CHAPTER III

THE CRY FOR HOME RULE

The support extended by the Madras Presidency to the War efforts of the Empire was rather spontaneous and was an expression of its undivided loyalty to the British. But the people of the Madras Presidency were disappointed over the indifferent attitude of the British towards the aspirations and fortunes of the Indian people. This produced the favourable climate for strengthening the cause of Indian Nationalism. Taking advantage of the situation Mrs. Annie Besant started the Home Rule Movement in Madras in 1916.

Annie Besant organized the Home Rule League to bring together different sections of people under a common banner. She launched a nationwide agitation against the White Imperialism in India. She went from house to house, from village to village and from bazaar to bazaar, and sowed the seeds of self-Government in the hearts of the people. As it was a period of crisis Mrs. Besant felt that the time was ripe for a political movement to demand Home Rule

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1 Mrs. Annie Besant was an Irish woman. In 1893 she landed India as a member of the Theosophical Society. The land India which was to become her true mother land thenceforth. She rebelled against the rigid orthodoxy of her clergyman-husband. On the death of Col. Olcott the founder of Theosophical Society, Mrs. Besant was elected President of the Theosophical Society in 1907. After this Adyar was made the headquarters of the Society. Since her arrival at Madras, Mrs. Besant taught the best principles of Indian tradition. The Theosophical Society was connected with politics. She started two newspaper also.

2 The Bharati, Madras, 7th July 1916, MNNR, p.1194.
for India. She attended the 19th Annual Session of the Indian National Congress held at Madras in 1914 and also the subsequent session held at Bombay in 1915. Mrs. Besant tried her best to bring together the Moderates and the Extremists in the Congress. While the Extremists led by B.G. Tilak endorsed the programmes of Mrs. Besant, the Moderates were reluctant to extend their support to the Home Rule Movement.

When Mrs. Besant came to India in 1893, she noticed that the Government had been giving the young Indians a secular education, but had tried to minimize the quality of university education in this country. She observed the absence of the spirit of energy and joy of youth in India. In schools, boys were ruled by terror and not by love; they were repressed and not encouraged. Youthful swiftness was blamed as blunder and youthful zeal was marked down as illegal unrest and treason. She pointed out that the educational record of the Madras Government was especially notorious. The Government paid very little attention to education and spent little money on Indian schools, compared to the huge amount spent on European education. They taught Indian history in a fashion which not only killed the patriotism of boys, but made them feel ashamed of their country. These circumstances prompted Mrs. Besant to embark on educational activities. Her aim of establishing educational institutions was to mould the lives of the students from the very beginning. Mrs. Besant worked for an educational system founded on Indian ideals, enriched, not dominated, by the

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4 ‘New India’, 26 April, Madras, 1917, p.21.
thought and culture of the West. About Mrs. Besant Arundale wrote that she was the foreigner to reestablish that which the British had stolen away.

The basic aim of Besant’s activity was to support Indian youth to love and serve their homeland; to make them understand that India’s future would be the more dazzling, the more she became a dynamic colleague in the imperial task of Britain. She urged the students to study economics and history coupled with the law of their own nation. That would make them useful citizens. The Theosophical Society had always given a push to the educational of young Indians, with a view to fostering in them the spirit of the Motherland. Colonel Olcott and Madame Blavatsky, the founders of the Theosophical Movement in India, opened many schools, especially some Panchama Schools for the lowest classes. Before their death, the Olcott Panchama Free School in Madras had a strength of 534 boys and 194 girls.

Mrs. Besant asked the newly set up educational institutions to teach history in a new manner. In her opinion, the history books should add stories, sketches and episodes of chivalry of early Indian, without any distinction of caste, colour or creed. She also tried to develop the feeling of patriotism in the younger people through the study of Indian literature, and Indian achievements in science, art and warfare. She held that the boys and girls of different religions should be taught to look with equal pride on Prithviraj, Rana Pratap, Rana

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Sanga, Akbar, Guru Nanak, Rajamansingh, Shivaji, Chand Bibi and Ahalya Bai. They were the great makers of India, and every Indian heart should cherish them all, “and glory in them all as India’s children… We shall breed patriots therein⁹.

Besant asked the youth to train their bodies for the sake of the Motherland and decided to lecture throughout India to revive Hinduisim. In one of her lectures, she made it clear that “if the country was to progress onwards and evolve into a great nation, it was necessary that the students should be taught to appreciate their national greatness. Therefore, the work should begin in schools. The books that were given out to boys should be books that inspired patriotism. Patriotism did not mean love of England but love of India¹⁰. Mrs. Besant requested the Indians to study their own past and get inspiration from the past heroes. She asked Indians to be proud of being Indians. She even declared in one of her lecturers that “where liberty lives not, there lives no fine thing¹¹.

With a view to educating the youth in the spirit of the motherland, she founded a number of schools and colleges. Among them the most important were: the Central Girl’s High School at Benares, Anglo-Indian Sankrit High School at Bankipura, Sanathan Dharma High School at Bhavanagar, Theosophical High School at Kanpur, the National High School at Madanapalle, and other schools affiliated to the Theosophical Educational Trust¹². Among the colleges the most important were the Central Hindu College at Benares, the

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¹⁰ Ibid., P.884.
¹² Government of India, Annie Besant: The Visionary, Centenary Celebrations of Dr. Annie Besant’s Arrival in India, 1993, p.6.
Madanapalli High School and College, and the Adyar National College. She never accepted any financial assistance from the Government. The Central Hindu College of Benares shall ever remain a standing monument of Mrs. Besant’s educational work in India. The students of that College came out with a will to do any sacrifice for the Motherland. She raised her students to the status and standard of the boys of English Public Schools and Colleges. Besant recollected her days in the Benares Hindu College thus: “The boys who came to them as haters of the English were transformed into lovers. Some came to them as anarchists but turned as law-abiding reformers. The Maharaja of Benares gave a piece of land and spacious buildings for the college.

Though mainly a theosophical institution, the Theosophical Society prepared a report of its educational activities every year. Most of its leading teachers were theosophists, who worked without salary. Mrs. Besant called the college the most obvious organization in which theosophists had been functioning. Helped by self-sacrificing educationists like Arundale and Iqbal Narayan Guru, she made a conspicuous success of the Central Hindu College, and it became a nucleus radiating the Hindu culture and ideals. Dr. Richardson was the first Principal and Mr. Harry Banberry the first headmaster. Dr. Arundale, who came to Benares in 1908 as a Professor, succeeded Dr. Richardson as Principal, on the latter’s death.

In order to stimulate interest, Mrs. Besant herself gave a course of lectures in the autumn of each year on Hindu religion, ethics and philosophy. Mrs.

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13 ‘New India’, 24 March, Madras, 1916, p.34.
Besant and Dr. Arundale did much to arouse and keep alive the interest of teachers and parents in the fundamental aims and methods of education, through their articles in the press. Mrs. Besant asked the teachers to train the youth for freedom and not fear their high spirits, their pride and their sensitive dignity. In her opinion, these were the jewels of a free nation. She associated herself with the Santana Dharma Paripalan Sabha, Benares, with the aim of “improving the morals of Hindu students and of engendering a love for Aryan spirituality”\textsuperscript{15}. Modern science was a part of their educational syllabus. The teachings of ancient religion, philosophy and ethics also formed an integral part. Lord Curzon expressed great sympathy with the Central Hindu College system of teaching, and his private secretary personally wrote to Mrs. Besant wishing success to her movement.

Mrs. Besant also introduced various items of active social reforms in the educational institutions. She believed that Brahmacharya was necessary for the students, for their intellectual, physical and emotional growth. She viewed that “a Brahmachari should follow four main ideals service, study, simplicity and self-control, which should be the motto of the Hindu student that should guide his daily life”\textsuperscript{16}.

The Central Hindu College High school was not open to married students. The students of her hostels were allowed to inter-dine, a practice not allowed at that time. She established schools for girls, removed the Pardah system, and encouraged the students to take part in sports of all kinds. She charged only the

\textsuperscript{15} Home, (Pol), (Confl.), Procs. No.247, K.W., Mar.1912, NAI.

\textsuperscript{16} Annie Besant, \textit{The Besant Spirit}, vol.II, Madras, 1939, p.82.
minimum possible fee from the students. She encouraged and helped her students to go abroad for further studies, thus broadening their mind. She treated the students as her friends and wanted them to be gentlemen in the first sense of the word.

**Besant’s Activities Invite Criticism**

The Central Hindu College Magazine, which Mrs. Besant published for the Indian youth, had a phenomenal circulation of fifteen thousand a month. It was liked by the public among all classes of people in India and was widely read, and extracts from that magazine were frequently published in the Indian papers. The Government disliked her writings in the college magazine. H.V. Lovett, the Commissioner of benares, said that she was entirely unworthy of the confidence with which she had been treated, and decided that she should no longer be allowed to use the college magazine for her own political propaganda which he thought would do trouble in the extreme\(^\text{17}\). The Government officials criticized her activities in the Hindu College. They watched and regularly reported her activities. Even Lord Minto said that the Central Hindu College required careful watching. He said that he had faith in her loyalty but he continued, “She is an enthusiast who is carried away by her own ideas which are sometimes positively dangerous”\(^\text{18}\). Many others like J.L. Kenkins also criticized her. Mrs. Besant paid no heed to such reports of the officials.

The Government considered it dangerous to give sanction to Mrs. Besant, for any enterprise, which she might undertake. They believed that she was of

\(^{17}\) Home (Pol.), Deposit, No.19, May 1910, NAI.

\(^{18}\) Ibid., Note by Lord Minto, 2 April, 1910.
unstable mind and that it was very difficult to calculate what she might do or not. In 1910, she sent a petition to the Viceroy for a University in India. But the Government rejected her idea as politically unsafe.

**Students and Politics**

Mrs. Besant believed that the students should learn the ethics of political affairs and finances in relation to the past and the existing condition of their homeland, but avoid them in political action, while they were students. Throughout her political life in India she held this view. She took a firm and unhesitating stand in the matter of student involvement in politics. She never permitted expression of political feelings in schools and colleges because she explained to the students that they had been sent at great sacrifice on the part of parents for the education of their children. In her opinion, it was the obligation of the students in return to close their schooling before they willingly got occupied in political work, which might fully destroy their careers. She did not want the students to be patriots first before entering politics. When the students of the Central Hindu College marked their protest against the partition of Bengal, by attending the College barefooted, Mrs. Besant pacified them and said, “Politics is for the old and not for the young, and boys as high as this (and she bent low showing the height to be only about three feet) cannot be expected to know the merits and demerits of the partition of Bengal.” She likened the sending of men, untrained and undisciplined, to the war front, to the sending of sheep to the slaughterhouse. She believed that the lively participation of the

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students in political affairs was unsafe to themselves and risky to the society with which they mingled and that the passion, the decision and quite consideration necessary to discriminate between legitimate agitation and passing into cruel deed, could not be expected from them\textsuperscript{21}. Elders should practice politics and the students must only watch and study them. She did not allow any political demonstration in the educational institutions. She told students that their duty was to study. She reminded them that the Central Hindu College was an educational institution and not a political institution and discounted any party political demonstrations within its limits\textsuperscript{22}. Her stand that students should not mingle in politics made her unpopular for some time. Dr. Nanjude Rao of Mylapore quarreled with Mrs. Besant on this question and Kasturi Ranga Iyengar supported him. She was now revealed”, that “She was at best a representative of British imperialism”, that “all her work for Indian renaissance was a mere pretence” and so on\textsuperscript{23}.

