CHAPTER IV

HOME RULE AND INDIAN NATIONALISM

Indian political thinking was ripe with the ideas of Home Rule, but demands remained demands, as it lacked direction and leadership. It was in this scenario that Mrs. Besant stepped in. She gave a scheme of self-government and precipitated a Movement to attain the same. The release of B.G. Tilak from jail in 1914 found him starting the Home Rule movement in Maharashtra. Mrs. Besant and Tilak had no previous occasions to work together. But their common objectives and the opportunity that the First World War offered demanded them to work together. This gave India a chance to widen the political base of the Home Rule movement all over India and abroad, placing the British imperialists on tenterhooks forever. The War intention, the demise of Gokhale and Mehta, and the entry of the extremists into the Congress fold made the December 1916 Congress session listen to the voices of Besant and Tilak.

Mrs. Besant inaugurated her Home Rule in Madras on 3rd September 1916 and considered elected members of the Imperial Legislative Council as supporters. In the first meeting of the organization held at the YMIA Hall in Madras, more than 500 persons enrolled themselves as members. She elected an executive council of seven office bearers for three years, from among the members of the thirty four founding branches. Arundale was the Organizing Secretary, B.P. Wadia the Treasurer: C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar, who became the Vice-President of the League, later became the Chief Lieutenant of Mrs. Besant. Adyar was the
headquarters of the Home Rule League. In the first meeting of the League B.P. Wadia presented to Mrs. Besant a gold badge of the League with the letters ‘Home Rule’. She received the badge, saying that she would never dishonor it and requested the Indians to work for Home Rule wherever they went. She defined Home Rule as ‘the Government of the people, and by the people’.

In the meeting C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar’s proposal that the Home Rule League should be associated with the Congress was carried. As a result, all Home Rulers became Congressmen. Another resolution requested complete co-operation and exchange of members between the Bombay Home Rule League and the All India Home Rule League of Madras. This acquired mutual membership, and paved the way for co-operation between the two Leagues. Mr. Besant revived the old programmes of Swadeshi, Boycott and National Education.

**Objects of the League**

The political condition of Madras, at the time when Mrs. Besant launched her Movement, was favourable for such a movement. In the beginning, Madras was on the side of the Moderates. But when Mrs. Besant became the leader of the Madras Congress, the Moderates came under the control of the Extremists and were forced to participate in their propaganda work. The declared objects of the Home Rule League were as follows.

i. “To secure Self-Government for India through law-abiding and constitutional activities, i.e., agitation and propaganda, the constitutional way being the best way to political evolution.
ii. To maintain connection with great Britain by becoming a free nation within the Empire under the Imperial Crown of His Majesty, the king Emperor George V, and his successor.

iii. To support and strengthen the National Congress, which had labored for thirty years, to lay the foundation of Indian Self-Government.

iv. To carry out continuous educative propaganda on the necessity of Home Rule for India

Mrs. Besant outlined the following tasks as the immediate work of the League: “to form or join local societies affiliated to the Congress organization, to elect delegates to the Congress of 1916, pledge to vote for Home Rule and to circulate Home Rule literature”. The entrance and life subscription was fixed at re.1 and the membership; of the league was open to all men and women, over 18 years of age. A silver pendant with a pointed star of the Indian Empire with ‘Home Rule’ in red, engraved in the centre, was the badge of the Home Rule League. The colours were red (Hindus) and green (Muslim) The badge was given to each member. She had her own flag of red and green, “which was like a red rag to the bull, the bull being the Government”. Life membership fee was Rs.100/- school and college students were not given membership. But undergraduates were accepted as associates for study purposes. The members of the new body called ‘the indignant group of the Home Rule League’, formed in

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1 Home (Pol.) (Conf.) Procs. No.652-656, Spt.1916, NAI.
2 New India, 15 June 1917, Madras, p.271.
3 Ibid., p.282.
4 Annie Besant, Builder of New India, Adyar, 1942, pp.272-73.
Madras, began to wear the Besant pendant as a badge and took a pledge to make any sacrifices for freedom.5

Her experience as the President of the Theosophical Society helped her to inaugurate her movement with prepared support. Mrs. Besant’s presidential address at the 41st anniversary of the Theosophical Society concluded with an appeal to her religious followers to help “in the regeneration of India”6. She utilized the organizational network of the Theosophical Society to draw the attention of the Indian youth.

Most of Besant’s followers belonged to the middle-classes. Western-educated Indians, mainly lawyers, doctors, journalists, and teachers were its members. Some businessmen and industrialists also joined the league. The leaders of the league tried to get the support of the working classes and the mill-workers of Bombay. All sections of people rallied behind her in opposition to the Government. Her followers included moderates, extremists, radicals, nationalists, Hindus and Muslims. The structure of the organization was very simple. A few people, or at least three, who were interested in working for Home Rule, formed themselves into a group. They chose one of the members as their representative. It was this representative who communicated with the Secretary of the Home Rule League and received copies of the propaganda for distribution among the members. Speaking about the duties of the Home Rulers, Besant said: “A true Home Ruler believes that his is a divinely-appointed mission. he believes that behind him stand the great Rishis of Aryavarta; he believes that in this War many

5 Bla Gangadhar Tilak, _His Speeches and Writings_, Madras, 1918, p.186.
be traced a mighty purpose as much with regard to India as with regard to any other nation in the world. He believes that there must be no delay in proclaiming that Home Rule must be granted to India when the war is over, lest men by delaying hinder the fulfillment of the Divine plan”\(^7\).

Mrs. Besant’s Home Rule League had two divisions—one in India and the other in England. The main function of the branch in England was to educate the English democracy on matters related to India. She decided to take up the work, which Charles Bradlaugh had begun and prepared the following slogan to achieve Home Rule.

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O, \text{ Sorrowing hearts of slaves,} \\
\text{We heard you beat from far;} \\
\text{We bring the light that saves,} \\
\text{We bring the morning Star;} \\
\text{Freedom’s good things we bring} \\
\text{You whence all good things are}^8
\]

She requested her followers to establish branches throughout the country and to form local committees affiliated to the Provincial Congress Committees. She also asked them to attend the Congress session in large numbers and to vote for Home Rule. She wanted them to do active propaganda work by circulating Home Rule pamphlets and by lecturing in local languages about the demands of the Home Rulers. She directed every member to study her two books, ‘How India

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\(^7\) Manmohan Kaur, *Women in India’s Freedom Struggle*, New Delhi, 1992, p.120.

Wrought for freedom, and India: A Nation. Members were also requested to attend all important meetings conducted by the leaders of their locality.

The villages were reached through a number of low-priced pamphlets in local languages. The Tamil pamphlets carried patriotic songs. Dr. P. Varadarajalu Naidu, in his lectures on Home Rule in Tamil, attracted large crowds for the first time. This enabled one to understand the importance of the political activities that were sweeping over the cities and countryside. Similar vernacularization of political propaganda took place in the Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam speaking areas. Among the English-knowing people of all classes, New India had a very wide circulation, especially “in the lower ranks of Government service”\(^9\). Large crowds attended the lectures. When Mrs. Besant’s criticism of the British Government was translated into the language of the people, it proved to be a challenge to several Presidencies like the Central Provinces, Bombay and Madras. Her followers in London published a pamphlet containing 18 printed pages, entitled “Mrs. Besant and India’ giving a clear picture of India’s miserable condition. It was to give publicity to her idea of Home Rule movement and to convey her appeal to the people.

In order to spread her ideas, she even sent deputations to far-off places. branches of her Home Rule League were set up throughout the country. Even the peasants and workers joined her League and her movement grew rapidly. By 15\(^{th}\) September, 31 branches had been established in different parts of India, as stated below:

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Madras - 20
Bombay - 5
Unite Provinces - 4
Bengal - 1
Central province - 1

Total - 31

Within a few days of her announcement of the formation of the league, branches were formed at Bombay, Kanpur, Allahabad, Benares, Madanapalli, Kumbakonam, Adyar, Madurai, Ahamadnagar, Calicut and Madras. The greatest strength of the League was in the Madras Presidency where branches were established in places like Conjeevaram, Erode, Guntur, Machilipatam, Madura, Narasapuram, Nagapatam, Onglole, Palghat, Salem, Tanjore, Tenali, Tirupur, Trichinopoly and Venkataramaputtur.

By October 1916, the number of branches of Home Rule League went up to 50. Mrs. Besant was elected President for three years by the founding branches that had a strength of 132 branches, by September 1917. In the beginning, the membership was confined to Theosophists, even outside South India, or in areas where Theosophy had some impact, for example, Bombay, Guarat, Sind, Bihar and the United Provinces. The movement was less strong where Theosophy had less hold, as in the Punjab and Bengal. The Adyar headquarters of the League maintained only a little supervision over its 200 local branches. Out of the 200,

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Ibid., p.97.
about 132 were in the Madras Presidency. She established 25 branches in Madras, 45 in Andhra, 9 in Malabar, 13 in Bombay and 2 in Sind. She also founded branches in Bengal, Bihar, Delhi and U.P. In the estimate of H.F. Oven, “the membership of Tilak’s Home Rule League rose from 1,000 in November 1916 to 14,000 in April 1917, to 32,000 in 1918. Mrs. Besant’s League was slower to gain momentum. In March 1917, it had only 7,000 numbers but by December the figure had shot up to 27,000”\textsuperscript{11}. The League found its main support from the Tamil Brahmins of Madras city, whereas in Bombay, the younger Gujarati industrialists and lawyers became its members. Her exclusion from Bombay and Central Provinces increased her popularity and the League membership increased to 2000 with 41 branches.

