 women volunteers of Hindustani Seva Dal and Bhagini Mandal convinced women of Dharwad district to attend Belgaum Congress Session.\(^{18}\)

Thus, these leaders created conducive political atmosphere in the distinct which incited Congress workers of the district to attend the Belgaum Congress Session. They created political awareness to agitate against the colonial rule of British. Hence the spirit of nationalism received new colour and shape owing to these activities. Everywhere there was enthusiasm and people
contributed their might in the form of cash and kind for the success Belgaum Congress. K.P.C.C. contributed ninety thousand rupees for Belgaum Congress out of which Rs.12, 000 was collected by DDCC. The total amount spent for holding Belgaum congress session was Rs.2, 20,829.\textsuperscript{19}

The Hindustani Seva Dal, which was founded in 1923 by Dr. N.S. Hardikar organised a camp at Kumta in 1924. Several youths trained in this camp worked for the success of the Political Conference at Gokarn and participated in the Belgaum Congress of 1924. The Seva Dal contingent from the district to Belgaum Congress was led by Krishna Narayan Nayak of Karwar. Hundreds of delegates from the district attended the Belgaum Session of the Indian National Congress and returned - inspired by the atmosphere of the session presided over by Mahatma Gandhi.\textsuperscript{20}

**Arrangements at Belgaum Congress Session.**

The following were the main features of Belgaum Congress session. “The huts for visitors and delegates were built with \textit{Khadi} and had bamboo roof. The arrangements for the supply of water were made from Pampa Sarovara. About 1500 pots of water were kept for the session. The Pampa sarovara has set at rest the anxieties regarding the water supply. Even if water is used from morning to evening continuously, it is not likely to diminish the reserve water much….. The store room of the kitchen was named as Annapurna Griha. Excellent rice was brought from Bombay about fifty-one bags of chilly powder was stored.” The Dharwad district congress committee deputed ten organizing experts to help Belgaum District Congress Committee in looking after these arrangements.\textsuperscript{21}

One thousand lanterns and 250 Petromaxes were brought to the session from Bombay, Dharwad, Banglore and Mysore. The entrance of the congress Maidan looked like tower of Hampi. The main gates were decorated with \textit{Khadi} garlands and welcome boards. They contained in bold letters the words \textit{Vande Mataram, Udayavagali Namma Cheluva Kannada}
Nadu. The Maidan was decorated with national flags too. The walls of Congress Maidan displayed the pictures of *Satyagraha*, *Charkha* signifying Swadeshi spirit and the slogans denoting the message of Gandhi to fight for village industries, the Upliftment of *Harijans* and the removal of Untouchability. Swadeshi exhibition in an area of 350’X 200’ was arranged to propagate Swadeshi spirit. Thus the whole socio-economic and political philosophy of Congress was embodied in these slogans. The hall equipped with spinning wheel and other accessories was specially constructed for convenience of delegates desiring to spin. Spinning competitions were held. Thus festive mood in Karnataka was created for Belgaum Congress.22

2000 congress workers and 400 Hindustan Seva Dal volunteers trained by N.S.Hardikar at Hubli and 1844 delegates representing British and Princely India attended the Belgaum congress session to listen the address of Mahatma Gandhi and other national leaders with rampt attention and to act as per his instructions to fight for Swaraj.23

**Address of Gandhiji.**

The 39th glorious session started on Friday the 26th December 1924 by a big procession on the opening day. The president and the top leaders of India like Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel, Chakravarti Rajagopalachari, C.R.Das, Saifuddin Kitchalu, Gangadhar Rao Deshpande, Pandit Motilal Nehru, Lala Lajpat Rai, Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya, Sarojini Naidu, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, T.Prakasan, Dr.Babu Rajendra Prasad, Rangaswami Aiyangar, N.C.S.Satya, Tandon were the prominent leaders who occupied the seats on the dias.24

Mahatma Gandhi was received on the Dias by Gangadhar Rao Deshpande, the Chairman of the Reception committee of the Congress session. The proceedings of the Congress commenced at 3pm. sharp with an invocation song of *Vande Mataram* by Pandit Vishnu Digabar Paluskar and his associates. The song for the united Karnataka viz. *Udayavagali*
*Namma Chaluva Kannada Nadu* written by Shri. Narayanrao Huilgol was also sung in chorus in open session of the Congress.  

In his presidential address Mahatma Gandhi stressed on the problems that the country was facing and the measures to be taken to launch non-violent *Satyagraha* movement to break the laws of the British government and de-recognize it for freedom and integrity of the nation. To accomplish this task he called up the *Swarajists*, Congressmen, Hindu-Muslims and Sikhs to bury their differences and work for the unity.  

The presidential address of Gandhi was in conformity with the situation of the country. It aimed to bring about unity between the pro-changers and no-changers for putting united fight against the British. While defending his action on suspending the non-cooperation movement, he proclaimed that the nation should not aspire “to earn the bread of liberty at the cost of violence”. Besides, he asserted that freedom earned through violence shall not protect the pristine glory and heritage of Indian culture.  