**Organizations**

For the purpose of training the students of the institution for social work, Mrs. Besant inaugurated organizations like the “Sons and Daughters of India and ‘Scouts and Guards of Honour’. She started the ‘Order of the Sons of India’ in 1908, and a little later, that of the ‘Daughters of India’ with the object of preventing Indian students from drifting towards anarchism. She decided to convert the youthful energy for good purposes and wanted youths to prepare themselves for the citizen’s life in adulthood by helping in night schools, by

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., p.291.
\textsuperscript{23} Sri parkas, op.cit., p.135.
starting small co-operative societies for relieving the poor of arrears, and by visiting the homes of the poor and in many other ways\textsuperscript{24}. These acts helped the students to get awareness about the condition of the country. In her opinion, this information later helped the students to wage war against social evils like poverty, ignorance, disease, dirt, etc. The abolition of all these evils would enable them to become great lawmakers or good teachers or national leaders. Mrs. Besant sought official approval to protect the Order from the persecution of the lower officials. Lord Minto, the Viceroy, warmly approved the Order as an association to save Indian youth from treason and the gibbet, and to re-establish Indian womanhood with its older splendor\textsuperscript{25}. Sir Arthur Lawley, the then Governor of Madras, was deeply impressed by the importance of the work of the Order and became very happily its patron, in the Madras Presidency\textsuperscript{26}.

The ‘Order of the Rising Star’, with J. Krishnamurti as its head, was yet another Order, among the boys of the Central Hindu College. Mrs. Besant was its Protector. The main principles the Order were: “(1) expectation of the coming of a Great Teacher, and (2) special individual preparation and service done in His name\textsuperscript{27}. The followers of this order all over the world believed in the coming of the Lord. This Order was also for the defence of the good, justice and for the ruin of evil-doers. The trustees of the college did not like movement and this led to the failure of the movement in the college and the college itself was lost to Theosophy at the end of 1911 or at the beginning of 1912. A junior

\textsuperscript{24} ‘New India’, 2 March Madras, 1917, p.68.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 24, May 1917.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 29, August, 1916.
\textsuperscript{27} Josephine Ransom, \textit{A Short History of the Theosophical Society}, 1875-1937, Madras, 1938, p.391.
branch of this Order called the ‘Servants of the Star’ was established in 1913, and it opened its membership to those who wished to be trained in the special kind of service, which the spirit of the new age demanded.

The “Theosophical Stalwarts”, was yet another Order she founded. Each member had to take a pledge to show by personal example, that he disassociated himself from certain customs. In 1931, this Order developed into the Order of the Brothers of Service, and its members were bound to disregard all caste restrictions.

The ‘Young Men’s Indian Association’, founded in 1916, was to bring youngsters and elders together in the service of the country and to save the students from the terrorist movement. It is a “confessed imitation of the Young Men’s Christian Association and is meant to save young men from Christian influence”\(^{28}\). It attracted the student population of the Madras city, towards the Home Rule movement. Many Indian became members of this association, which later formed the centre for the spread of the Home Rule propaganda. Branches were opened even at places like Palghat.

Mrs. Besant even started a movement mainly for children, named “The Golden Chain” with its motto, ‘Be happy, live nobly’. Launched in America it was later affiliated with the ‘Order of the Round Table’. It had its main aim to teach the lessons of universal brotherhood to children of all faiths and races.

Aiming mainly to teach women their responsibility as daughters of India, Mrs. Jinarajadasa started ‘Women’s Indian Association’ with Adyar as its

headquarters. Mrs. Besant was also associated with it. Its main aim was to help the women to realize the fact that the future of Indian lay in their hands. Some of the Orders founded were to help women to realize their responsibilities as daughters of India.

Mrs. Besant also started the first ‘Co-Masonic Lodge’ at Benares and later, the second Lodge at Madras. Mrs. Besant wanted these organizations to train the men and women of India in noble citizenship, and to build up the coming generation in true piety and patriotism, ready for the future. She worked hard to inculcate in the minds of the youth the spirit of the Motherland, as she desired this as essential to make India fit for Home Rule.

The statesman-like quality of Mrs. Besant became obvious when she pleaded for the teaching of Hindi as one common Indian language. This, she considered, would help Indians communicate easily from one end of the country to the other. In her opinion, the learning of Hindi was a sacrifice that Southern Indian might well make for the unification of the Indian nation\(^29\).

In 1913, the Central Hindu College was handed over to Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya to form the nucleus of the Benares Hindu University. After this, she founded the Theosophical Educational Trust with the aim to start educational institutions for the students of every faith, in which religious coaching was to be an essential part of education\(^30\). Under the control of this trust, a number of colleges and schools were started. In 1916 she decided to


\(^{30}\) Annie Besant, op.cit., p.21.
merge the Theosophical Educational Trust with the proposed Board of National Education.

Mrs. Besant never advocated the boycott of western educational institutions. In the educational field, she always aimed at a happy synthesis of the east and the west and related her lectures to educational, social and political reforms. She paid special attention to the all-round development of students. She started several hostels for such students in various parts of Madras, who lived in miserable lodgings, sometimes in houses of ill-fame. The famous Gokhale Hall, the splendid reading room, restaurant, and residential quarters for students, all bear testimony to Mrs. Besant’s great love for students.

Even though students were not given membership in the Congress, they rendered great help to the Congress as volunteers. For many years, the youth enrolled themselves as volunteers to do a number of jobs like receiving visitors at the railway stations and arranging all the activities of the meeting. The volunteers had been thanked and praised at all the meetings. Thus, patriotism was sown and nourished. But later the students were not allowed to volunteer. The Madras Mail, an Anglo Indian journal, wrote that if Indians were allowed to volunteer, there would be another 1857. In Mrs. Besant’s opinion, the children of India were forced to live and die in an atmosphere of inferiority.

Besant and Women

Mrs. Besant, a loyal friend of women, always championed their equal status, rights, privileges and opportunity with men. She regarded women not as man’s double but as his complement. “Women and men are the two eyes of
humanity, and the axes of vision are different though correlated, and make for fuller vision than one eye can compass by itself\textsuperscript{31}. Her leadership gave strength and encouragement, and inspired the women of the land to participate in the national life of the country and to join the national movement in increased numbers. C.M. Reddy observed that Mrs. Besant set the ground for the Gandhi an freedom movement in which women played a major part\textsuperscript{32}. In here speech at the Co-operative Institute in Castle Street, London, Annie Besant demanded political status for women and equality in all spheres. On the other hand, if they were left inferior, they would not be able to withstand open competition\textsuperscript{33}.

The entry of Mrs. Besant into Indian polities accelerated the process of women’s participation in politics. Referring to the role of women, Mrs. Besant remarked. “You cannot, with uneducated mothers, have a race of heroes and patriots. It was the mother of India in the past, the great women of India, who made India what she was in ancient days\textsuperscript{34}. Her commitment towards emancipation of women was quite pronounced. She asserted that the progress of India depended on the emancipation of women. In 1903, Mrs. Besant stepped from the field of education to that of social reform. In 1904, she declared that reform was needed in Hindu society and that reform meant a purification of Hinduism. She was in favour of a flexible caste system and she worked for it. She preached and worked for improving the backward conditions of the scheduled classes. During the course of the public address, delivered at Madras

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., p.115.
\textsuperscript{32} Manmohan Kaur, \textit{Woman in India’s Freedom Struggle}, New Delhi, 1992, p.112.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., p.121.
\textsuperscript{34} Submit Sarkar, \textit{Modern India – 1885-1947}, New Delhi, 1983, p.375.
on 24 October 1912, Mrs. Besant called upon the Indian people to become aware of their obligation to these classes in order to get rid of the “national Karma of the degradation into which these people have been plunged”\textsuperscript{35}. Mrs. Besant realized the fact that women were educated in ancient times and they moves freely in society. So her request to the Indian women was to return to their golden age and to regain their lost power and prestige. In support of the Indian women, she wrote many articles on education and founded women’s colleges.

Mrs. Besant raised her voice against child marriage. With a view to eradicating this custom, she discouraged the admission of married students to the Hindu College, Benares. She said: “The future of India depends on the abolition of child marriage amongst the people, that as long as that persists, there are certain inevitable consequences, of lowered vitality, of the spread of nervous diseases, of premature old age, all of which you can see going on in India of today, standing in the way of her taking her place among the physically stronger nations of the world”\textsuperscript{36}. She raised her voice also against bride money.

Mrs. Besant discouraged remarriage in the case of elderly widows, but encouraged child widows to remarry. She said, “It makes marriage a commercial contract of a union of bodies only, as well disintegrating the sacred life of the family which is the dearest pride of the Hindu”\textsuperscript{37}.


\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., P.30 Ibid., p.30.

\textsuperscript{37} Annie Besant, \textit{Builders of New India}, Adyar, 1942, p.424.
Racialism

In order to eradicate racialism, Mrs. Besant issued the following public appeal to the government and to the Europeans, to the one to check and to the other to abstain from insults to Indians.

Your Excellency, your Indian and English children are bruising each other’s hearts to the death and wrecking the future. You have introduced reforms in politics. Oh, raise your powerful voice to check the hatred that divides heart from heart, community from community. Speak strongly, as you alone can do, to these lower English who are destroying your work and undermining the Empire. Bid your official everywhere to guard your Indian children, and to shield them from outrage and from wrong.38

Besant received many letters of gratitude from Indians, for her appeal. But on the other hand, the Europeans were shocked by the appeal. They criticized her and began to suspect her as encouraging racial bitterness. Even Lord Minto disapproval of her plea. Many officials considered her appeal a mot mischievous document. Finally, Mrs. Besant had to say sorry for her appeal. She wrote a letter to Minto complaining against the attitude of the officials. In this letter she regretted that her appeal made such an unexpected stir. She continued, “I do not at all mind Sir. John Hewett being so rough to me. But I am anxious about the college. His use of the Maharaja of Benares to stir the Ruling Chiefs who help us into action against me is, I think, a little unfair, and will cause resentment.”39

38 Annie Besant to Colonel Pinhey, 26 March 1910, Enclosure, Proof from Theosophical Society, Minto Papers, Correspondence, 1910, Vol.
39 Ibid., Annie Besant to Minto, No.81a, March 1910.
The Lieutenant Governor of the United Provinces condemned her through the Commissioner. He even asked the Indian princes who were the patrons of her college to disassociate themselves from the appeal. The Maharajas of Benares and Jammu and Kashmir also wrote to her a letter of Protest. Her appeal fell on deaf ears among people of her own community who criticized her for encouraging racial bitterness.

**Mrs. Besant as Editor**

Politics as well as journalism has an intimate and continuous interrelationship. The different stages of Mrs. Besant’s rise, growth and fall in Indian politics are all reflected in her newspaper articles. She entered the field of Indian journalism when the Indian press was in the grip of the infamous Press Act of 1910, and through her papers she fought for freedom. Mrs. Besant, a great scholar, had published about 330 books and pamphlets. She wrote 25 books in collaboration with her friends and edited nearly 12 periodicals. Among them the most important were The National Reformer, our Corner, The Link, Lucifer, The Theosophist, The Adyar Bulletin, The Young Citizen, The Commonweal, New India and United India.

With the aim of achieving Self-Government for India within the British Commonwealth, by introducing social, religious and educational reforms, Mrs. Besant started the publication of the Commonweal on 2 January 1914 with B.P. Wadia as its managing editor. The first issue of the Commonweal carried her political aims as follows: “In political reforms we aim at the building up of complete self-government from village council through district and municipal boards and provincial legislative assemblies to a national Parliament, equal in its
powers by whatever name they may be called, also as the direct representation of Imperial parliament, when that body shall contain representatives of the self-governing states of the Empire. The motto of the Commonweal was religious freedom, countrywide education, communal improvement and political reform aiming at self-government for India inside the British commonwealth.