The strength of the League could not be judged from the number of branches. Some branches were extremely active, but others remained under the control of the Theosophical societies. For example, most of the branches in Madras were inactive. At the same time the branch in Bombay city, the four branches in the U.P. towns, and many village branches in Gujarat were very active. Through these branches, she sent a number of petitions to the Government for granting Home Rule. Her followers were ready to react or protest against any issue or action against Mrs. Besant. When she was externed from certain provinces, her followers even sent resolutions of protest to the Viceroy and the Secretary of State. Again, they protested against Tilak’s externment from Punjab and Delhi. Instructions were given to the branches through individual members or through Arundale’s page on Home Rule in new India. Many branches joined

\textsuperscript{11} New India, 11 June, 1917, Madras, p.304.
together and formed joint local committees. These committees were later merged with the provincial Congress Committees. Mrs. Besant made personal relationship with almost all the branches.

The Home Rulers opened a number of reading rooms and libraries in different parts of the city. In the meetings, which were organized usually in the local bar libraries, students, professionals, and businessmen and sometimes even agriculturists attended. Many moderate Congressmen joined the Home rule League and even the members of Gokhale’s Servants of India Society attended its meetings. The Home Rule League’s offices served as centers of useful information to its visitors who obtained the latest photographs or pictures of leaders and friends of India and details about the League, as well as the latest social and political history of the world. In short, a visit to the league’s office helped the visitor to update his knowledge of Indian politics, including the progress that the Indian movement had made in great Britain and other countries. At the office of the home Rule League, started at No.19, esplanade, madras, Home Rule literature, Photographs and portraits were stocked for sale as well as for free distribution. Home Rulers in other places were asked to send their reports addressed to G.S. Arundale, Organizing Secretary, Home Rule League, Sevashrama, Adyar, Madras.

Two events helped the rapid growth of the Home Rule Movement. The first was a letter written by Mrs. Curtis, a Government official, containing the details of a plot that India was to became a dependant of all the Self-governing colonies at the end of the War. This letter fell into the hands of Gandhi. At once, Gandhi

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Ibid., 23 April, 1926, p.304.
published it. The letter gave a great shock to the Indians, and many Indian elders who were initially against the movement thought of joining it. Lore Chelmsford’s speech at Lahore was the second cause. In his speech, he stated that the rate of progress in India would not be rapid in the near future. It also infused a feeling of nationalism in the Indian minds.

**Spread of the Movement**

Mrs. Besant spread her movement in many ways. Firstly, she made use of the method of discussions amongst various groups. A series of lectures were organized in district headquarters, including fund-raising campaigns. She also published a number of books, newspapers, and pamphlets. In the introduction to her book, How India Wrought for Freedom, she explained the best proof of India’s fitness for Self-Government. In order to spread her idea, she toured a number of places, where she talked about the defective policies of the Government on agriculture, about scarcity of food and growing starvation. She requested the listeners to come forward and join her movement. She said: “You have to consider that poverty, you have to realize what it means, you have to know the agony of hunger and then think about that hundred million of the agricultural population on the verge of starvation”\(^\text{13}\). The peasants urged her to give wide publicity in her paper to their sufferings, and she agreed to do so. She tried her best to solve their problems. Special campaigns were arranged for village work. In the villages, the Home Rulers distributed vernacular pamphlets. In order to spread her movement, she even sought the support and sympathy of university authorities. Copies of her articles were sent to the leaders of the branches, who distributed them to the

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\(^{13}\) Home (Pol.) Jan. 1917, File 44, NAI.
reading rooms, libraries and local clubs. She also propagated her ideas through her two organs, New India and Commonweal. She tried to get the sympathy and support of the student population by instituting Home Rule classes and forming Boy Scouts and Volunteer Troops for them. She also tried to arouse interest in the Punjab, by freely supplying New India to the various reading rooms. Similarly, she sent copies of India, a National to the boys who were greatly influenced by this book. Her writings in the papers were aimed to abolish the abuses present in the British administration, like the poverty faced by the Indians, the unemployment problem among the India’s and the evils present in the administration of justice, army commissions and railway department. In all these fields, she criticized the Governments mercilessly. The propaganda work helped the cry of Home rule to spread to the remotest corners of the land. No wonder, Home Rule Leagues were recognized all over the country.

In her lectures she asked the Indian to do two things: to use the entire resources of the nation to attain freedom, and to make the Congress devote its whole time and energy to the service of the nation. In order to spread the idea of Home Rule, she accepted the integration of language area also. In organizing the country, she adopted the linguistic principle to determine the provincial limits. In this respect, in the opinion of Pattabhi, the Home Rule Movement “went a head of the Congress and was its forerunner in reality”.14

To the Congress which did not to any active propaganda work, in the beginning, Mrs. Besant appealed to formulate a plan of Home Rule, which the League would popularize by means of articles, lecturers and leaflets. The

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Congress leaders, who had no sympathy for the League, paid very little attention towards this suggestion. They followed a policy of “we won’t do it and you shan’t”\textsuperscript{15}. Certain other causes pointed out for the slow progress of the Home Rule movement were the religious outlook, child marriage and untouchability.

Canada was the first country to speak in favour of Indian Home Rule. One Canadian member of the Imperial Council declared that, “by her loyalty to war and her conduct in the long years of peace, India has earned the change in status to become equal to other members of the great British family to nations and acquire, and has a right to expect, the privileges accorded to others”\textsuperscript{16}. While the Home Rule movement was getting strong in India, two important events were taking place in international politics: the First World War and the class war waged by the communists against the Czar regime in Russia. The tone of the Home Rule Leagues during the war different from that of the early Congress. “There was more enthusiasm and emotion, a more zealous devotion to the cause and a much greater numerical participation than early Congress would have considered desirable—or perhaps even attainable”\textsuperscript{17}.

**Arundale and the Home Rule League**

We can get a clear idea about Arundale’s entry not politics from his article, named, ‘My experiences’\textsuperscript{18}. Through the ‘weekly chats’ in the pages of New India

\textsuperscript{15} Jim Masselos, *Indian Nationalism An History*, New Delhi, 1993, p.147.


\textsuperscript{17} C.H.M. Naidu, *Nationalism in South India*, Its Economic and Social Background (1885-1918), New Delhi, 1988, p.26.

\textsuperscript{18} Home (Pol.) Deposit, Jan.1918, File 2, NAI.
he expressed his ideas and did a great deal to bring the students and schoolboys under the influence of political propaganda. He organized a number of study classes for students, on politics. He did great work to bring the students and schoolboys under the influence of political propaganda, and to help the Home Rulers to establish libraries, to circulate pamphlets, to collect funds and to organize social work. Like Mrs. Besant, he also declared his faith in Constitutional agitation. It was he who inaugurated the Boy Scouts movement, with its unit to be known as ‘Wivaji’s troop’. The Home Rule leaders felt the urgent need for forming a volunteer corps. It was formed on 14 November 1916. Its main duty was to maintain peace and order in the league meetings. They were also required to do social and public service and assist such of those local bodies as were not hostile to the cause of Home Rule. He gave the first lesson in drill to the Home Rule Volunteer Corps on 29 November 1916. They were also provided with a separate uniform. The Volunteer Corps did a lot for the success of the movement.

Mrs. Besant realized that Home Rule was interconnected with the religion of the people and that it was a unifying force for the Hindus and Musalmans, Brahmans and Non-Brahmans. In her opinion, all were equally its devotees. So she connected her movement with religion by the prayers offered in the urban temples. From there, the prayers spread to village temples. Then Sadus and Sanyasins preached it in the countryside. Speeches were organized even in temples. She always tried to preserve India’s ancient traditions and culture. In her opinion, the

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future of India could be shaped in a proper manner only by understanding the past Indian traditions.

**Women and the Home Rule League**

Active participation of women formed an important feature of the Home Rule agitation. Women realized their backward condition and their exclusion from political movement, after coming into contact with Besant. In order to encourage their active participation, she set up special women’s branches. Among the women members, the most important one in Madras was N. Sivakami Ammal, who took an active interest in women’s education. She requested Mrs. Besant to conduct a seminar on the topic ‘The Duties of women towards Home Rule and Swadeshi Movement’ in the Congress session held at Karachi in 1917, and also sent a representation to Mrs. Besant supported by 2,000 women. Influenced by N. Sivakami Ammal, the Congress session of that year was attended by a large number of women. Again, when Mrs. Besant celebrated the National Education Week, it was attended by a large number of women. One of them was so influenced by the scheme of Mrs. Besant that ‘she donated her jewellery worth about Rs.6,000 for the cause of national education’20. Later, on another occasion, two Kamma ladies of the Krishna District donated two acres of wetland for the same purpose21. When Mrs. Besant was interned, protest meetings were organized by the women who said that their prayers in the temples set the eternal captive free. All these show the nature of women participation in Besant’s Home Rule movement.