Referring to the communal riots he said, “Hindus and Muslims are the two beautiful eyes of Mother India.” He asked them to realize the fact that “communalism is the grave of nationalism”. He highlighted on the need to launch the national movement with secular and national perspective for freedom and progress of the nation. Mahatma, while calling upon his countrymen to work, for the eradication of Untouchability, and for the upliftment of Harijans, stressed to implement his constructive programmes. He wanted to exploit the common issues of the people to make the national movement a mass movement. He underlined the need to develop the spirit of *swadeshi* through national education and propagating *Khadi*. He further said that these will help to protect and develop village, small scale and cottage industries and ensure economic freedom to Indians. Gandhi took this golden opportunity to thank the *Swarajist* leaders
viz. C.R. Das and Motilal Nehru immensely for keeping the flames of freedom ablaze and brought them back to the Congress fold once again to liberate India.\textsuperscript{28}

While explaining how the British policies of Colonialism and imperialism had ruined the economy, polity and culture of India, he asked the congress workers to propagate the polices of congress even to the common and uneducated people in urban and rural India and win over their support for national movement. He emphasized the need to stand united and to uphold the principles of secularism to intensify the \textit{Satyagraha} movement.\textsuperscript{29}

Gandhiji then dealt at length another question as vital to the interests of the country as the Hindu-Muslim question–‘Untouchability’. He made realize the masses present there that the existence of class of untouchables at such low and pitiable level among the Hindus was a blot on Hindu society, and the Hindus could never be called civilized so long as there were men among them, even to touch whom was considered pollution by others. There could never be any unity among the Hindus and there shall be no significance to Hinduism so long as Untouchability remains and it will continue to tarnish the name and fame of Hinduism.\textsuperscript{30}

**Impact on Freedom Movement.**

The congress of Belgaum may well be called the ‘Unity Congress”, for everybody’s attention was focused on bringing about unity not only in the congress ranks but also in the country. All other Parties had been invited to hold their sessions in Belgaum so that larger unity might be achieved.\textsuperscript{31} From Gandhiji the delegates had a clear exposition of the situation and the lines along which the fight for freedom should proceed. The whole speech was a call for action, action that would prepare the people for a political struggle. The preparation should be through working out the constructive programme of the congress boycott of foreign cloth through extension of spinning and weaving \textit{Khaddar}, removal of Untouchability, national education, and Hindu- Muslim unity within congress and within Hindu society.\textsuperscript{32}
Inspired by the personality and thoughts of Gandhiji, the leaders of Dharwad district who attended the Belgaum Congress session, also heard the speech of other national leaders. Now they started to act as messengers of freedom. They carried the message of Gandhiji and the ideals of I.N.C door to door in villages and towns and incited people to plunge into the arena of freedom movement. Thus nationalism was in motion as it instilled a sense of sacrifice and patriotism in the minds of people-young and old, men and women for national cause under the leadership of Gandhiji.

Umabai Kundapur and Krishnabai Panjikar, women leaders of the district formed *Bhagini Mandalas* to work for the emancipation of women. They worked in Gandhi *Ashram* at Hosaritti in Haveri taluka. Inspired by the proceedings at Belgaum Congress, women leaders like Yashodharamma Dassappa, Bassamma the mother of Mahadevappa Mylar and his wife Siddamathi Mylar, Venkubai Parvathi, Mallamma Pawar, Gauramma Karikatti and Savamma joined congress and worked as fulltime Congress workers.33 Men leaders such as R. R. Diwakar, R. S Hukkerikar, Hallikeri Gudleppa, K. F. Patil and Vekatesh Magadi, Lingaraj Muddannavar, T. R. Neswi and Paramanna Hosamani took up the cause of *Khadi* popularization in villages of the Dharwad district and uplift of the *Harijans* to create social and political awareness among them.34

*Harijan Welfare Sangha* (1925) and *Deenadalitara Balikashramas* (1924) came into existence at Galganatha and Sirahatti respectively. Veerannagowda Patil and his wife Nagamma Patil took good deal of interest towards Harijan upliftment and opened *Harijan Balikashram* at Hubli to educate Harijan girls and bring them into the fold of freedom movement. They were assisted by Mylar Mahadevappa and his wife Siddamati Mylar.35
Sugandhi Murugappa of Bijapur came forward to establish a Harjian Seva Sangh in 1925 at Bijapur. The Congress workers in Uttara Kannada engaged themselves in constructive activities like the production (especially spinning) and popularization of khadi. In Belgaum district khadi work was taken up vigourously, the Ashram at Kumri being active in the field. Gangadhar Rao also mostly stayed at Kumri from 1925. Hundreds of peasant women in rural areas were engaged in spinning.

They also showed great amount of interest in weaving and spinning and established these industries in Ranebennur, Akkihalur, Haveri and Dharwad. They also contributed to the opening of Libraries in all talukas of the district to encourage children to go for National Education. Thus Belgaum congress session paved the way for the spread of literacy movement in Dharwad district. The K.P.C.C. and Dharwad D.C.C. took up the cause of Hindi learning to ensure national patriotism. Against this background, Hindi Prachar Sabhas were established at Dharwad in 1926 with branch office at Hubli and at Gadag. Influenced by the social philosophy of Gandhi, Mailar Mahadevappa opened Gandhi Sevashram at Koradur and conducted sixteen widow re-marriages. He convinced freedom fighter Gowli Sharanappa of Kottur to marry a widow by name Rudramma of Kogli and conducted their marriage at Kordur Ashram. Muslims also started joining the congress due to the good works of the leaders namely Abdul Saheb Khulasi of Savanur, Abdur Rehman of Bankapur and K.F.Pathan of Hubli. These nationalist Muslims worked for the diffusion of Hindu Muslim tension prevailing in places of the district such as Hubli, Shiggaon, Bankapur, Akkihalur, Kundur, Hulikoti, Annigeri and Gadag.

Besides, Belgaum session of Congress fostered unity between non-Brahmins and Brahmins in the district. Prior to Belgaum Congress Brahmins dominated the Congress. By the influence of Gandhi, the Non-Brahmins like Siddappa Kambli, Siddappa Hosmani, B.K.Patil
and Dr. Kurdkeri joined the Congress and strengthened Congress movement in district for Swaraj.⁴⁰ Thus, the spirit of nationalism and patriotism were nourished by the works of Congressmen who attended the Belgaum Congress.
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