Mrs. Besant and G.P. Ramaswamy Aiyar jointly purchased the Madras Standard in July 1914, the oldest paper in Madras [1841], and started its publications on 14 July 1914 under the name New India. She purchased it from one Kuthiravattath Prabhakaran Thampan of Malabar, then residing at Madras, for Rs.21,000. She herself had admitted that the had bought the New India not with her own money. She renamed it New India because the name Madras Standard was considered a bit provincial. She also published an overseas edition of New India. Besides New India and Commonwela, she published the Adyar Bulletin and the Tehosophist. The Theosophist edited by Olcott was used for religious purposes and for review of the great ideas held out in Hinduism. She also encouraged the starting of a newspaper in Bengal, called the Phoenix.

Mrs. Besant wrote a letter to her friend Miss. Esther Bright saying that for the help of her work, she had bought a daily paper in Madras. In her opinion “It was a rage, but it will be a power …” She continued: “Round this (New India)

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40 Home, (Pol.), (Confl.), procs, No.652-676, Sept.1915, NAI.
and the weekly Commonweal was destined to rage the battle for Home Rule\textsuperscript{45}. Starting a newspaper was not a light task. This letter exhibited her confidence and the seriousness of her approach. Her acquaintance in her early life with the journal named The National Reformer stood her in good stead while in Indian journalism.

As the editor of New India, she introduced a number of changes. At the outset, she considered her paper to be a sacred trust and not a money spinner. As such, she cleared off all the unnecessary advertisements. She never allowed criticizing anyone, through her paper, even her enemies. Also a good artist, Mrs. Besant strictly controlled every aspect of paper, right from proof-reading to financial matters.

The New India truly reflected all the activities of her career and was the main vehicle for her political activity. The motto of New India was “For God, Grown and Country”, and these three words upheld” the keynote to the proper direction of all patriotic ambition\textsuperscript{46}. The immediate task of New India was to unite ardent dedication to the homeland with better service to the King Emperor and his huge Empire\textsuperscript{47}. In her opinion, the main aim of New India was to press forward the future changes in India and to declare gradually India’s position in the Empire\textsuperscript{48}. Throughout its career, New India stood for certain principles. Mrs. Besant claimed that New India, as a secular paper, had stood for religion as an essential part of nationwide life, for accurate devotion to the Imperial Grown,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{45} Sri Prakas, op.cit.,pp.188-189.
\item \textsuperscript{46} ‘New India’, 29 Aug. Madras, 1916, p.189.
\item \textsuperscript{47} V. Sankaran Nair, \textit{Role of Students Freedom Movement}, New Delhi, 1990, p.60.
\item \textsuperscript{48} Home, (Pol.), (Confl.), Procs. No.652-657, Sept. 1916, NAI.
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for dedication to the homeland, and also for the ideals that helped them to encourage harmony and closeness among the different races and faiths, which went to the making of the British Empire\textsuperscript{49}.

In addition to editing New India, Besant contributed a number of reviews, editorials and notes under the heading, ‘On the Line’. Through her articles in New India, she tried to awaken national self-respect in India. In one of her articles, she said that her aim was to save the Indians from ruin or from becoming a nation of coolies. She even announced her idea to lead a political movement in favour of ‘Swaraj. The Director of the Criminal Investigation Department reported: “Her methods were highly objectionable as they inevitably led to inflaming racial feelings”\textsuperscript{50}. She voiced against the abuses present in the British administration, the executive evils in the administration of justice, army commissions, railway policy and the poverty of India, and criticized the Government mercilessly. In the first number of the new weekly, she published the following message: “Its policy will be to support India’s nation a hood against the fatal communal and caste divisions regarding all questions from the national standpoint. It supports the Home Rule Bill now before the British Parliament officially accepted by the Labour Party, the next Government making may improvements in the committee stage. When the Bill becomes an Act, India’s destiny will be in her own hands\textsuperscript{51}. In the article “What will you do?” she clearly said that the aim of New India was to advise, help, instruct and to

\textsuperscript{50} Home, (Pol.), (Confl.), Procs. No.652-657, Sept. 1915, NAI.
motivate the Indians and that success was certainly on their side because justice was on the side of the Indians.

**Popularity of New India among Students**

The fact that Mrs. Besant received hundreds of letters from young men all over the country is proof enough to show the popularity of New India among the youngsters. New India showed them how to settle their loyal devotion with that larger patriotism which was the energy of the empire as a whole. Mrs. Besant asked the youth to help New India with their enthusiasm and earnestness. Arundale, in his article “The Futility of Indian Education”, criticized the Government’s educational policy. Through her articles, she brought to light the intolerable position of the Indian youth. The Government started a campaign against New India, because of its compassion with students. In some of the colleges, students were not allowed to bring New India inside the campus and it was thrown out of the reading rooms in many colleges. The Government issued an order to the police to watch everyone who took the paper. Mrs. Besant commented, “All the decent people will soon be under police supervision, and it will become an indignity not to be followed by the C.I.D. In her opinion, the C.I.Ds were the greatest revolutionary force in India and, for the safety of both the Government and the people, she requested the Government to disband that department. She even labeled the C.I.D as P.D.P., that is, the ‘Patriot Destructive Department’ because they were trying to destroy the loyal citizens by the most shocking means.

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53 Ibid., 11 May 1916, p.233.
Imposition of the Security

Mrs. Besant and her editorial staff ignored the existence of the Press Act. It was said that New India kicked the Government straight in the face. Mrs. Besant openly said that New India enjoyed great freedom because of her white skin. The Government did not like this and they decided to strike. Now the Madras Government decided to take action and requested the Viceroy to deport Mrs. Besant to England. But the Government of India refused to do so. The Viceroy and the Home Member of the British Government were not in favour of her deportation. But the Viceroy agreed to create obstructions to her activities. In May 1916, James Cousins’ article praising the leaders of the Eastern Rising in Dublin was published in New India. The Government did not like this. Finally, Mrs. Besant was forced to dismiss him.

Copies of her two books India: A National and How India Wrought for Freedom, and a number of articles were sent to S. Srinivasa Ayyangar, Acting Advocate-General, for comments. They were returned with the following comments. “An appreciable quality of seditious matter and of matter which is forbidden by section 153-A, Indian Penal Code, is to be found in the extracts, sufficient to attract the application of Section 108 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. For this purpose, no distinction need be made between matter which was published before the deposit of security and matter which was published after such deposit”\(^{54}\). S. Srinivas Ayyangar pointed out that many of her articles were armed to excite the Indian mind with contempt and hatred of the English and also between the people and the Government, and cited a line from one of

\(^{54}\) Home, (Pub). (A), No.1517, 25 Aug. 1916, NAI.
her articles: “the caste of white Brahmans now established by law in India”. In some usages or passages of Mrs. Besant like the ‘crushing tax ant aiming to made the people feel that British Rule meant poverty, injustice, tyranny and insecurity. He commended the usages like ‘taxation raised here is hoarded in London’, ‘perpetuation of atrocity in civic life in peaceful times’ the ‘barbarous atrocity’ and ‘Prussianism in India’ as offensive under the purview of the Press Act. her frequent declarations of loyalty to the Grown were insufficient to neutralize all these.

The Advocate General observed that Mrs. Besant wrote India: A National with a view to making Indians realise that the “only argument against India’s fitness” for Home Rule “is her submission”. He also commended the historical introduction of How India Wrought for Freedom. For example, he cited the passage “India is getting tired of English domination, that she is determined to get rid of coercive legislation and to enjoy Self-Government. He also criticized the seven reasons that Mrs. Besant put forward in this book and argued that both the books were liable to forfeiture. On the basis of these references, S. Srinivasa Ayyangar advised the Government on 16 August 1916 to take action against New India and Mrs. Besant. The security of Rs.2000 and all copies of the newspaper, wherever found, were declared to be forfeited to the King Mrs. Besant firstly decided to suspend publication of the paper until she had obtained a decision on an appeal to the High Court, but later she reconsidered this decision.

56 Home, (Pub.), (A), No.1517, 25 Aug. 1916, p.112, NAI.
57 Ibid.,
The Madras Government asked Mrs. Besant to deposit securities. First in May 1916, they sanctioned a demand of security of Rs.2000/- from New India for the better behavior of her newspaper\(^58\). No special reason was given for this unexpected change of policy on the part of the Government. After receiving the order, she wrote: “No reason is given ‘Jo-hukm’. Our property threatened, our business menaced with extinction. If we have done wrong, we cannot correct it, for our Dictator gives us no information. ‘Your money or your life’, is the formula…. This is the form British justice assumes in Madras and elsewhere in India\(^59\). The order gave a great shock to her. She consulted her friends and the liberal politicians. They advised her to change her tone. But she decided to continue the fight against the Government. She gave the following instructions to the editorial staff: “Let everything be white-hot. Let there is no needless sparks\(^60\).

Mrs. Besant refused to pay the security and questioned this order in vain in the Madras High Court. S. Srinivasa Ayyangar, the then Advocate General of Madras, opposed her petition in the High Court. A security of Rs.5000/- was demanded and taken from the Commonweal. She even complained to the Privy Council. It is interesting to note that this S. Srinivasa Ayyangar, who battled with Mrs. Besant in the legal ground, subsequently found turning himself as a friend in the arena of politics. Mrs. Besant requested the friends to help New India by calling meetings, by writing letters to their local papers and by keeping alive a strong agitation and to oppose any prayers or memories to government.

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\(^59\) Ibid., 31 May 1916, p.242.
\(^60\) My Motherland Pamphlets series, Mrs. Besant: Her Fight for India, Madras, 1934, p.7.
About New India’s security she said: “New India, its body struck away, will assume a myriad subtle forms, and will breathe life and inspiration into myriads of Indian hearts”. In her opinion when the Devas are too much hampered, they call on Shakti, and she spears and makes extra growth possible.  

K. Balasubrahmania Ayyar, of Mylapore, requested the people to organize protest meetings all over the country against the shameful act of the Government, to take a vow that they would not rest until this hateful measure was cancelled. He requested them to organize a ‘New India Defence Fund’ to collect the sum demanded and pay it to Government in her name and thus show to the Government that the security had been demanded from the antion and it would gladly pay the heavy fee which would fit her for the Home Rule she had been striving for.

Here, one thing to be remembered is that this security had been demanded even before she started her Home Rule League. This provided her another opportunity to criticize the Government and maintain her campaign against the Press Act more vigorously. In her opinion, the Press Act was vague, uncertain and discriminatory. In the Young Citizen, she wrote in 1941 that the chains of the Press Act in India were deeply irritating but for India’s sake, she was even ready to welcome slavery.

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62 Ibid., p.249.
Protest against the Security

The Magistrate’s demand of security from Mrs. Besant, without assigning any reasons for it, led to a lot of protests. The Press Association of India, in its letter sent to the Government, made it clear that the security demanded from Mrs. Besant was unjustifiable and harmful to the best interests of Indian journalism. More than seventy Indian papers throughout the land criticized the Government for the injustice done to New India. Manorama requested the whole of India into deep sorrow… We deeply regret the step which the Government have taken against such a personage\(^6\). Keralodayam also requested the representatives of the Indian press to discover ways to defend themselves from the action of this unfair measure\(^6\). It also requested the Government to deal with Mrs. Besant magnanimously. Vijayavikatan, Swadeshabhimani, and Vidyabhanu were also of the same opinion. Vijayavikatan considered it unfair on the part of the Government to demand security from New India. Vidyabhanu requested the Government to deal with the matter carefully and to cancel the order. Swadesamitram requested all public bodies in India to work together for repealing the Press Act. Swadeshabhimani said: Whatever Mrs. Besant’s views in theological matters may be, we must doubtless acknowledge our indebtedness to her for the energy with which she has been working for the political advancement of India during the past three of four years. It is she who first conceived the idea of a Home Rule League\(^6\). The West Coast Spectator and the West Coast reformer also criticized the order of the Government.