Annie Besant proposed to the Government to create village Panchayats and to use them as the units of Government, to elect members of the Taluk Boards and District Boards. She proposed a new body called Ward Councils. But everywhere she substituted election for nomination. The Municipality gave the Panchayats some small duties. In her proposal, the members of the Provincial Legislative Council were to be elected from the members of District Boards, on educational basis. The prevailing Legislative Council would be an elective body with a Ministry responsible to it.22

Even though, Mrs. Besant was aware of evils like the decay of industries, growing poverty of the people, and the increasing burden of debt, she never advocated separation from the Empire; instead, she preferred to remain within it. But she was determined to win Home Rule for India and considered Home Rule a right and not a boon. In one of her articles, she desired to gain Home Rule, that is self-rule for Indian within the Empire, by constitutional means.23 She considered “open and tongue, as her weapons… Reason and justice are its pleaders, supporting its righteous appeal. And Britain will not deny in Asia, the principle for which she is fighting in Europe”.24

Mrs. Besant asked her followers to follow the example of the self-governing dominions and to work hard for Home Rule. She represented India with “great vigour and ability and demanded at least a partial liberation at the centre”.25 In

22 Jim Masselos, op.cit., p.146.
one of her lectures she said: “It was better to have bullock carts and freedom than a train deluxe with subjection”\textsuperscript{26}. In her opinion “India has learnt, by repeated disappointments, the great lesson: If you want a thing done, do it yourself”\textsuperscript{27}.

While in England, Mrs. Besant formed an Indian Parliamentary Committee with herself as the Chairman and enrolled members of the Parliament as its members. Through these members, she sent out information relating to India. This committee had one hundred and eighty-eight members with nearly three hundred Labour Associations and Trade Unions associated with it\textsuperscript{28}. Her followers in London published a pamphlet entitled, ‘Mrs. Besant and India’, containing details like ignorance of Indian affairs, the awakening of India, her idea of self-government, and her work for Home Rule movement.

Some of the non-Brahmin leaders, who supported the activities of the Home Rule movement, include V. Kalyanasundra Mudaliar, E.V. Ramasamy Naicker, B.P. Wadia, Dr. Arundale, G. Selvapathy Chettiar, Dr. P. Varadarajalu Naidu, Singaravelu Chettiar and George Joseph. It was through the Home rule movement that many non-Brahmin Congressmen like Kesava Pillai, V.O. Chidambaram Pillai and Chakkarai Chettiar gained popularity. But after the formation of the Justice Party, many of them parted company with the Home Rule League, which they termed as a movement of the Brahmins under a ‘Brahmani’, that is Mrs. Besant. Dr. T.M. Nair, the leader of the Non-Brahmin movement, made the following comment in his address at the Spur Tank Circle in Madras. “All the Home Rulers,

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., p.342.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 29 Sept. 1915, p.351.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 25 Sept. 1915, p.352.
the top leaders of the Congress party except perhaps a few Vibhishanas like Salem Varadarajulu Naidu, Erode Sowcar, E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker, Tuticorin lawyer V.O. Chidambaram Pillai and the Madras Pandit Kalyanasundara Mudaliar, in fact, almost all the national leaders are Brahmins”\(^\text{29}\).

**The Press and Home Rule: A Babel of Voices**

The paper Bharathi welcomed the formation of the Home Rule League but believed “the formation of many such leagues can scarcely be wise. The interests of the country will be best promoted, if all people should, with one mind, form only one such league and work with one ideal before them”\(^\text{30}\). Andhrapatrika supported the formation of the Home Rule League and remarked that the one Rule League did in four months what the Congress had been able to do in thirty years. Mysore Patriot opined that Mrs. Besant and Srinivasa Sastri were right in saying that “India is better fitted for Home Rule today than England was for Home Rule when she had it”\(^\text{31}\). Indian Patriot warned the Government not to neglect the work of the Home Rule League for India, organized in England as insignificant. Desabhaktan wrote “the object of those demanding Home Rule is not to get rid of the English Government. The Home Rule we ask for is to be under the English rule. What we want is not a change in the existing rulers but a change in the existing system of administration”\(^\text{32}\). On 10 January 1918 a meeting held at Ambasamudram passed a resolution criticizing the comment of Dr. T.M. Nair that

\(^\text{29}\) Ibid., p.353.

\(^\text{30}\) Manmohan Kaur, op.cit., p.146.

\(^\text{31}\) Annie Besant, *India Bond or Free*, Adyar, 1918, p.4.

\(^\text{32}\) ‘New India’, 1 May, Madras, 1917, p.362.
the Home Rulers were carrying on their agitation at the instigation of Germany, “as a baseless life”\(^{33}\). Naradan, another paper, requested the people to sacrifice their body, soul and wealth to get Home Rule and not to hear the advice of anti-Home Rulers.

At the same time, the Anglo-Indian papers turned against the Home Rulers. They requested the Government not to grant Home Rule to India fearing that India would be reduced to the present state of Russia, if Home Rule were given to it. The Indian Mirror of Calcutta demanded that Mrs. Besant should be silenced by force. The London Times pronounced the Home Rule movement as mischievous. The Englishman of Calcutta was against the Home Rule League’s programme of educating Indian public opinion for gaining Swaraj. It was against the Indian idea of Home Rule. In the opinion of The Englishman, “to even speak of it now as a political possibility, is absurd”\(^{34}\). It held the opinion that India would be ruined if she were granted Home Rule. The Madras Times opposed Besant’s idea of home Rule. It criticized her saying that India should extort Home Rule from Britain in the middle of the tension of the War. In reply to this comment, Mrs. Besant said that her aim was to educated the people about Home Rule during the War and to help the Government to establish it after the war. The paper warned her not to expect too much. Other papers like the India Patriot, Indu Prakash and the Gujarati criticized her for ideas in the same vein.

Native papers like Dravidian, Malayala Manaorma and Non Brahman also turned against the Home Rulers. Dravidian even designated the people who

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33 Manmohan Kaur, op.cit., p.146.

34 T.M. Nair, Spur Tank Speech, Madras 1919, p.38.
demanded Home Rule ‘as traitors to the country’\(^{35}\), and warned the people not to participate in this ‘stupid movement’, Manorama observed that the condition of the Native Christians would be miserable if Home Rule be granted. The paper added that “the people of India have not, by education and capacity, reached that stage when they may be safely entrusted with the Government of their country”\(^{36}\). The Non-Brahman considered her new movement a Brahmin movement organized by a handful of Brahmins and a lady like Mrs. Besant. The Travancore Abhimani thought that India would never be fit for Swaraj unless she got rid of her caste system, and observed that “the suggestion of irresponsible journalists like Mrs. Besant that India should be given Home Rule is evidently made without the least consideration being bestowed upon what the effect of it will be on the lower classes”\(^{37}\). The Wednesday Review criticized Mrs. Besant for converting the Theosophical federation into platform for her Home Rule Propaganda. This paper even advised Mrs. Besant “to dissociate herself from all politics and return to her first love. if she decides otherwise, she would be injuring herself and her movement”\(^{38}\).

The Anglo-Indians were against the idea of Home Rule and their papers considered India not fit for Home rule. They asked the Indians to learn to swim before touching water. To this comment, Surendranath Benerji answered that these critics were out of court. In a Congress meeting, he said that India had produced religious reformers like Vivekananda, poets like Tagore, scientists like

\(^{35}\) ‘Bharathi’ 5 May, Madras, 1916, p.28.


Bose, journalists and orators like Surendranath banerji, statesmen like Gokhale, jurists like Dr. Ghose, and administrators like Raja Sir T. Madhava Rao. Such a country, in a single half-century, “is certainly not unfit”\(^{39}\). Answering the comment of the Anglo-Indian papers, Mrs. Besant said: “If we are fit, give us Home Rule; if we are not fit, give us Home Rule so that we may make ourselves fit for it”\(^{40}\). Chisolm Ansty, who found the term ‘local Self-Government’ as old as the east itself, commended India as fit for Home Rule, as he considered the East the parent of Municipalities. In the opinion of Vincent Smith, ancient India was full of village republics. Mrs. Besant also shared the same opinion. In her book ‘India-A Nation’ she tells that before the arrival of the British, India had enjoyed 5,000 years of Self-Government, a finding that pictured India as fit for Home Rule. In her opinion, if England was fit for Self-Government, then surely a highly civilized country like India ought to be more fit only by working; so she requested the Indians to work actively for winning Home Rule. In one of her writings in New India, she said: “No nation gave liberty to another nation, and the sooner they realized it, the better. A nation was fit for liberty the moment she was determined to have it. They were not fit for liberty if they were willing to go on being ruled by those whom they had not elected. They should tell England that by her love of liberty they claimed the right to rule themselves. Then England would understand their voice and she would no longer say that India was not fit for Self-Government. If they said it in a voice that could not be denied, she would be the first to give it”\(^{41}\). An editorial note captioned “What have Happened” commended:


\(^{40}\) ‘Dravidian’, 24 Nov. Madras, 1917, p.34.

“If Mrs. Besant had not entered into the political field of India and started her new movement, things would have gone of from bad to worse, and would have resulted in a revolution similar to the tragedy of 1857”42.

**Attitude of the Congressmen towards Home Rule**

Eminent Congressmen to join the Home Rule League included Motilal Nehru, Tej Bahadur Sapru and Ishwar Saran. All of them came under Besant’s influence, and in 1916 at Lucknow they made a vain attempt to set her up for the Congress Presidentship, against A.C. Mazumdar. Pandit Motilal Nehru, who became President of the Allababad branch of the Home Rule League, said that if he ventured to offer a word of advice he would say: “Let us call it Home rule or responsible Self-Government, as it suits one’s individual fancies, but let us all work with one mind, one heart, one inflexible determination to achieve the reforms which the Congress, the Muslim League and the Home Rule League have all agreed upon”43. Jawaharlal Nehru, greatly influenced by Mrs. Besant, became the joint Secretary of the provincial Home Rule League in 1916. In his opinion, “the atmosphere became electric and most of us, young men, felt exhilarated and expected big things in the near future”44. K.M. Munishi joined the Besant’s League at its inception itself. In Calcutta, B. Chakravarti and in Amritsar Saif-ud-Ding-Kitchlew became its members. Satyamurti (Madras), Jitendralala Benerji (Calcutta), Khaliquzzamon (Lucknow), Jamnadas Dearkadas, the wealthy dye importer from Bombay, the industrialist Umar Sobhani, Shankarlal Bankar and

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44 ‘New India’, 21 June Madras, 1916, p.120.
Induala Yajnik were some such members. Many of them later became great leaders of Indian politics. In Madras, Sir S. Subramania Iyer was the President of her League, C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar was her legal adviser, and G.A. Natesan and L.A. Govindaraghava were among her most loyal and vocal supporters. S. Subramania Iyer opened a number of Swadeshi markets, and sold locally made articles like towels, soaps, trunks and pencils. he succeeded in his attempt, when many people happily bought these Swadeshi goods. by the protection and encouragement of native industries, a revival of the economic and industrial conditions of India was attempted.

V.K. Krishna Menon and Home Rule

V.K. Krishna Menon was one of the active workers of both the Congress and the Home Rule League, in Tellicherry. The Home Rule League and the District Congress committee worked in close co-operation with each other in organizing meetings and processions in the period. Krishna Menon’s daring and youthful zeal for action became evident one morning when the red and green flag of Besant’s Home Rule fluttered from the main building of the presidency College. It was soon found out that the lawbreaker was none other than Krishnan Menon. Exclusion from the college was hardly avoided through the interference of an Indian professor who had already assessed the great potential of Krishnan Menon.

Menon had been influenced by the magnetic personality of Annie Besant even before coming to Tellicherry. her theosophical movement and her ideas of working for the uplift of the poor had a thrilling effect on V.K. Krishna Menon, who, by that time had become one of her favorite volunteers. Later, Mrs. Besant selected V.K. Krishna Menon to attend an educational conference in England and
to undergo training as teacher. During the 23 years he spent in England, he spread the ideas of Indian nationalism and brought to the notice of the British M.P.’s, politicians and common people, the Indian problems and the facts about the most ruthless tyranny that Britain was practicing in India. His friendship with Harold Laski helped him to present the Indian problems among the members of the British labour Party. His main aim was to make the people of Britain aware of the inhuman rule of the British in India.

V.K. Krishnan Menon started his Home Rule work with great zeal and founded the first Scout troop at Komaleeswaranpet in Madras, named the ‘Mohammed Troop’. Under his guidance this troop slowly became a model and won all the top honours. He also organized the Cycle Squad, Sea Scouts, Rover Trops, etc. and also took an active part in the political club called the ’21 club’ as well as in the Young Men’s Indian Association organized by Mrs. Besant. Soon he became a Scout Commissioner. He also joined the special organ founded by Mrs. Besant, called the ‘Brothers of Service’. Seeing the ability of V.K. Krishna Menon, Mrs. Besant sent him to Malabar in 1918 to organize the movement there. There also the continued his work very vigorously. He worked for some time as the secretary of Dr. Arundale.

Tilak’s Home Rule Movement

Tilak is considered by many as the first leader who brought the Indian freedom movement from the closed rooms of the intellectuals to the ordinary people of India. In 1915, Tilak conducted a meeting of his followers at Poona.

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45 Ibid., p.121.
aimed to explain the objects and work of the idea of Home Rule to distant parts of India.\textsuperscript{46}

Tilak founded his Indian Home Rule League on 23 April 1916, even earlier than Mrs. Besant, from whom he had borrowed the word Home Rule. To him “Home Rule was nothing but to have the management of their home in their own hands”.\textsuperscript{47} In order to propagate this political idea, Tilak used his papers Kesari and the Maharatta and conducted a number of tours. He earned the title Lokamanya in the course of such tours. He gave a number of inspiring lectures and in one such speeches he declared.

\begin{quote}
India is our own hours. Our domestic affairs must be in our own hands.

Freedom is my birthright. So long as it is wake within me, I am not old. No weapon can cut this spirit, no fire on burn it, no wind can dry it … We ask for Home Rule and we must get it.\textsuperscript{48}
\end{quote}

This slogan acted as potent spell upon the minds of the people. To grant Home Rule to the people of India was considered by Tilak as the only way to solve the Indian problem.

He explained Home Rule as a form of Government within the British Empire, in which the rule of the bureaucracy would be replaced by an administration responsible to the people. He became a hero among the people because of his homely speeches. He held his first Home Rule meeting at Belgaum.

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 17 Sept. 1915, p.123.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 22 Dec. 1917, p.125.
\textsuperscript{48} Ravinder Kumar and Haridev Sharma (eds.) \textit{Selected Works of Motila Nehru}, vol.1, New Delhi, 1982, p.363.
on 1 May 1916. In his Home Rule League, Tilak did not accept any office. He selected Joseph R.P. Karandikar, Sathya, Vaze and Belvi as the Committee members. He established many branches of the League in Ahmedabad and the neighbouring areas. Maharashtra, Central Province and Bihar were under his control. With Poona as the headquarters, Tilak’s Home Rule League was limited to the Maratha speaking parts of the country. In a meeting conducted by his followers at Hubli, he said “We do not want to trespass on the right of any nation, we do not want supremacy over any people, we are only asking for what is our birthright”\(^{49}\). In another meeting he delivered the following message: “Be prepared to say that you are a Home-Ruler. Say that you must have it and I dare say when you are ready, you will get it. I believe that by that faith you will be able to realize your object within a year or two”\(^{50}\).

Tilak started his propaganda work by publishing pamphlets, six in Marathi and two in English. The government chose to blow against him when Tilak celebrated his 60\(^{th}\) birthday on 23 July 1916. His followers presented a purse of Rs. One lakh to him. The Government was quick to send him a notice demanding a security of Rs.60,000 for bad behavior that same day. His friends like Jinnah defended Tilak, Against the security Tilak filed a case. He lost the case in the magistrate court, but was exonerated by the High Court in November. The victory was hailed all over the country. Tilak who took full advantage of the Government order, proclaimed in his public speeches that Home Rule now had the sanction of the Government, and continued his propaganda campaign with great vigour.


In December 1916, he said in a meeting that Home rule was the demand of all Congress resolutions and the only cure for India’s political ills and grievances. “Home Rule is the only remedy. Insist on your rights. India is your own house. Is it not? Then why not manage it yourself? Our domestic affairs must be in our own hands. We do not want separation from England”\(^{51}\). Tilak regarded Home Rule as Dharma.

Many consider Tilak “The torch-burner and the torch-bearer”\(^{52}\). Mrs. Besant considered Tilak man filled with passionate and never weakening love for India. For Tilak, every sacrifice for her was joy. “No physical bondage could bind that free spirit... In my own relations with him, I found him absolutely straight and loyal to his word”\(^{53}\).

The two Leagues did not merge, because, in the words of Annie Besant, “Some of his followers disliked me and some of mine disliked him. We, however, had not quarrel with each other”\(^{54}\). An agreement existed between Besant and Tilak that there would be no rivalry between them and they would co-operate with one another. But an overlap occurred only in Bombay city. When separate branches of the two Leagues were formed, they co-operated with each other in publishing pamphlets and organizing meetings. Theosophists were the main followers of Besant in Bombay. Among them were the most important were young Gujaratis like the Dwarkadas brothers. Mrs. Besant and Tilak used each other’s


\(^{52}\) S.R. Bakshi, *The Documents of Home Rule Movement*, New Delhi, p.171.