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Andhraprakasika even warned the Government thus: “The Government can kill new India, but not the national spirit which it has engendered here and there in the country during the past two years.” In its opinion, it was not wise to bring trouble to her, in her old age. Sasilekha, Desamata, Kerala Patrika, Andhra Patrika, Sampad Abhyudaya and Yogaksheman also requested the Government to repeal the Press Act. Hogakshemam considered the step taken by the Government to be rash and hasty. Kerala Patrika requested the Government to consider the matter favorably. The Desamata sided her and said: “When great papers like New India are subjected to great hardship, nothing need be said of ordinary papers.”

Sasilekha criticized the Government for issuing the order without warning Mrs. Besant, Kerla Sanchari considered the order “a blessing in disguise to India.” Bharatha Kesari, Desabhimani, The Social Reform Advocate and Bharathamate appealed to the Government to reconsider the matter. United India and Native State, which considered the action a blunder, said that the order came as a shock to the entire Indian community.

But papers like The Hindu, Travancore Times, Andhrachandrika, Indian Patriot and Wednesday review took sides with the Government. Andhrachandrika applauded Petty, the Magistrate, in demanding the security. The Travancore Times was a bit severe towards Mrs. Besant and supported the action of the Government. Hindu Nesan remarked that the policy of New India

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was to find fault with the Government and wrote: “This lady has never been quite steady in her views. She would praise individuals and institutions to the skies one day and condemn them in the strongest language the very next day. It is no wonder that, in the hands of such an unsteady lady, New India has come to this pass. She has completely lost sight of the noble ideals of journalism. Hindu Nesan even considered her a ‘traitor’ and not a ‘friend’. The paper even said: “The destinies of this country are quite safe in the hands of its guardian angels. So let her leave Indian politics alone and turn her attention to theosophy. O Lord! Spare us from our friends. Indian Patriot asked Mrs. Besant to “acknowledge the power of the Government and not attempt to show that, before Mrs. Besant, Government is nothing. This paper said that to permit her to control our politics would be to make theosophy leading in India. This paper was ready to accept her as a coworker, but not as the leader.

In the opinion of many leaders, taking action against New India was a step of supreme unwisdom. In the opinion of some others, it was not only a crime but also a blunder. Mrs. Besant considered it a blessing in disguise when the whole of India rose like one man in support of her and pointed out that by taking action against her paper the Government was digging its own grave, “New India may be killed but Home Rule has been brought nearer”, said Mrs. Besant. Again, she considered that the order of the Madras Government was a sentence of death not on New India, but on the freedom of the Indian Press. India’s leading men

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72 Ibid., p.51.
conducted innumerable meetings of protest. It is said, “The Madras Government paused while New India went merrily along”. The New India office was filled with letters and telegrams of protests against the action of the Government. Dr. S. Subramaniya Iyer and Srinivasa Sastri criticized the Government for their action against New India. Many leaders requested the Government to rethink about the orders, but in vain. The result was a wide agitation both inside and outside the Madras Presidency.

The Press Act, put into effect in the Madras Presidency for the first time, was not to the liking of many people. They decided to organize a New India Defence Fund to collect the money demanded by the Government. The feeling of the people became obvious in the following statement. “Let us show the Government that the security has been demanded from the nation and it will gladly pay the heavy toll which will fit her for the Home Rule she has been striving for”. Her Bombay followers sent enough money to pay down twice the security asked, as a token of active support to her movement. The total subscriptions amounted to Rs.60,000.

When the first security was imposed upon New India, many people thought that it was the beginning of the end. In the opinion of Mr. Chamberlain, Secretary of State for India, it was not simply the beginning of the end, but the end itself. In his opinion, New India became a chastened organ, the imposition of the security was not the beginning of the end but the beginning of a new

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75 Ibid., 29 Aug. 1916, p.92.
76 Home, (Pol.) Procs. No.652-656, Sept. 1916, NAI.
beginning. Commenting about the pesterimg, she said that she would work for a free India within the Empire without any fear of the persecution or the injustice.

At the same time, an amount of Rs.5000/- was demanded as security under Section 3 (2) of the Indian Press Act 1910, from Mrs. Besant, as keeper of the Vasantha Press, on 25th August. Her opposition against the Press act led to her security being forfeited in August. Now the Government demanded a higher amount of Rs.10,000/-. The 1st September issue of the Commonweal contained a reference to the action taken by the Government against the New India Press. the Commonweal described the action of the Government as the local thrill of the week. In the meantime, Mrs. Besant decided to print Commonweal at the New India Press. It was an attempt to protest against the provisions of the Press act. In her opinion, the reason for official misunderstanding and misconduct was that officials read only the Anglo-Indian journals.

It is interesting to note that the Government of India subscribed to not less than 62 copies of New India, because it criticized the Government openly and frankly. Pentland, Governor of Madras, called New India a “daily political broadsheet rather than a newspaper which unfortunately was printed and published in India”.

After the imposition of the security, the tone of New India generally became more violent and Mrs. Besant wrote a number of comments in the paper

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78 Ibid., p.104.
80 My Motherland Pamphlets Series, op.cit., p.12.
on the internments, commonly described as the ‘Sydenham Gang’. For example, in one article she described the member of the Indo-British Association as having “played out exploiters and exhausted bureaucrats” enriched with money “amassed from the helpless masses” who pursued “a wicked policy” unworthy and mischievous ends” in co-operation with their “brother conspirators”, “a handful of commercial exploiters” in this country who started a campaign of vilification “of course with the passive sympathy of the Anglo-Indian bureaucrats.\footnote{Pentland to Montagu, 9 Aug. 1917, Montagu Collection. Also Saorja Sundara Rajan, March to Freedom in Madras Presidency – 1916-1947, Pondicherry, 1989, p.94.}

The poem “To England” is an exposition of India’s slavery, un-English Anglo-Indians, and repression of constitutional agitation, and formed a clear account of the attitude of the paper. Examples of such writings can be multiplied including Arundale’s article entitled “India Watch Over the Education of India’s Children” and Besant’s “A Campaign of Calumny”. In the latter Mrs. Besant criticized the Government for using the Press Act against her. She said that the Government had failed to use the Press against her owing to the absence of any real grounds for proceeding under the Act. Through her articles, she tried to arouse interest in the Punjab. Interviews of leading journalists and publications were recorded and published in New India. Most of them demanded the cancellation of orders. Thousands of people sent letters to the Editors, and most of them found their way into the paper. Freedom of the press was the main subject of comment in her newspaper.
Attitude of the Press towards Mrs. Besant’s writings

Both the Indian and the Anglo-Indian Press had mixed reactions about the writings of Besant in New India. The Tribune, the Maratha, the Kesari and the Bombay Chronicle supported her ideas through their papers. The Tribune of Lahore considered Mrs. Besant’s fight to be India’s fight. While most of the Indian papers supported her writings, the Anglo-Indian Press turned its face against her. They demanded the Government to force her to stop or to discontinue her activities. Her writings were criticized by the Times of India. The Englishman stated that her demand for self-Government was nonsense. The Indian Mirror from Calcutta, the Indian Patriot from Madras, the India Parkash and the Guarati from Bombay were all against her ideas. Welby, the editor of the Madras Mail was dead against her and called her a “wandering Jew”82.

Mrs. Besant and her paper received rousing support from many. But the popularity of New India began to decline owing to her attitude towards Gandhi’s concept of Non-Co-operation and Satyagraha. She even criticized him on this matter in New India. Gandhi reacted in one of his articles, saying that it was much obvious that the Indian Besant had become an English Besant. Later, Gandhi’s Young India became more powerful than Besant’s New India. Because of these main reasons, New India lost its old power and prestige, in the wake of the emergence of The Hindu and Swarajya.

Even in the face of adversity, Mrs. Besant decided to continue the work of the paper with great spirit, which served as a vehicle in her great work of attaining Home Rule. This paper roused the self-conscious and self-respect of

82 Home, (Pub.), No.719 W-1., 5 Mar. 1918, P.19, TNA.
the Indians and this feeling caused the people raise their voice against the rule of the British and inspired them to join the freedom movement.

Irish by blood, Londoner by birth, white in complexion, atheist by belief, theosophist by accident, Indian by adoption Besant’s personality was difficult to comprehend. Her love for India found expression on her arrival in India, in the shape of reforms on matters of education and women’s issues. Racial feeling won her the admiration of the British in the beginning. For the Indian she was a representative of British imperialism. It was in this conflicting situation that Mrs. Besant had to chart a road map of her mission in India. Her activities in the field of Education, in the inculcation of politics among students, uplift of women and children, and above all her ability to reach the public through the press gave the British imperialists the impression that Mrs. Besant was a dangerous phenomenon. The British strained to put a spoke on her wheels and she enjoyed keeping the British on tenterhooks. At the same time Mrs. Besant did everything to identify herself with the Indian problem. The success or failure of these parties, to understand each other, determined the course of subsequent history.

**Home Rule and Indian Politics**

In the history of the freedom movement in India, the period under discussion was noticeably marked by instability in the matter of leadership owing to manifold causes. Gopala Krishna Gokhale and Pheroze Shah Mehta died in 1915. Surendranath Banerjee and Lalalajpat Rai were unhappy with the turn of events. balagangadhar Tilak was just released from jail, but was physically too feeble to step into politics. Gandhi, who had returned from South Africa, was new to Indian politics. The absence of able leaders left Indian
politics in the country, on constitutional lines. The British Government favoured them, but suppressed the activities of the extremists. The emergence of Mrs. Besant in this political scenario was decisive. Neither a moderate nor an extremist, she served as a bridge between the two. To her, the moderates were ‘yesterdays’ and the extremists were ‘tomorrows’. This equation prompted others to call her moderate extremist.

Political life in India was at its lowest in the year 1914. The Congress was active only during annual sessions and was ‘torn as under over method and goals’, and Madras was ‘devoid of dynamism and leadership’. It was in this vacuum that Mrs. Besant entered Indian politics with Madras as the base and wanted to form a body like the Home Rule League.

In spearheading her way to dominate Indian politics, Mrs. Besant organized Congressmen, Indian students, women and labour. The gift of the gab became more obvious in the political propaganda asking every Indian to learn about Home Rule, think, act and demand Home Rule from the British. Her speeches and writings systematically built up a case for Home Rule for India and her efforts were to eclipse war. The fast changing political scenario that Mrs. Besant built up prepared the ground for agitation activities through the Home Rule Movement.

Annie Besant’s idea of World Empire

The political ideology of Mrs. Besant was aimed at India’s religious, economic, social and national revival. Of the factors that shaped her political ideas, the most important were Indian spirituality and her faith in her greatness
of Indian thought. Her Theosophical background prompted her to establish a world empire based on the idea of universal brotherhood, for which the relationship of India and England was inevitable. She wanted to strengthen the relationship between India and England by following the ideas of equality and brotherhood. Her main aim was to lift up the whole world by establishing a Commonwealth of Nations and a World Empire. Unlike the moderates, she believed in the greatness of Indian spiritualism and tried to revive Indian ideals. Unlike the extremists, she believed in the constitutional ideologies taught by the moderates and never advocated violence. A believer in radical changes, she was influenced by the writings of liberalism and democracy. She brought passion, eagerness, vigour and discipline in politics and favoured the introduction of changes or reforms at the earliest. No wonder, she was not at all satisfied with the slow activities of the Congress leaders. Her main idea was to establish a Commonwealth of Nations.

**Induction into Politics**

In Mrs. Besant’s pamphlet, England, India and Afghanistan, written in 1876, she demanded self-government for Indians by slow stages. She made her first contact with the Congress in 1894, at the Madras session. The Congress leaders invited her to deliver two lectures, one on “The Place of politics in the Life of a Nation” and the other on “Temperance”\(^83\). In 1902, in London, she said to the people of England that the rule of the British was mainly responsible for the miserable conditions in India. She asked the British Government whether they had a right to rule 30,00,00,000 of people in name and not understand the

alphabet of the Indian question very largely, in the Imperial Parliament. She criticized the British Government, for ruling India for the profit of her conquerors, and also for treating Indians as the conquered race. She attributed the famines to the financial drain of the ‘Home Charges’ and the huge bureaucracy, and partly to the destruction of the manufactured goods to India for the profit of Lancashire.

In 1903, she asked the British Government to rule India, not an western lines but on the basis of Indian feelings, but an Indian traditions, Indian thoughts and Indian ideas. She said that she dreamt of the time when India, England, Australia and Canada would all join hands in the making of a common Empire, when India’s children would bring their priceless treasures to the enriching of that Empire. In 1905, she made public her opinion on politics. In 1909, when the Congress was divided into two, she called it the saddest event in the history of the Congress.

She considered the Village Councils the necessary units of Local Self-Government and wanted their revival. She was greatly influenced by the Panchayat system of the ancient times and attributed its collapse to the British rule, first by the East India Company and later by the British Government. By destroying the native industries, she believed, the English East India Company reduced India to poverty and the Grown continued this process subsequently.

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85 Ibid., p.95.
She felt the need to tighten the ties between India and England for the good of both the countries. She always stood for the preservation of the link between the two, because, in her opinion, such relation would serve to preserve peace between Asia and Europe. It would stand as a barrier against the breaking out of war between the two continents. By war, she meant a conflict of coloured and white humanity, which would destroy Asiatic and European civilizations. In her opinion, Home Rule was necessary for each constituent nation of the Commonwealth, because every nation had its own problems, which its own natives were to solve. So she requested the Englishmen to strengthen ties with India. In 1912, she started active propaganda work for uplifting the India’s and gave a series of lectures that marked the beginning of an earnest and concerted movement for the same. She took an active interest in Indian politics from that year onwards and began to participate in the Congress meetings held in Madras. Through her writings the wanted to make Indians fully aware of the evils of the British rule. In order to achieve this aim, firstly she founded a number of organizations and groups throughout India, aimed to support the Congress. Secondly, she conducted propaganda work through her newspapers, pamphlets and lecturers and also organized propaganda funds. Thirdly, she started a number of national schools and colleges in different parts of India. To give training to the Indians in the art of politics, she even established a mock parliament. Finally, on behalf of the Indians, she sent a number of representations and deputations to England. She also protested against the misrule of the British.

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Her activities in India during 1893-1913 were largely confined to the field of Theosophy, education, and social reform. Soon, she realized the fact that real improvement could be achieved only by raising the political status of India. She studied in depth the administrative system of ancient India, the history of the Mauryas, Guptas, Mughals, Rajputs, Sikhs and the Mrathas, and the tyrannies and the wrongs of the British Government. She studied the black story of Clive and Hasings, and the sad Viceroyalty of Lord Curzon\textsuperscript{88}. All these exercise helped her to evaluate the political condition of India at the time of her advent in Indian politics.

In 1913 she ventured into active politics, as the political conditions of that period compelled her to do so. She said: “It is possible that I should have never jumped into political work, had not increasing repression by the authority, narrowing of liberty, the ill-treatment of students, and the danger of revolution forced me into the field”. She plunged into the political struggle, because she found that the unbearable force of repressive legislation had hampered all progressive action\textsuperscript{89}.

In one of her articles in New India she said “Liberty was being strangled to death, and I, one of her old soldiers, could not stand aside. I joined the political campaign. Not to lead, but to take risks\textsuperscript{90}. These lines indicate the grounds for her joining the Congress. In 1913, she even declared that freedom was the price of India’s loyalty. She decided to popularize the idea of Self-

\textsuperscript{88} Modern Review, Jan to June 1920, Vol.XXXVII, Calcutta, p.41.
\textsuperscript{89} Verinder Grover and Ranjana Arora (eds) Great Woman of Modern India – Annie Besant, New Delhi, 1967, p.331.
\textsuperscript{90} Manmohan Kaur, Women in India’s Freedom Struggle, New Delhi, 1992, p.117.
Government. To this end, she delivered a series of lectures in Madras, the most important among them being: ‘Foreign Travel’, ‘Child-marriage and its Results’: ‘Our duty to the Depressed Classes’; Indian Industries as related to Self-Government’; Mass Education’; ‘The Education of Indian Girls’; and ‘The passing of the Caste System’. Later, all these lectures that greatly influenced the Indian were wrapped together under the title, Wake up India. In July 1913, Mrs. Besant published a collection of her lectures, which marked her first step towards participation in India politics.

From 1913, she began to champion the cause of building up India into “a mighty Self-Governing community”. She realized that only with the help of a political movement could she do something for India. With this aim in mind, she requested the Congress to sponsor a movement. She pursued Sir Feroze Shah Mehta, in a letter, asking him to take the direction of a national movement. As Mehta refused to accept her proposal, she wrote to Dadabhai Naoroji, who too declined to cooperate. Disappointed, Mrs. Besant decided to start her Movement out of the Congress fold. Her entry into Indian politics was not liked by many of her friends in the theosophical Society. To such friends, she said that the question of Home Rule for India was no question of party politics, but one of principle, of the liberation of a people from despotic rule.

Historians have attributed various reasons for the entry of Mrs. Besant into Indian politics. After coming to India, she had to face a number of obstacles to the smooth conduct of her educational and social activities. Some attribute this

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92 Ibid., 4 April 1917, p.47.
93 Verinder Grover and Ranjana Arora, op.cit., p.336.
to the British Government’s refusal to grant a charter conferring University status upon the Central Hindu College, and others to the Krishnamurti incident, after which, they say, the Government turned against her and refused to help her. As such, she plunged into politics in order to make her work possible. C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar views that she entered Indian politics only because of her desire for the elevation of mankind. Similarly, Mrs. William, her biographer, has pointed out that she entered politics only because of her desire to assume the leadership of the Nationalist Movement. Another aim was the fostering of Indo-British friendship. In 1914, she moved from purely educational and socio-religious activity into the field of politics. She delivered a political lecture in January 1914 at Madurai and subsequently joined the Congress. As a delegate of the Congress Session, she demanded political equality with the other citizens of the Empire.

She brought passion, enthusiasm and discipline into politics and inspired the Congress with new ideas, new talents, new resources and altogether a new method of organization and a new outlook into the field of the Congress. Her ideas brought about a sea change in the political field and India witnessed political awakening of a new type under her direction. This enabled India to carve out a place in the political map of the world. In order to convert the Congress into a united front, Mrs. Besant advocated two major ideas in the Congress, viz., an agitation aimed at moving the British to grant Home Rule, and re-entry of the Extremists into the national body.

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94 New India, 14 Apr. 1917, Madras, p.88.
95 Raj Kumar, Annie Besant’s Rise to power in Indian politics, 1914-1917, New Delhi, 1981 p.74.
She felt the presence of a group of people in Madras who wanted to drive her out of public life. In order to weaken them and to gain public support to her activities, she decided to launch in January 1914, the weekly newspaper, The Commonweal. It aimed to champion the cause of freedom of thought and action, and to put great importance on human dignity, equality and social fairness\(^96\).

In 1914, she toured the war-raged England and lectured on various topics like ‘England’s need is India’s opportunity’, ‘The price of India’s loyalty is India’s freedom’, ‘Strike the iron when it is hot’, etc. Through her papers, she developed the idea of Home Rule for India and declared about leading a movement for India’s freedom. In one of her lectures, she said: “The fate of the British Empire hangs on the fate of India and therefore it is but wisdom and prudence to keep India contented by granting Home Rule to her\(^97\). There she worked for the freedom of the Indian people and strove to form an Indian party in the Parliament. Even though she failed in her attempt, she was able to set up a Home Rule League there. She also conducted propaganda work in England and succeeded in rousing sympathy for the cause of India.

On her return to India, she bought a daily paper in June 1914 and renamed it New India and commenced its publication on 14\(^{th}\) July. As an organ of active propaganda, New India generated a new political feeling in the Madras Presidency and tried to awaken the people of India. It was through this paper that she worked hard to uphold her aims and objectives, exposing the policy of the Government and the miserable conditions of the Indian in their own land.


\(^97\) Josephine Ransom, op.cit., p.414.
Mrs. Besant considered the foundation of the National Congress an attempt of the Indians to “imitate the representative system, and to lay before the Ruling power, by the voice of her representatives, her needs, her troubles, and her hopes”\textsuperscript{98}. She blamed the Congress for “making time while the younger generation was getting impatient for a bolder national policy”\textsuperscript{99}. Mrs. Besant criticized the elder Congress leaders, who, in her opinion, had not been taught how to love their country. In her articles on Self-Government in these papers, she announced her intention to lead a political movement in favour of ‘Swaraj’.

**Dominion Status**

From the very beginning, Mrs. Besant stood for India’s dominion status. In one of her lectures, she declared: “I stand for Dominion status because it makes India independent within her own territory, gives her control of the army and of her (potential) navy. Then she can take independence whenever she wished to have it”\textsuperscript{100}. In her opinion, Dominion status meant complete Self-Government from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin and from Dwaraka to Puri. She held independence to be India’s inevitable fate and Home Rule or dominion status to be the first step to it.

The First World War that had broken out on 4 August 1914 had its impact on the Indian national movement. It indirectly encouraged the revolutionary movement in India and the Hindu-Muslim communities decided to join together


\textsuperscript{100} Annie Besant, *The Future of Indian Politics*, Madras, 1922, p.50.
to work for India’s freedom. The Congress at its Madras session passed a resolution extending its full support to England. The War gave the moderates an opportunity to show their loyalty and faith to the British Empire. Many moderate leaders encouraged the people to join the army. Gandhi worked as a recruiting sergeant\textsuperscript{101}.

Besant favoured the Allies and declared that they would win in the War. She urged others to support the War Loan and herself raised six hundred recruits for the defence force\textsuperscript{102}. When the War erupted, she called upon “all who are pledged to Universal Brotherhood, all Theosophists the world over, to stand for Right against Might, Law against Force, Freedom against Slavery, Brotherhood against Tyranny\textsuperscript{103}.” Besant asked how Britain was going to reward the heroism of Indian soldiers who did a number of heroic deeds in the War. She herself found the answer that the reward could only be Self-Government for India.