\(^{53}\) Bal Gangadhar Tilak, op.cit., pp.230.

organization as a common platform on which to speak. In an interview with the
director of Criminal Intelligence, Dr. Moonje, the famous extreme it leader, said:
“Mrs. Besant had done her best for Home Rule but, as a matter of fact, she had
been used throughout as a tool by the real Home Rule statesman, who was Tilak.
Mrs. Besant was really a mere agent of Tilak, although she did not know it
herself”\textsuperscript{55}.

Tilak suggested the idea of gaining Home Rule by efforts of united will
power. Mrs. Besant also accepted this idea. A leaflet that was printed at the
vasanta Press, containing the following message: “Home Rule for India, use
thought as well as speech and action. Translate into your mother-tongue and
repeat aloud or to yourself every day at noon the following sentence, India shall
have Home Rule and wish it with all your heart. Do not forget”\textsuperscript{56}.

It was through the Home Rule movement that Tilak realized the value of
constitutional methods such as petitions and deputations. In the beginning Tilak
had no faith in these methods and later, he even led the Home Rule deputation to
England. But he and his associates were turned back from Colombo, and were not
allowed to proceed to England. He tried to introduce a bill in the British
Parliament through the Labour leaders, regarding Home Rule.

Tilak and Besant met Montagu during his India visit in 1917. Lord
Montagu’s high opinion about Tilak can be known from his remarks made in his

\textsuperscript{55} D.G. Tendulkar, Mahatma, vol.I. Bombay, 1951, p.262.

diary: “He (Tilak) is at the movement probably the most powerful man in India”\textsuperscript{57}. Seeing the popularity of the Home Rulers, the Home Member of the Government of India wrote in January 1917, “The position is one of great difficulty. Moderate leaders can command no support among the local classes who are being led at the heels of Tilak and Besant”.\textsuperscript{58}

The years 1916 to 1919 proved to be the busiest in the life of New India and in the career of Mrs. Besant, a period that heralded her rise to the zenith of power. She stood in the very forefront of the movement for Indian freedom. New India became the exponent of two great movements the Home Rule League and the Labour Union. Through New India and Commonweal she made the Home Rule demand, a radical and popular demand. She said” “We claim liberty, not favour. We claim freedom, not the goodwill of the Government. Freedom is the right of every human being and without the process of law none should have the power to take it”.\textsuperscript{59}

\section*{Mrs. Besant’s attempt to become the President of the Congress Foiled}

In 1916 Mrs. Besant contested for the Presidency of the Indian National Congress. The Raja of Mahammadabad even promised to contribute one lakh rupees towards the expenses of the Home Rule Deputation to England, if Mrs. Besant was elected President. Motilal Nehru and Tej Bahadur Sapru supported her. In August, she issued a personal statement, in which she requested the Congressmen to elect her, because her election would be a protest against the

\textsuperscript{57} Ram Gopal, op.cit., p.264.

\textsuperscript{58} S.R. Bakshim Op.Cit., p.185.

action of the Madras and Bombay Governments. She said so because these two Governments had recently made it clear that they objected to her politics. She made a personal request to the Congressmen, saying that a vote given to her would be a practical rallying of the country round a particular person against the views of two of the Local Governments. But many provincial Congress Committees were against Besant, whose name was not included in the Preliminary nomination of any Provincial committee. Realizing this fact, she publicly withdrew her candidature at the meeting of the Madras Congress committee, on the ground that she did not expect a unanimous vote. She said that she did not wish to be elected by a divided organization. In the election that followed, Ambika Charan Majumdar became the President.

**Newspaper’s opinions about her desire to become the President**

Many newspapers disliked Mrs. Besant’s desire to become the President. The West Coast Spectator advised her to play the part of an advocate and bring the Congress to her views.\(^{60}\) In its opinion, the Home Rule League had no right to dictate terms at a time when the Congress had not yet identified itself with the Home Rule League. The Dravidabhimani considered it not advisable to elect her the President because “she has been agitating the public mind a good deal in connection with her having been directed to Day Security”.\(^{61}\) It further said that if elected to the presidential gaddi, she might vent her wrath against the authorities, making confusion more confounded. In its opinion, making her the President of the Congress was just like adding fuel to the firse. Indian patriot criticized the


\(^{61}\) Home (Pol.) File 32 & K.W. Mar. 1917, NAI.
Reception Committee for its foolish act of recommending her as the President of the next session. The Hindu criticized the Provincial Congress Committees of both Bihar and the United Provinces for nominating her even after the Madras Provincial Congress Committee had withdrawn her name from the contest for the provincial nomination. Kerala Patrika was also against her. It said: “She first tried to become the Chief Guru of the Hindus, and, as she failed in that attempt, she is now trying to start a Home Rule League and be its President. She thinks that this object of hers can be easily achieved, if she becomes the President of the Congress. We cannot now say in what character she will appear next. We trust that our countrymen are too wise to be misled by such tricks”.

Papers like Sampad Abdhyudaya supported her candidature saying that as the presiding minister Mrs. Besant might be able to produce patriotic citizens who regarded the securing of a just administration for India as the end and aim of their existence. Swadesamithran supported the election of Mrs. Besant as the President of 1916, on the ground that “she has served India in numerous ways and has proved herself to be a sincer friend of the Indians and a sympathizer of their ideals and aspirations”. The Bharathi supported the election on the ground that by sowing the seeds of self-government in the heart of every India, Mrs. Besant “is going from house to house, from village to village, and from bazaar to bazaar and

like electricity she is drawing the student population towards the current of liberty”.\(^{65}\)

**Exclusion from the Central Provinces**

In November 1916 the Central Provincial Conference was to be held at Amraoti. The local branch of the Theosophical Society also announced a meeting at the same time, to presided over by Mrs. Besant. But on 29\(^{th}\) October, the Government issued an order prohibiting Mrs. Besant from entering the Central provinces. This gave her an opportunity to turn the order as a weapon against the government. Her real idea was to visit Amraoti for political purposes. But she accused the Government of interfering in her religious activities, thus creating religious feeling among the people. The following passage makes the point clear. For the first time an Act professedly passed for the military purpose has been used to infringe the religious liberties of a section of His Majesty’s subjects in India, thus destroying the religious neutrality of the Government, and preventing the free enjoyment of its liberty by a religious society, gathered for purely religious purposes, under the protection of the religious liberty guaranteed to Indian subjects under the most Sacred Pledges.\(^{66}\)

B.P. Wadia represented Mrs. Besant at Amroati, and read out her message, criticizing the invasion of the Government on the religious liberty of the Theosophists. He even challenged Sir Benjamin Robertson to give the reason on which he based his order. Wadia wrote to Sir Benjamin Robertson, refuting the serious charge made against him. The letter was as follows.

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During my short stay at Amraoti I spoke several times, and Sir Benjamin has
not enlightened the deputation as to which particular pronouncement of mine he
takes exception to. There were three Theosophical meetings, at one of which I read
out Mrs. Besant’s message, and, if one makes use of one’s common sense, one can
assert that Sir Benjamin does not object to any of these. But perhaps common
sense is of little use when one is considering pronouncements of Government
officials! Then there was my Home Rule lecture under the Presidency of Kelkar a
lecture similar to those I have delivered in various places. If that is the lecture to
which Sir Benjamin applies his strong remarks then he is at liberty to prosecute me
for sedition. 67

Wadia made a political speech at Amraoti that was mostly against the
Government. he decided to deliver the same speech in a meeting at Madras,
arranged under the Presidentship of Mrs. Besant, to publish the next of the speech
in the form of a pamphlet, and challenged the Government to prosecute him for
sedition. The Madras Government issued an order prohibiting Mrs. Besant and
Wadia from taking part in the meeting under the Defence of India Act, and
forbidding them to publish the speech in any newspapers, and a notice was served
accordingly. 68

Criticizing the action of the Government, Mrs. Besant wrote in the
Commonweal:

Despite the Solemn Royal Pledge, the Local Government of the Centrla
provinces and Chief Commissioner of Berar think to prevent me, the

President of the Theosophical Society, from presiding over a Federation meeting of that Society, and speaking on purely religious subjects, thus trampling on the orders of their sovereign, breaking the pledge given by the crown and dishonoring the Royal signature of Queen Victoria, the Great and Good.\textsuperscript{69}

She made it clear that she had never introduced political work or made an announcement in a Theosophical meeting and concluded her article with the following comment.

Already my own popularity has gone up by leaps and bounds, and every new severity in geometrical progression, doing far more to increase my strength in the country than I could do for myself, for I can only each the educated people, while these severities make me beloved in all the villages by the dual Chief Commissioner of the Central provinces and Berar for the help given to the home Rule propaganda by the attack on the religious liberty of Theosophists. It will bring many more members to the Society, and I hope to hear that my absence from Amraoti has brought many more members to the Home Rule League than my presence could possibly have done. That will be the best answer to Sir Benjamin Robertson’s attack on religious liberty.\textsuperscript{70}

In order to protest against this action of the Government of the Central province, a protest meeting was held at Allahabad on 12 November 1916 under the leadership of Pandit Motilal Nehru. Almost all the leading Hindu politicians and the Home Rule members of Allahabad attended the meeting. Motilal, a close


friend of Besant, said in one of his lectures: “The admission of India to the Imperial conference is timely, and it will be heartily welcomed by the dominions”.  

Her externment was even questioned in the Central Provincial Legislative Council. Up to 1916, Mrs. Besant had kept the Theosophical Society separate from politics. But in 1916, she informed the Society that “it is the desire of the Lord, conveyed through her, that Theosophists should join politics”.  

Indirectly she told the Theosophists that the ‘Master’ definitely wished them to take up political work in their capacity as Theosophists. She played very cleverly because “she knows quite well that Theosophy for all practical purposes is Besantism”.  

The Lucknow Congress of 1916 prepared the scheme of Self-Government for India and decided to support her movement. The followers of Tilak arranged a special train known as the ‘Home Rule Special’ to carry the delegates from western India to Lucknow. Arundale asked every member of the League to attend the Congress session as delegates. His aim was to flood the Congress with Home Rulers. After the Lucknow Congress session, a joint meeting of the two Home rule Leagues was held on the same stage. Influenced by the spirit of the resolution of the Lucknow Congress, Mrs. Besant carried out a continuous campaign for Home Rule from January to June 1917. Meetings were held throughout the country, apart from publishing several articles. Andhra Patrika expressed that “Home Rule has done in four months what the Congress had been able to do in

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thirty years, and that devotion, singleness of purpose is the chief means to gain
the end in view”. Leaders of both the Home Rule Leagues attended this meeting,
prominently Mrs. Besant, Tilak, Khaparde, Pal, Arundale, Telang, Belvi and
Karandikar.

**The Congress Passes the Resolution for Swaraj**

A new chapter in the history of the Congress opened in 1916, with Mrs.
Besant as its most popular and dominating leader. The Lucknow session of the
Congress was of great importance mainly because of two reasons, one being the
re-entry of the extremists and the other, the friendly relationship between the two
great communities, the Hindus and the Muslims. Tilak and Motilal Ghose, who
got separated from the Congress at Surat in 1907, also attended its session. In the
meeting Mrs. Besant said: “She (India) is a coloured people, she is not colourless,
and colourless people have the right of domination over them as coloured
people”. She also requested both the Hindu and Muslim members to make
demands for Home Rule to the Government. To the Hindus and Muslims, once
she said: “I plead to you, Hindus and Muslims of the Congress and men of the
League, to join a common cry. One is the Motherland, One is the Nation! Two
nations cannot co-exist on the same soil. We cannot have a Hindu nation and a
Musalmam nation in India. We must have one Indian Nation from the Himalayas
to cape Comorin, from Bengal to Kathiawar”. At Lucknow, the Hindu-Muslim
leaders unanimously adopted an agreement known as the Lucknow Pact, which

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75 Ibid., p.325.
formed the basis of the resolution on Self-Government. In the annual session of the Congress, the United Congress told the Government its opinion “that the time has come when His Majesty the King Emperor should be pleased to issue a proclamation announcing that it is the aim and intention of British policy to confer Self-Government on India at an early date”.\textsuperscript{77} By her dynamic personality she made Self-Government the main objective of Indian politics. In this field, an equally forceful and determined person, namely Tilak, ably assisted her.

Influenced by Mrs. Besant, the 1916 Congress session passed the following resolution on Swaraj: “This Congress demands that a definite step should be taken towards Self-Government by granting the reforms contained in the scheme prepared by the All-India Congress Committee is consultation with the Reforms Committee appointed by the All-India Moslem League”.\textsuperscript{78} Tilak considered the passing of the resolution of Swaraj to be an act of historic importance.\textsuperscript{79} The Kesari observed that on Friday, 29 December 1916, on the banks of the river Gomati, the standard of Indian Swaraj was unfurled. The Congress of 1916 declared that Home Rule was the immediate necessity.

President Ambika Charan Majumdar, greatly influenced by Mrs. Besant, demanded ‘Representative Government’ for India. He said: “Call it Home Rule, call it Self-Rule, call it Swaraj, call it Self-Government, it is all one and the same

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\item \textsuperscript{77} Home, (Pol.) (A), Mar. 1918, No.247 & KW, p.30, NAI.
\item \textsuperscript{78} Ibid. p.38.
\item \textsuperscript{79} ‘Andhra Patrika’, 10 June, Madras, 1917, p.7.
\end{itemize}
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thing; it is representative Government”.

The Congress of 1916 was described as a Home Rule congress by many because of the enthusiastic presence of the large number of Home Rule delegates.

Towards the end of 1916, Tilak and Mrs. Besant visited many parts of India and they established a large number of Home Rule League branches. In police reports these visits were referred to as triumphant tours’. Even leaders belonging to the moderate party attended these meetings.

For the attainment of Swaraj, Mrs. Besant also formulated a Pledge known as the ‘Stalwart Pledge’. Indians who took the pledge “agreed to discountenance divisions based on community or caste, colour, creed, race or sex; to honour women and recognize equality of sex and to protest against ostracism of widows who chose to re-marry; to treat the so-called depressed classes-the untouchables-as equals”.

Besant influenced the Kumar Maharaj of Vizianagaram and the Raja of Ramnad. They helped the Madras Londaholder’s Association when Montagu visited Madras in December 1917. The Zamorin of Calicut was drawn into the Home Rule agitation by his relatives, particularly by lawyer K.P. Raman Menon. Lord Govindoss was a founding Vice-President of the Home Rule League of the Madras Presidency Association.

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81 Annie Besant, *Dr. Besant’s Clarion call to the India of Today*, Madras, 1943, p.525.
The Work of the Theosophical Society and New India under Surveillance

The year 1917 was the busiest period in the political career of Mrs. Besant. In January 1917, the Madras Government made inquiries regarding the work of the Theosophical Society, and found its machinery being used by Mrs. Besant to achieve her political aims. In the letter written to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Madras, the personal Assistant to the Deputy Inspector General of Police, Railways, and Criminal Investigation Department, Madras, made it clear that the Theosophical Lodges were being used as the centres of the local agitation for Home Rule by her followers in many places, and that even Mrs. Besant advised her followers to join the Home Rule Movement. The Government, fully realizing the danger behind her political activities, prohibited Mrs. Besant from attending any political meetings or speaking or publishing anything by an order. Lord Pentland, the Governor declared that her attendance would be “prejudicial to the public Safety”.\textsuperscript{82} In another report, the Theosophical Society had been hailed as one of the agents in the Revival of Hinduism.\textsuperscript{83}

Most of her ideas about Home Rule made initial appearance in New India. It also covered several incidents and themes relating to Home Rule. Her writings influenced the masses positively and the Government negatively. The enraged Government turned against the paper. The articles made it clear that the Government was following the same old policies of former statesmen like Macaulay, Chamberlain and Curzon. Now the Government decided to destroy the

\textsuperscript{82} G. A. Natesan, \textit{The Indian National Congress}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} edition, Madras, 1917, p.229.

power of this paper, because this movement naturally became a headache to the bureaucracy.

Many of Mrs. Besant’s articles in New India fanned the flames of Home Rule throughout the country. The force of her writings can be discerned in the words:

All the pledges given by the Government of India to procure its passing have been broken. India was bound in her sleep, but India is awake today. Why should she give any reason for her determination to rule herself? It is enough that she wills it. If she chooses to be self-governed, who has the right to say her nay? Only as long as the consents to her own bondage can that bondage be maintained. A nation does not petition for freedom. She proclaims it.\(^{84}\)

Mrs. Besant helped her followers to found newspapers and weeklies. M. Subbaraya Kamath, sub-editor of New India, founded a Tamil daily called Desabhaktan with a donation of three hundred rupees from Mrs. Besant. This paper became a powerful organ of the Congress and Home Rule movements, and always praised the activities of Tilak, Gandhi and Besant.

In an article named ‘Raksha Bandhan’, she criticized the Government for not giving the Indians the power to lift their right hand in order to protect their mothers, sisters and wives against the attacks of scoundrels and thieves. She also considered the War Loan a forced loan, and even said that the Government was more eager to get the material gain expected from India than the moral and political progress of the Indians. Mrs. Besant published an elaborate scheme of

\(^{84}\) Bal Gangadhar Tilak, op.cit., PP.239-249, Also see S.R. bakshi, op.cit., p.20.
National Education in the 5th June issue of New India. Criticizing the Government’s order of prohibiting the participation of students and schoolboys in political movements, she wrote: “As the Government Educational Service becomes more and more rigid and the deadening official pressure which crushes our patriotism and the sense of pride in the country becomes heavier, those who work for India’s freedom within the Empire are faced by a grim alternative... It is necessary to do something to save these unfortunate youths from becoming either slaves or rebels”.85 Mrs. Besant now made it clear through New India that all her agitation was constitutional. Government also prohibited Arundale and Wadia from attending and meeting or making any speeches. In her article ‘The Law of samitis’, she tried to secure the whole of the Congress organization for her own party. She feared that the Viceroy might declare all Home Rule League to be an unlawful association. So, she urged her followers to dissolve the Leagues and merge them with the Congress organization.