In the latter part of the year 1914, she threw herself into the Congress movement and tried to fresh enthusiasm among its members. Realising that it was not possible to achieve the political goal without the return of the Extremists to the Congress fold, she paved the way for their reentry. In this attempt of compromise, many like S. Subramania Iyer helped her. Three weeks before the Congress met at Madras in 1914, Mrs. Besant went to Poona with Mrs. Subbarao Pantalu and interviewed Tilak and Gokhale. She then sent Pantalu to Bombay for discussion with Feroze Shah Mehta, who refused to listen to him. Pantalu

\textsuperscript{103} ‘New India’ 17 Oct. Madras, 1914, p.217.
returned disappointed. Mr. Mehta and other Bombay moderates were against the idea of reunion and feared that if Tilak was allowed to enter the Congress, he would try and convert it into a militant body, which would bring the British down hard on it and prevent further developments in the direction of Constitutional reform. Gokhale withdrew his support to Tilak. In a confidential letter he explained his reason thus: “Tilak had openly avowed his intention of adopting the ‘Boycott of Government’ and the obstructionist methods of the Irish if he entered the Congress. On the basis of this letter, Bhupendra Nath Bose, the President of the 1914 Congress Session, rejected the proposal of the reentry of extremists into the Congress. Besant immediately wired to Tilak enquiring about it. She read the reply telegram from Tilak in the meeting, which said that he had never advocated boycott of Government. Bhupendra Nath Basu expressed his regret again and again for having charged Tilak with something he did not advocate. Tilak said that Gokhale had beaten him in the dark. He asked Gokhale to make his letter known to Bhupendra Nath. He even decided to take legal action against Gokhale, who stated that he had gathered from Tilak’s talks with Subba Rao that Tilak’s old policy was unchanged. She criticized them for ‘desiring to lock the door and keeping others out’. Mehta, who was against the re-entry of Tilak, aimed to save the Congress from the influence of Tilak. “He stormed, he raged, he rallied at the idea of a compromise and condemned the compromise as mischievous. In the midst of

104 Ibid., p.228.
107 Josephine Ransom, op.cit., p.410.
the controversy, Gokhale died in 1915. Mrs. Besant failed in her attempt because of the negative attitude of the Bombay moderates.

On the question of Self-Government, Mrs. Besant spoke in the Congress Session in 1914 that “India asked for this before the war, India asks for it during the war. India will ask for it after the War; but not as are ward but as aright does she ask for it. On that there must be no mistake. These words had their impact on Bhupendra Nath Basu, the President of the 1914 Congress Session, as reflected in his words: “The period of ‘boons’ was over. The period of claiming ‘rights’ was here. The meeting also accepted Mrs. Besant’s idea that religion, education morals and politics were all part of a great national movement. She said: “India is growing in the sense of her own dignity. She is not content to be any longer a child in the nursery of the Empire. She is showing the responsibility of the man in Europe. Give her the freedom of the man in India. She again declared that what India wanted was ‘Purna Swaraj’ and not higher powers and more employments. Influenced by her work, the Congress passed the resolution on Swaraj unanimously. In this meeting she even demanded that India should exclude imports from countries from which her people were excluded. Senior moderate leaders like Mehta, Gokhale and Malaviya did not attend the 1914 Madras Session. But their absence was compensated by the presence of Mrs. Besant, who appeared to be rising in Indian politics like a morning star.

109 Pattabhi Sitaramayya, op.cit., p.121.
110 Raj Kumar, op.cit., p.82.
In 1915 she had received her ‘Marching Orders’ from Bhagwan Sanat Kumar, who summoned her to Shamballa in the Gobi desert. The Guru said the following words: “You will have your time of trouble and danger. I need not say, have no fear, but have no anxiety. Do not let opposition become angry. Be firm but not provocative. Press steadily; the preparation for the coming changes, and claim India’s place in the Empire. Do not let it be stained by excess. Remember that you represent in the Outer World the Regent who is my Agent. My hand will be over you and my peace with you.” These orders became her declared policy.

In 1915 Mrs. Besant started educational propaganda for Home Rule. She wrote in New India that she used the words ‘Home Rule’ rather than Swaraj of Self-Government, because the British were more familiar with that word. She published more than two dozen Home Rule pamphlets and books including – India a National and How India Wrought for Freedom. In the Foreword to the latter, she wrote that the time had come for a definite agitation for Home Rule.

Mrs. Besant announced her intention to start a political campaign in favour of Swaraj. This turned out to be the most important political work of Besant. At the Bombay Session of the Congress in 1915, she decided to launch a Home Rule league, as she felt the need for Home Rule League had arisen to be an active propagandist body as the Congress showed little activity between its annual sessions. The words ‘Home Rule’ were chosen as a short public cry. This made it clear that the struggle was not against Great Britain, but for liberty within the

Empire. In her opinion, ‘Home Rule’ did not mean democratic Government. “It is not the form of Government that makes Home Rule. It is that a nation is governing itself. A nation which by its own free vote, voted an autocracy, will still be a self-governing nation.

She prepared a clear plan of Self-Government for India and started her work from the village. In her opinion, every man and woman of twenty one years of age must have his or her share of control in the administrative affairs. She was organized discussions, games, etc. In her opinion, education, industry, law and policy were absolutely necessary for India’s welfare. She criticized the Government for its exploitation of the peasantry by the land revenue system, and also for exporting grain from India at times of scarcity and famine. In her opinion, the first duty of the Government was to save the people from starvation. Thus, she tried to inform the rulers of their duties towards the ruled. She ridiculed the use of English as the medium of instruction. In one of her speeches, she said that a feeble India would be a liability whereas a strong India would be an asset to the Empire. She requested the reformers to work for the abolition of the bureaucracy. In her article, ‘What we are fighting for’ she made clear that “Indian blood was not being poured out in Europe in order to win freedom for others only. She warned the Indian masses that unless there was steady, firm and continuous agitation for self-Government before the war was

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over, the freedom of India would be put off for generations. She also criticized Lord Chamberlain, the Secretary of State, for his ignorance and contempt for India. In her opinion, “he knew nothing and cared nothing”\(^{116}\). Through her organization and the press, she prepared the ground for Self-Government for India and requested the Indian press to get ready to wage the war for freedom.

**The Madras Parliament**

In order to give practical training in the art of Parliamentary affairs, Besant founded the Madras Parliament on 14 February 1915. Her aim was to improve the civic education of the people of Madras. The Madras Parliament was a debating society with a speaker, a Prime Minister, other ministers and a leader of the House. Besant was elected the first leader of the House. The motto of the Parliament was: “We bring the light that sanes, We bring the Morning Star, Freedom’s good things we bring you, Where all good things are”\(^ {117} \).

The Parliament trained the people in self-control, courtesy and power of speech. Its first meeting, held on 6\(^{th}\) March, clearly mentioned the policy of Besant and sketched the policy of the Government. Many Bills introduced by prominent leaders were passed by the Parliament. C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyar introduced a Bill on compulsory elementary education. This Bill was passed after debates. Other important Bills were the Madras Panchayat Act, a Religious Education Act and an Emigration Act. Mrs. Besant introduced the Commonwealth of India Act. All these bills were passed after debates. G.S. Arundale acted as the leader of the opposition. Many of its members later

\(^{116}\) Annie Besant, op.cit., p.91.

\(^{117}\) Home (Pol.), Procs. No.652-656, Sept. 1916, NAI.
worked successfully in the internment of Mrs. Besant, Arundale and Wadia. During its short span of life, it played a very important role in the political history of Madras.

In 1915, Mrs. Besant tried her best to bring about unity between the Moderates and Extremists because she thought that a divided Congress would be unsuccessful in bringing force on the British Government for granting reforms. After the death of Gokhale and Mehta in 1915, the main source of opposition to the Extremists also disappeared. After Ferozeshah Mehta’s death, the Congress Session met in Bombay under Lord Sinha. It was he who sang the swan song of the various bodies of the Congress. He wanted to amend Article XX of the Constitution of the Congress. Besant met Gokhale with Tilak’s demand. Gokhale also agreed to this demand. The moderates agreed to amend the Congress constitution. This brought about the union between them. They were re-admitted to the Congress under a compromise arrangement mainly brought about by Mrs. Besant. The famous Lucknow Pact between the Hindus and Muslims was one of the results of that wise decision. In her opinion, Swaraj could be more easily achieved if the extremists and the moderates, and the Hindus and Muslims, together put forward their demand.

Mrs. Besant worked very hard through her writings in the press, and lectures on the platform, to unite the Hindus and Muslims. She saw the Hindu-Muslim problem as a part of the larger problem of national unity and worked for Hindu-Muslim unity. In her opinion, “there is no disparity for us between
Hindus and Muslim, because both are India’s and come from the womb of the Mother”118.

**Evolution of the Concept of Home Rule**

The Home Rule demand reached its highest watermark when Mrs. Besant made it a living issue. It was her slogans of self determination and democracy and her vigorous propaganda that compelled the British to change their attitude towards India. In the history of India’s freedom struggle, the success that Mrs. Besant achieved in making Self-Government the central objective of India’s political development is unique. It helped the agitation to spread nationwide and created a significant impact. She used most vigorously words both written and spoken for the spread of Home Rule.

The demand for Home Rule was first made by Rai Bahadur Kristo Das Pal who roused attention to the need of Home Rule in India in 1874, even before the launching of the Indian National Congress. He said in his article in Hindu Patriot: “Our attention … should… be directed to Home Rule of India119. He pointed out that Canada had a Parliament. The small and little advanced colonies as Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, New South Wales, New Zealand, St. Christopher’s Island and Barbados had elected councils. In this context, he argued, “British India has a fair claim to similar representation. If taxation and representation go hand in hand in all British Colonies, why should this principle be ignored in British India…. Home Rule for India ought to be our

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119 Ibid., 10 Sept. 1915, p.164.
cry, and it ought to be based upon the same constitutional basis that is recognized in the colonies”\textsuperscript{120}.

In 1876, Surendrandath Bannerji and Ananda Mohan Bose, in Calcutta, took the first step towards the regaining of Self-Government with the object of achieving representative Government. Surendranath Banerjee considered Self-Government the order of nature. In 1915, he declared the same at the annual session of the Indian National Congress. He said: “We want self-government and why? Because we want to be a nation. We want Self-Government for the highest ends of national and moral regeneration for uplifting our people”\textsuperscript{121}. Mr. Banerjee requested the Indians to work for Self-Government for the sake of humanity.

References about the idea of Home Rule in the early history of the Congress are very few. But even then, it seems that Home Rule or Self-Government for India had been the main idea of the Congress from the very beginning. In December 1887, A.O. Hume wrote a private letter to Dadabhai Naoroji: “Though we do not aim at any such radical separation even in a pretty distant future-as do the Irish-after all our efforts are directed towards Home Rule for India”\textsuperscript{122}. In 1895, Tilak published a scheme for Home Rule and later presented a memorandum on Home Rule, to the British. His plan received no attention in India because the political thinking was less advanced at that time.

\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., 26 Aug. 1915, p.172.
\textsuperscript{121} Annie Besant’s Papers on Madras Parliament, Adyar, Madras.
\textsuperscript{122} ‘New India’, 16 Nov. Madras, 1917, p.190.
In 1906 Gandhi in his booklet in Gujarathi, Hind Swaraj or Home Rule, said “Real home-rule is self-rule or self-control. The way to it is passive resistance: that is soul-force or love force. In order to exert this force Swadeshi in every sense in necessary. In 1906, after a heated discussion the Congress passed the resolution on Swadeshi and boycott. The Congress also declared Swaraj or Self-Government, as in the colonies, the main aim of the Indians. In April 1906, when the Congress resolved to have is written constitution, it was clearly declared as the very first article, “that the objects of the Indian national Congress are the attainment by the people of India of a system of Government similar to that enjoyed by the Self-governing members of the British Empire and a participation by them in the rights and responsibilities of the Empire on equal terms with those members.

In the same year, Dababhai Naoroji declared Swaraj or Self-Government, the target of the Congress. He delivered the following message at the Congress Session held at Calcutta in 19-6: “Self-Government is the only and chief remedy. In Self-Government lie our hope, strength and greatness….I do not know what good fortune may be in store for me during the short period that may be left to me and if I can leave a word of affection and devotion for my country and countrymen I say: Be united, persevere and achieve self-government, so that the millions now perishing by poverty, famine and plague, and the scores of millions that are starving on scanty subsistence may be saved and India may once more occupy her proud position of your among the greatest and civilized nations of the

124 Ibid., p.603.
west\textsuperscript{125}. Later, in one of his lectures, he recalled his 1906 speech at Calcutta and wished to see Home Rule in India before his death. He wanted a strong, steady, continued agitation, to be begun at once, not cruel or harsh, nor provocative, but tempting to all freedom loving people of England\textsuperscript{126}. According to Dadabhai, the only remedy for the economic evil lay in the achievement of Swaraj. In 1906 at the annual session of the Congress W.C. Bannerjee asked the Government to broaden the base foundation of the Government and to give proper lawful share in it. Later he declared in simple language his ambition to obtain the same facilities of national life that existed in Great Britain itself.

Later, Rashbehari Ghose also declared the same idea that the Indians wanted to be sons of the Empire, not in mere name but in reality. In 1907, after the Congress split, the leaders declared the same idea as their main aim. In June 1907, Modern Review published an article entitled ‘Home Rule for India’\textsuperscript{127}. After 1907, the Congress leaders began to practice this idea seriously. In 1913 the Muslim League also declared suitable Self-Government as the aim of the Muslims.

**Birthpangs of the Home Rule League**

The foundation of a Home Rule for India League was discussed in 1915, and many Indian papers published the following communiqué in September.

For many months conversations in India and correspondence with England were going on. The discussions held in 1914 with some English politicians and

\textsuperscript{125} Ibid., p.58.
\textsuperscript{126} W. Wedderburn, Allan Octavian Hume, London, 1913, p.96.
\textsuperscript{127} M.K. Gandhi, Hindi Swaraj or Home Rule, Ahamedabad, 1960, pp.91-92.
sympathizers with India in England marked the beginning. It was decided to start a Home Rule League with ‘Home Rule for India’ as its only object, as auxiliary to the National Congress here and the British Committee in England. “Its general aim will be to educate the people and give to the demand of the Congress for Self-Government, the strength of a nation, which has realized itself and which through its national organization, has voiced its claim for years, only to see it rejected. The promoters of the movement emphasise the fact that there is no wish for separation from the empire but only a determination to manage their own affairs. The League is to consist of two divisions, one in India and the other in England, the latter educating the British Democracy in relation to India, the work of the British Congress Committee, useful and sacrificing as it is, not reaching the British masses in whom power lies”\(^\text{128}\).

The name of Mrs. Besant did not appear in any place of this communiqué. But it was obvious that she prepared this scheme. The publication of the communiqué was followed by a lecture series of Mrs. Besant on Home rule that covered all over India. In order to discuss her idea of Home Rule, she invited the leading Hindu and Muslim leaders to meet her in Bombay, before the Congress Session, and wanted the Congress to sponsor the League. She expressed her political goal in these words: “In political reform we aim at the building up of complete self-government from village councils… to a national parliament equal in its powers to the legislative bodies of the self-governing colonies\(^\text{129}\). She used the words “Home Rule in Indian politics” for the first time, in New India dated


\(^{129}\) Ibid., pp.7-8.
14 September 1915\textsuperscript{130}. On 25 September 1915, New India carried a formal announcement about the home Rule League and published the aims, objects and draft constitution of the Home Rule League. She also announced that Dadabhai Naoroji had agreed to be President of the League and that Sir Subramaniya Iyer and Sir William Wedderburn had agreed to become Presidents of the Madras and London branches of the League respectively\textsuperscript{131}. Sir S. Subrahmanya Iyer was so favourable to Mrs. Besant that she requested the members of the Legislative Council to follow the example of “this saintly and venerated old man”\textsuperscript{132}. These three men were past Congress Presidents. It clearly showed that there was no rivalry between the Congress and the Home Rule League. Only the Bombay moderates were against her in the beginning. But B.G. Tilak and the Congressmen from other places gave full support to the idea of the League. In a meeting in the same month, Wadia condemned the promises given by Great Britain to India as ‘scraps of paper’. In September 1915, Mrs. Besant delivered two lectures in Bombay on ‘The submerged classes in India and England’ and ‘India after the war’. Considering these two lectures offensive, the Bombay Government sent a letter to the Government of Madras to warn Mrs. Besant.

The practical reason of the need for legislation, the ruined economic condition of the country and the historical justification for the grant of Self-Government to India were the grounds on which Mrs. Besant seconded the resolution on Self-Government in the Congress in 1916. On the basis of these reasons she supported the resolution and requested the Government to give full

\textsuperscript{132} Home; Pol., (A) Mar, 1918, No.247 & K.W., pp.20-21, NAI.
representation in the Legislative Councils, as a step towards Self-Government, to India. Many prominent leaders like Sir Ibrahim Rahmatulla and Mrs. Sarojini Naidu supported this resolution. “We are going to politics”, she said, “not with a view to be materialized ourselves, but to purify and spiritualise public life, and so long as we keep this aim in view, the day is not far when in our own lifetime we shall see our motherland free”\textsuperscript{133}. She considered Home Rule essential, mainly for two reasons. In one of her articles, she explained that it was the birthright of every nation, and that India’s most important interests were made subservient to the interests of the British Empire, without her consent, while her resources were not utilized for her greater needs.

Mrs. Besant even called all those who had faith in her to participate in politics to secure India’s freedom at the earliest possible date, and received support from Baptista, Sir Dinshaw Petit, Muzrul Haque, J.B. Petit and Tilak. Baptista even called her the Simon-de-Montfort who guided them all to victory\textsuperscript{134}. Bepin Chandra Pal declared: “It is the first article of the Congress, it is the first article of the Indian nationality; it is the first article of every self-respecting Nation, every civilized Nation in humanity. It is the first article of every man and woman who feels within himself or herself the call of the Divine. It is the first article of every Yogi, of every Gnani, and of every Baktha, because self-government is the path and foundation, not only of the life temporal but also of the life spiritual”\textsuperscript{135}.

\textsuperscript{133} D.V. Tahmankar, Lokamanya Tilak, \textit{Father of Indian Unrest and Maker of Modern India}, Great Britain, 1956, p.236.
\textsuperscript{135} T.V. Parvate, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Bomnay, 1959, p.334.
In the article entitled ‘Rally Round the Standard of Freedom’, she firmly declared: “Liberty is our birthright as much as it is yours, and we will have it”\textsuperscript{136}. In her opinion, the struggle for Freedom was righteous and holy and she requested the Indians to struggle for freedom till they were free. In her book Shall India Live or Die?, she made it clear that when she used the term Home Rule, she meant the management of India by British, instead of by India, as a Dependency. To Mrs. Besant, the demand for Home Rule was not a cry of mere self-interest but was an aim to restore the old Panchayat system of Government and to hand over the affairs into its hands with real power. In her opinion “if a people are to be free, and to feel the value of their freedom, it must entire into their own lives, improve and beautify them”\textsuperscript{137}.

She decided to launch the Home Rule movement in 1915, and her policy was to ‘transpose the picture’ and ‘get Self-Government’. She expected that changes that all had been asking for would follow as a matter of course\textsuperscript{138}. In the beginning, to start the Home Rule League, Besant desired the helping hand of Gandhi, which he refused, because at that time he was in favour of the Government polices. Mrs. Besant persuaded Gandhi by telling him she knew the British very well. Unless the Indians prepared the ground, the British Government would forget all about India’s help in the War. Gandhi did not pay attention to this idea. But later events showed who was right and who was wrong. Though Gandhi did not extend his help in starting the Home Rule movement, he later accepted Besant’s movement as ‘brilliant’ and remarked:

\textsuperscript{137} Jamnadas Dearkadas, Political Memoris, Bombay, 1969, p.9.
“the Home Rule League has done so well to awaken the consciousness of the people that I wish a branch of the League could be started in every village in India\textsuperscript{139}. He was so much attracted by the movement that he lent his full support to it and even presided over its meetings and addressed its followers.

**Response of the Newspapers**

Many newspapers welcomed the idea of Mrs. Besant to start a Home Rule League for India. The Swadesamitran and Sasilekha welcomed the idea. Sampad Abhyudaya wrote that Mrs. Besant wished to help the people to realise the benefits of this system and thereby earn their gratitude\textsuperscript{140}. This paper had no doubt believed that if all people should ask for Home Rule with one voice, there could be no doubt that the British Government would grant it. Manorama expected the League to achieve success, if its works were carried on loyally and without much noise. Mr. Dadabhai Nauroji being its president, the paper held out no fear of its aims and acts being misunderstood\textsuperscript{141}.

But certain other papers criticized her new idea. The Indian Patriot predicted division of the country into two sections, one that follows Mrs. Besant’s scheme and the other who do not seem to turn on the question of pace\textsuperscript{142}. Bhagyodayam pointed out that the formation of the Home Rule League might affect the congress negatively, and that it was better to reform and improve the Congress and to establish its branches in every part of the country. The New reformer, another native paper, feared that a movement set up to

\textsuperscript{139} Ibid., p.39.
\textsuperscript{140} ‘New India’, 10 Nov. Madras, 1927, p.119.
\textsuperscript{141} Annie Besant, *Shall India Live or Die?*, Madras, 1925, p.111.
\textsuperscript{142} Raj Kumar, 0p.cit., p.99.
humiliate the Government at a time when the Empire was engaged neck deep in a world war does not show loyalty which like love expects no reward. Andhrapatrika advised Mrs. Besant to strengthen the Congress by settling the differences prevailing among the Congress leaders first. In its opinion, it was unnecessary to have another all India Association with the same ideals as those of the Congress.

Mrs. Besant mooted on 25 September 1915 the idea of starting a Home Rule League and decided to call an All-India Conference on 25 December 1915. In her invitation to the Indian leaders seeking their help for the establishment of the League, she indicated that her aim was to form an organization for the education of the people of India and Great Britain, on the necessity of Self-Government for India. In this meeting presided over by Surendranath Banerji, she requested the Indian leaders to approve her idea, choose the name of her organization, formulate its basic rules, and to elect its all-India officers. When her idea was thrown open to discussion, Narayana Chandravarkar requested them to decide the issue first in the Congress meeting. Many of the representatives accepted this opinion and after heated discussions, they accepted the suggestion of Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya to postpone the debate. He said that there would be a meeting of the Congress Committee the next day, where they would get a chance to discuss the idea with the Congress leaders. He also urged to stop the formation of the League until the Congress leaders had decided on that point. After his speech, the meeting was adjourned to meet two days after.

In the Subject Committee of the Congress, the leaders discussed the plan and passed a resolution urging continuous political propaganda and demanding further measures of reform towards the attainment of Self-Government. This decision of the Congress gave a fatal blow to Mrs. Besant’s idea. Now, many Indian leaders thought that since the Congress had decided to do what the League was to propose, it was best to give the chance to the congress organization.

In the adjourned meetings, Mrs. Besant said that senior members of the Congress Committee and the Muslim League would guide her. In this meeting Mazharul Haque said that he and his Muslim friends were in favour of forming the new League. C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer brought an amendment to postpone the formation of the League till the Congress and the Muslim League made their report. Many leaders like Jehangir Petit, Dr. Gour and Rasal opposed this amendment. After a heated discussion, Mrs. Besant accepted the amendment, and it was put to vote. About thirty representatives of the Hindus and Muslims voted against it. Thus the first attempt of Besant to start her movement failed miserably. The all India Congress Committee did not prepare the scheme. Later, Mrs. Besant realized that it was very difficult to get the support or the Congress.