**Boys Scouts Movement**

Annie Besant founded the Indian Boy Scouts Association in 1917, “as a part of the fight for the right of Indians”86 and expected that the scout Movement might become part of the Imperial and World Organization after the War. In founding these movements she was ably assisted by Tarini P. Sinha and Sanjiva Kamath. In this movement, though the boys obeyed the Scout Law, they wore Indian turbans and sang Indian songs. The Scouts Association with its headquarters in London refused to give affiliation on the ground that the number

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85 ‘Modern Review’, vol.XXI Jan. madras, 1917, p.120.
86 Jamnadas Dwarkadas, Political Memoris, Bombay, 1969, p.69.
of British officers in her movement was insufficient for giving training to the Indians during the War.

With its motto, “Country first, self second; Be prepared,” the Scouts believed in the idea that a Scout is “a brother to every other Scout.” Its main aim was to promote discipline among students. Mrs. Besant tried to improve the moral character of the boys in a much more effective manner. Supporting the resolution moved by Rao Bahadur B.N. Sarma, regarding the Boy Scout Movement among Indian students, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya said:

It will teach him in the first instance obedience and loyalty to the King Emperor, respect for the law, obedience to his parents and teachers, and discipline. A discipline good for him not only in his schooldays, but also in all his life. Above all things, it will teach him to value that sense of honour, which makes a man an honourable man … Loyalty to the kind, loyalty to the country, obedience to parents, respect for the law, respect for authority, will be among the prominent lessons which will be taught to the boy scouts.

Mrs. Besant once advised the Scouts to paint a larger map of India on the walls of the Home Rule office, with the word, ‘Vande Mataram’ written in Sanskrit in the centre. The activities of the Boy Scouts attracted the students in the Madras Presidency. After the formation of the Boy Scouts, they became more

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87 Original Order in Josephine Ransom’s A Short History of the Thosophical Society, 1875-1937, Madras, 1938, p.422.
90 Home, (Edn.) (A), Sept. 1917, p.8, NAI.
patriotic and the students’ participation in the Home Rule Movement increased highly.

When the first scout troop was organized at the Madanapalli College, the Madras Government turned against Mrs. Besant. The Government banned the Indian Boy Scouts Association, dubbing it as an anti-British organization, and installed in its place a Government sponsored organization. But later, Lord Willingdon took the initiative to merge the two Indian movements, and formed the South Indian Boy Scouts Association in Madras. Impressed by the progress of the movement, Sir Robert Powell decided to give affiliation to the movements, and formed the South Indian Boy Scouts Association in Madras. Impressed by the progress of the movement, Sir Robert Powell decided to give affiliation to the movements, and appointed Mrs. Besant the Hon. Commissioner for India, and Arundale, one of the two Madras Provincial Commissioners. After this, Mrs. Besant and her Scouts Movement played an important role in the fight for India’s rights. Later, Sir Robert Powell awarded Mrs. Besant the rare distinction of the Silver Wolf Badge for her services to the Scout Movement in India.

**Students and Home Rule**

To give proper advice to the students, a student’s convention was held at Madras in January 1917 under the leadership of S. Subramaniya Ayyar, who requested the students to take part in the Home Rule Movement. The Movement became very popular among students as an impact of propaganda work. Sometime later, the students made their presence in the League as associates. The rules of

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the League required them only to attend study classes for academic discussions of a political nature. They regularly read the New India. Apart from that, their perusal of Besant’s pamphlets and attendance in Home Rule classes greatly influenced them. The students gathered in large numbers at her public meetings, and in one of her lecturers, she even declared that “if Home Rule propaganda does the harm of making our young men more patriotic, more courageous, more frank and less decile, less timid, and less emasculated, then all Indians will agree that the more such ‘harm’ comes to the young, the better”. On another occasion she pointed out that she had entered politics in order to ward off the youngsters from the evil influence of the anarchists.

Her teachings and writings reached the students beyond the bounds of the Madras presidency. Students from other parts of India also came under the influence of her oratory. This is evidenced by the fact that the schoolboys began to recite the last sentence in her article on the Tilak’s Security case. “The agony of the cross precedes the resurrection of India a Nation”. One student of the Madanapalle College wrote on the blackboard; “We do not ask for Home Rule, we demand it. The influence of Mrs. Besant upon the students was so great that she needed to give only a hint and the students completed the work with perfection. To point out one example, Mrs. Besant condemned the practice of separate reservation for Europeans and Indians. Taking the cue, the students of

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92 Home, (Edn.), (B) Nos:33-34, July 1917, NAI.
93 Annie Besant, The Besant Spirit, Vol.3, Madras, 1939, p.120.
94 Home, (Edn.), (B) Nos:33-34, July 1917, NAI.
Pachaiyappa’s College in the Madras city organized a procession on 27 July 1916, entered the railway station and damaged the railway property.\textsuperscript{95}

The shouting and hustling at police reporters in public meetings, the Government officials believed, were the after-effects of Mrs. Besant’s condemnation of the Central Intelligence Bureau, which she nicknamed ‘crush India Department’.\textsuperscript{96} To cite another example, in Trichinoploy, the police reporters were abused and hustled by the students on 1 December 1916.\textsuperscript{97} In short, the teachings of Mrs. Besant had a deep impact on the English – educated Indians.

**Government Order No.559**

In order to protect the students from falling a prey to the flattery of the agitators and to prevent them from attending Home Rule meetings, the Governor of Madras issued Government Order No.559, “in justice to the students and to their rights as students; in order to secure to them during their student life full opportunities for study, for their equipment for life and for the development and formation of character before entering upon their life’s work”.\textsuperscript{98}

The Government prepared a list of pamphlets of Mrs. Besant, used as a means of propaganda amongst the students, which included the following: India-A National India and the Empire, Self-Government for India, the Political Outlook, Separation of Jusicial and Executive Functions, The Future of Young India, East

\textsuperscript{95} Fortnightly Report, 1y Feb. 1917.

\textsuperscript{96} V. Sankaran Nair, *Role of Students in Freedom Movement*, New Delhi, 1990, p.49.

\textsuperscript{97} ‘New India’, 9 May Madras, 1917, p.309.

\textsuperscript{98} Home Rule files, No.3567-w-1, dated 16 Sept. 1916, p.39, TNA.
and West in India, The India Council, Under the Congress Flag, Home Rule (a series of articles from New India).99

The Government Order dated 1 May 1917 restricted undergraduate students from taking part in any public political association or “in any movement with which it is in the opinion of educational authorities, undesirable that persons in statu pupillari shall be associated”.100 These rules applied to colleges under Government management and only indirectly to other colleges. Lord Pentland issued this order to silence the students who dared to ask for self-government management and only indirectly to other colleges. Lord Pentland issued this order to silence the students who dared to ask for self-government. The Government also stopped recruiting students to the Defence Force”.101 The Government Order was issued at a time when the student world had given no provocation of any type. This order did for Madras, what the partition of Bengal did for Bengal. Mrs. Besant mercilessly criticized the G.O. To her, “the G.O. could throw into a state of angry rebellion all who were eager to hear a great Indian on a visit to his town”.102 She warned the Government of repercussion if it dared to check the rising tide of the Indian struggle for liberty. In prohibiting the students from taking part in politics, the Government, she said “deprived them of a right which their counterparts enjoyed elsewhere. This involved a serious infringement of

99 Forthightly Reports, 29 Sept. 1916
100 ‘New India’, 28 July, Madras, 1916, p.60
101 Home Rule Files 6, G.O.No.744, 7 June 1917, TNA.
their liberty". 103 The whole youth of a nation could not be permanently crushed, she said: “Russia tried to do it, with a ruthlessness and a thoroughness that can never be surpassed, and we see the result in a Revolution which is applauded by the civilized world”. 104 Annie Besant warned the Government that the young men of India had so learned to love their Motherland that no Government Order could eradicate such a love.