The press criticized Mrs. Besant for accepting the request of the moderates. This act disappointed the Extremists and a meeting was held to satisfy them, in which she made an announcement that if the Congress could not prepare the scheme by 1 September 1916, she would be forced to start her League without their help. Some of her followers like Jamnadas Dwarkadas, Shankerlala banker and Indulal Yagnik were disappointed at this decision. Answering them,
she said that she was not foolish to wait for the Congress and said: “we have become a body recognized by the Congress and working under its mandate.” They secured her permission to start Home Rule groups. Some of her followers like Jamnadas Dwarkadas, Shankerlala Banker and Indulal Yagnik set up a paper called Young India at Bombay. In order to publish pamphlets in regional languages and in English they launched an All India Propaganda fund. With the aim of attaining self-determination for Indian, she organized an All-Party Organization named the National Conference, subsequently called the National Convention. On 5 October 1915 she spoke at Calcutta on ‘Why India should have Home Rule?’ In her article in New India on 18 October 1915 she defined Home Rule as national household.

Mrs. Besant, a women with a powerful personality, tried to spread the idea of Home Rule to every nook and corner of India. While she was in England, from 1908 to 1913, the Home Rule movement of Redmond in Ireland attracted her. She closely watched the progress of the Irish nationalist movement during the War. President Wilson who was sympathetic towards the Irish question tried to solve this problem. This interest in the solution of the Irish question greatly impressed Mrs. Besant, and it is believed to have inspired her idea of starting a similar movement in India. In one of her speeches, she said that she used the term Home Rule League for the sake of democracy because Home Rule had been the cry of democracy within the empire. In demanding Home rule she was also inspired by the history of the freedom struggle of the British. On another occasion, she spoke that Indians admired England because of the sympathy she

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had shown for the oppressed countries of Europe. She was also influenced by the writings of Milton, Burke, Shelley and Mill.

In December 1915, she attended the Bombay Congress, where she moved the following resolution: “considering the age-old civilization of India and considering the advance that has taken place in the country in education and public life, may it please Him Majesty, the King of England, to declare that it is the intention of the Government to grant Home Rule to India.”

The Bombay Moderates disliked the resolution and this influenced the President to rule out by saying that it was against the aims of the Congress. Surendra Nath Banerjee, who was a moderate, was against the very idea of Home Rule. He ruled out her resolution and wrote: “I must say that the League served to create the first division in the Congress after the reunion. I did not join it, nor did many of the ex-Presidents of the Congress. I incurred some unpopularity. I had helped to build up the Congress. It was a part of my life work, my pride and my privilege and it was not in me to ought who, in my opinion, would weaken its influence or the great position which it occupied in the estimation of the country. The meeting that followed decided that the All India Congress Committee should prepare a draft scheme after consulting other bodies. Mrs. Besant agreed to wait. But the moderates, who did not like the idea of starting another political organization, tried to delay her work. They feared that such an organization would serve to destroy the power of the Congress. Later, her resolution was passed in the subsequent session held in U.P. a clear indication of

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her influence in the Congress. The Moderates, who wanted agitation to be controlled by the Congress, decided not to lend support to the Home Rule campaign. The Servants of India Society refused to allow its members to join the Home Rule League. They decided to support the demand for Home Rule only through lecture tours and publication of pamphlets.

Lord Sinha called the people who wanted complete freedom, ‘impatient idealists’. Mrs. Besant criticized him and, in protest, conducted a private meeting at the same venue. She submitted her plan to start a Home Rule League with the aim of attaining full freedom. At a time when many Indians feared to use the very term ‘Home Rule’, as it recalled the violent Home Rule Movement of Ireland, Mrs. Besant dared to use it. She tried to give practical effect to the scheme without the help of the Congress. Some Government officials, who disliked her activities, requested the Government to take action against her immediately. But Sir C. Sankaran Nair and some other officials requested Lord Hardinge not to interfere with her at that stage.

Mrs. Besant, who attended the proceedings of the Muslim League in 1915, requested Muslims to add strength to a united demand to the British Government for Home Rule. Mazharul Haque spoke that they were entirely in favour of forming a Home Rule League. The same year found her presiding over the United Provinces Provincial Conference and the Bihar Students Conference.

The British Government asked the Indian leaders to suspend their struggle for freedom during the War period. The Home Rules’ response was that no time could be more suitable than that, because the Great War itself was being fought for liberty, democracy and equality. Supporting this view of her followers, she
asked the Government to give a promise that after the War, India would be given sovereignty. She remarked: “No good smith waits for the horseshoe to get cold before he strikes”\textsuperscript{147}. She decided to continue her work. In a lecture, she concluded: “Thus conspiracies are prevented, and local explosions perhaps injurious to Government are checked”\textsuperscript{148}.

The public received the first intimation about the Home Rule League in an interview that Mrs. Besant gave to a representative of the Associated Press of India, at Bombay\textsuperscript{149}. In this interview she made it clear that India had every right to ask for Self-Government and that India would ask for it not as a reward for the help rendered during the War but as a matter of right. On 25 September 1915, New India announced the formal inauguration of the Home Rule League in the words, “with Home Rule for India as its only object, as an auxiliary to the National Congress in India and its British committee in English, the special function of the committee being to educate the English democracy in relation to India and to take up the work that Charles Bradlaugh began and which was prematurely struck out of his hands by death”\textsuperscript{150}. Mrs. Besant’s articles in favour of Self-Government in the Home Rule Section covering three pages in her paper New India, from 5 January 1916, touched all shades of opinion and were a definite propaganda for Home Rule\textsuperscript{151}.

\textsuperscript{147} Ibid., p.307.
\textsuperscript{148} ‘New India’, 15 June, Madras, 1917, p.129.
\textsuperscript{150} S.N. Banerjee, A National in Making, Calcutta, 1925, p.363.
Mrs. Besant started the propaganda in anticipation of the League. A large number of copies of twenty six English pamphlets that explained her arguments for Home Rule pointed out the defects of the Government. After the formation of the League, these pamphlets were republished and their translation into Indian languages were also made available. Mrs. Besant continued to carry out her propaganda work through the press and the platform. A series of articles under the caption ‘Winning Self-Government’ were published in her weekly paper, The commonweal. She visited various parts of India spreading her new ideas. In May 1916, she delivered a special lecture at Poona on “The Future of India’. Tilak, who had full faith in her sincerity, also attended this meeting. N.C. Kelkar, who attended the meeting, said that Mrs. Besant and Tilak were ‘the two biggest radium atoms now in India’.

Mrs. Besant held that there were more than 280 reasons for demanding Home Rule. But, it fine, she summed them up in just one clause: “Because we cannot get things done without it”. The main cause was the reactionary policy of the Government. Mrs. Besant considered that the Arms Act, the Seditious Meetings Act, the Defence of India Act 1915, the Newspapers Act 1908, the Press Act 1010 and the revival of the Deportation Resolutions were the things that paved the way for the demand for Home Rule. The inhuman treatment of the Indians as outcastes by the British, especially in other countries, was another important cause. The disabilities of the Indians in Canada, Australia and the United States were due to this degradation. She criticized the Government for destroying the ancient economic system, and pointed out that the imposition of

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modern political economy by the British in India contributed only famines and poverty. Again, the Government ignored or turned down the petitions sent by the Indians for the removal of abuses, for proper education, for protection of industries, etc. Another important reason she pointed out was that “Liberty is man’s birthright, and the rule of another nation is inconsistent with national self-respect, national dignity, and unfettered national development.” Some of the practical causes were the rising military expenditure, injustice in the judiciary system, high land-tax, famines, improper volunteer system, and lack of technical education. Besant sums up the agitation for Home Rule as the ending of all the wrongs and injustices that the Congress had been exposing since 1885.

Lord Curzon’s partition of Bengal made a movement for Home Rule in India inevitable. Mrs. Besant argued that India’s contribution to the World War should rewarded with some political progress. The Russian Revolution and the idea of the formation of the League of Nation by President Wilson gave added momentum to the demand for Home Rule.

The British treated Mrs. Besant’s demand with contempt and said: “You are not fit to govern yourselves because you cannot defend yourselves.” In answer to this, Mrs. Besant pointed out that only Home Rule “will enable us to defend ourselves; for until we have Home Rule, we cannot be armed as we should be.” Mrs. Besant decided to demand Home Rule in order to save her honour and self-respect both inside and outside India. Through her Home Rule

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155 P. Raj Kumar, op.cit., p.143.
157 Annie Besant, The India That Shall Be , Madras, 1942, p.15.
movement, she never tried to embitter the relations between the Government and Indians but worked hard to build a common stage for the Indian freedom fighters. A.O. Hume wrote the following patriotic poem in the Home Rule section of the New India, which influenced the Indians a lot. The poem runs as follows:

Songs of Ind. Why ye sit idle
Wait ye for some Deva’s aid?
Buckle to, be up and doing:
Nations by themselves are made
What avail you wealth, your learning
Empty titles, sordid trade?
True Self-Rule were worth them all:
Nations by themselves are made
Sons of Ind. By up and doing
Let your course by none by strayed,
Lo; the Dawn is in the East:
By themselves are Nations made

In one article Mrs. Besant said: “Indian labour is wanted for the foreign firms. Indian capital is being drained away by the Ear Loan, which is to bring no freedom to India, if the autocracy has its way. Indian taxation to pay the interest on the War Loan will be crushing. When that comes, India will realise why I

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have striven for Home Rule after the War. Only by that can she be saved from ruin, from becoming a nation of coolies, for the enrichment of others”\textsuperscript{159}.

Swami Dayanand wrote in 1875: “Say what you will. Swadeshi Raj is by far the best. A foreign Government, even though it may be free from religious prejudices and be like parents impartial to all the people, can never make them happy\textsuperscript{160}. When Dayananda Saraswathy expressed his ideas on Swadeshi, it was entirely born from his learning of India.

Mrs. Besant came to India with the ideal of common brotherhood of mankind, with the notion that India had a positive role to play in this. India was conscientised with the ideas of Home Rule from many sources even before the entry of Besant into Indian politics. The Indian political soil during 1905 was not ripe to welcome Shyamji Krishna Verma’s concept of Home Rule, which the British dubbed as terrorism. The advanced section of Muslim politicians, who held anti British feeling among Muslims, too, adopted self-government for India as one of its objects in 1905. Dadabhi Naoroji stood for the demand of the I.N.C. in 1906 to be ‘Swaraj or self Government like that of the United kingdom’.

Though the idea of self-government on colonial model was incorporated in the Indian National Congress constitution in 1908, the Congress had failed to define the term Home Rule, and vagueness remained on the quantum of the Indian share in the administration of the country. Lore Harding’s Despatch of 25 August 1911 suggested autonomy in the provinces or provincial Home Rule as a

\textsuperscript{159} Annie Besant, Congress Speches, Madras,1942,p.24.
solution to Indian political problem, and the demand for provincial autonomy became the cherished goal of the Indian political leaders for a while. Anglo Indian leaders like J.C. Cotton in 1913 also upheld the idea of Home Rule.

Annie Besant, who had the opportunity to witness the Irish movement for Home Rule, could see in the backdrop of the war, a golden chance to demand Home Rule as a birthright. But the demand should come from India. The Indian National Congress, the largest single organization to jump into the fray, was found to be shirking from taking the actual plunge. In this predicament, Mrs. Besant mobilized her Theosophical Society and formed the Home Rule League to enable the Congress to advance its claim to Self-Government. On the other hand, the British who contained that a country which cannot defend itself, cannot claim self-government, schemed a policy of containment. IN this event when the nation is showing lethargy to rise to the occasion, Annie Besant threw herself into the vortex by making self-government the core issue. The emergence of Mrs. Besant in this political scenario was decisive. Neither a moderate nor an extremist, she served as a bridge between the two. To her, the moderates were ‘yesterdays’ and the extremists were ‘tomorrows’. This equation prompted others to call her a moderate extremist.