In the growing enthusiasm of the college students for Home Rule, Mrs. Besant foresaw the achievements of the Home Rule within a few years. The Government, she said,

Seems to be blind to the fact that the new self-respect of the students, the refusal to submit silently to words of abuse, means that Indian youth is high-spirited, not tame, and cannot be crushed into submission by threats and terrorism. These boys that are bullied today will tomorrow be men, resolute to win their freedom. 105

In one of her lectures she compared the English lads, who were encouraged to fight and die for their country, with the Indian youths who were denied such an opportunity to take any interest in their country:

103 The Governor’s Concluding speech at the Legislative Council meeting held on the 24 May 1917, TNA.

104 Home (Pol.), Sept, 1917, File 50, NAI.

105 Home, (Edn.), G.O.No.559, 1 May 1917, TNA.
Let every Indian, young and old, realise the difference between a young man born in England and one born in India, and recognize the fact that one country is self-governing, while the other is under foreign autocracy.\(^{106}\)

She warned the Government that the adventurous spirit and injured feelings, and the curbed freedom of the students, would lead them into dangerous channels of anarchical crimes. In her opinion, no G.O. could prevent students from participating in politics because they were Indians living in Indian houses. So the Government was not to isolate them. The education experts viewed that the Government Order 559 was unworkable. They felt that it was unnecessary and even detrimental to the real interests of students. The strong opinion of the public was that the G.O. was buried with its parents singing the funeral song over it. After the issuing of the G.O. Mrs. Besant sent out a notice to many students whose college fees she had been paying, telling them to her inability to continue any scholarships, as she considered “that young men are deprived, in the colleges that obey that order, of an essential part of their education, and are likely to grow into bad citizens, useless to the country”.\(^{107}\)

Like Mrs. Besant, G.S. Arundale, an educationist, also believed in Constitutional agitation. His condemnation of everything emanating from a European source had irritated the Home Department. They viewed that this had already created a dangerous state of unrest among students in Madras city. Arundale favoured teaching the spirit of patriotism in schools and colleges. he

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\(^{106}\) ‘New India’, 17 May Madras, 1917, p.90.

\(^{107}\) Ibid., 11 May Madras, 1917, p.91.
considered that the schools and colleges should be the miniatures of India.\textsuperscript{108} Through his columns entitled ‘weekly chats’ in new India, Arundale was devoted to infuse the spirit of patriotism among the youths. A student’s convention, organized by the students of Trichinopoly, on 4 and 5 January 1918, was presided over by Arundale who praised the students for their active participation in the movement. In an article contributed to New India, Arudale remarked: “It is said that the battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton. The triumph of Home Rule is being won in students’ conventions”.\textsuperscript{109}

Arundale upheld Home Rule as the only answer for the disturbing state of affairs in the educational institutions. He intentionally used the term ‘alarming’ because while the educational authorities allowed the Indian youths to grow up with patriotism burning in their hearts, they refused to allow its expression either with the lips or in action.\textsuperscript{110} He cautioned the Government from denying the student his birthright:

We must give him free access to his Motherland, and no longer close to him the doors by which she is approached. We must give him the right to serve her, and above all the right to defend her.\textsuperscript{111}

Arundale advocated the cause of Indians, who were keen for Home Rule, but were afraid to say so because in early childhood, when bravery and patriotism had not formed parts of their educational system. The Government paid no attention

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., 15 May Madras, 1917, p.94.

\textsuperscript{109} Ibid., 11 May Madras, 1917, p.99.

\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., 15 May Madras, 1917, p.107.

\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., 10 May Madras, 1917, p.112.
towards the demands of the students. Arundale quipped: “Indian students asked for break and received a stone”.

Ignoring the Governing Order, the students actively participated in political agitation, causing disturbances in places such as Guntur, Coimbatore, Kumbakonam, Machilipatam and Madanapalli. They openly defied the orders and attended political meetings. Some of them took a vow to attend public meetings, and some others submitted resolutions rejecting the Government Order, to the D.P.I. The Basel Mission College students of Calicut sent memorials to the Government. In Private classes the students met and studied the political teachings of the leaders. This proved true Besant’s claim that “no Government Order can prevent the students from being moved by the wave of the political life which is now passing over India”. The decision of the youths not to attend any war loan meeting, or other functions of a similar kind, turned the war loans a poor show, which was termed to be the result of the Governor’s reactionary policy.

Response of the Papers:

The Madras Mail wished the parents and guardians to welcome the order as it only defined more clearly the Risely circular [the early Government Order] and contained nothing new, while Non-Brahman and Kerala Patrika supported the Government Order. The Justice of 10 May 1917 commented that the Government Order was like “shutting the stable door after the horse had been stolen”.

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112 Ibid., 2 June Madras, 1917, p.114.

113 The Hindu, 15 Sept. 1916.

114 Fortnightly Report, 17 January 1918.
Indian considered the Government Order “as a nail in the coffin of the existing education”.  

Many Madras leaders protested against the Government Order. C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar presented a resolution at Cudalore emphatically protesting against the Government Order “in so far as it deals with the attendance of undergraduates in colleges at political meetings and against the arbitrary discretion vested in heads of colleges and schools to pronounce on the character of speakers at the public meetings”.  

Supporting the resolution, Mrs. Besant said that she did not believe that “it is a wholesome thing to keep young men in a condition of indifference as to the burning questions of the time. They hear them discussed at home and you cannot gag the mouths of loder men even if you try to gag the mouths of those who speak to students”.  

She pointed out that, in other countries, students were encouraged to do a lot of things to exercise, to discuss, to debate and to take interest in public questions, as these activities made their minds more strong and healthy. She advocated that the Indian students should also be allowed to do all these, so as to enable them to take their part as men of the world when they left college.

Criticizing the Government Order, the Hon’ble Mrs. Narasimha Ayyar pointed out that “it was their own sons and wards who were forbidden to attend political meetings at which their own fathers and guardians were speaking that they were cut off from all contact with the greatest men of their own country, and

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were told to look on them as dangerous... Their elders, the politics leaders of the land, would have no influence over them, and they would be unable to guide them”. 118 Professor Ramandatha Ayar, President of the Educational Conference of Teachers at Cuddalore, criticized the Government for keeping the students away from the theoretical side of politics. Mrs. Srinivasa Sastri also expressed his views on similar lines. The Government Circular created a feeling of discontent among the students, and it forced them to get knowledge of the country from unreliable sources. The young men, prevented from associating with any political movements, were in effect thrown out into the hands of the revolutionaries. The Circular, it was feared, “will create a sense of despair in a patriotic young man; he will not be led into right channels of service by movements like the Home Rule League”. 119

**Towards National Education**

The Government’s circular about students and politics roused Annie Besant to initiate practical steps brought about the scheme of National Education to the fore. The greatest feature of her scheme of education was that it should be independent of governmental control, and in her opinion, it was only possible when it was also not dependent on governmental assistance.

In Besant’s opinion, National Education must live in an atmosphere of proud and glowing patriotism. She defined National Education as follows:

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118 Ibid., 17 May Madras, 1917, p.145.

It must be controlled by Indians shaped by Indians, carried on by Indians. It must hold up Indian ideals of devotion, wisdom and morality, and must be permeated by the Indian religious spirit rather than fed on the letter of the creeds.\footnote{\textit{New India}, 17 May Madras, 1917, p.239.}

It must also meet the National temperament at every point, and develop the National character.

Her ideas of National Education, which remained for a long time as an ideal, gained the attention of many Indian leaders like Sir Rash behari Bose, Gandhi, Arobindo Ghose, Srijut Moti Lal Ghose (editor, Amrita Bezar Patrika), Motilal Nehru, etc. Arobindo Ghose considered National Education next to Self-Government. Srijut Moti Lal Ghose considered that “we cannot expect to attain Home Rule until our educational system is put under our own control”\footnote{Ibid., 12 May Madras, 1917, p.239.} Motilal Nehru believed that the National Education would make Indians capable of worthily discharging their coming national responsibilities.

To Honourable B.V. Narasimhaier, National Education looked like a cloud not bigger than a man’s hand, that would, however, spread and cover the entire length and breadth of the country in a very short time, bestowing blessings.\footnote{Ibid., p.252.} Tilak considered National Education a branch or a means to the attainment of self-government. In an article, Mrs. Besant wrote:

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‘New India’, 17 May Madras, 1917, p.239.
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Ibid., 12 May Madras, 1917, p.239.
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Ibid., p.252.
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As the Government Educational Service becomes more and more rigid and the deadening official pressure which crushes out patriotism and the sense of pride in the country becomes heavier, those who work for India’s freedom within the Empire are faced by a grim alternative … It is necessary to do something to save these unfortunate youths from becoming either slaves or rebels.¹²³

Soon, the elaborate scheme of National Education began to spread, and she began to collect funds for starting a National College in Madras. Mrs. Besant considered the national education movement not a political device to arrest the functioning of the British Government. It was a social measure to instill in the youth the spirit of the motherland and was requirement to make the Indians fit for Home Rule.

After the issue of the Government Order, Mrs. Besant sent a letter to a number of well-known people, seeking their help for the formation of the Board of National Education, to frame the curriculum and to handle the tasks of appointment of examiners, conduct of examinations and issue of diplomas. the Board of National Education was to establish universities, colleges and schools under national control and to start institutions of research, and training colleges in commerce, medicine, industry, etc. Drill, physical exercises, games, fencing, Indian swordplay and the sciences of self-defence were to form part of the curriculum. Boy Scouts cadets must be trained. In the national scheme, she paid special attention to the education of girls, whom she wanted to convert into noble women of the Indian type, devoted wives and wise mothers. In her opinion, her Colleges, though independent of Government, must excel Government Colleges in

¹²³ Ibid., p.263.
efficiency. Her latter was sent to 74 persons. Out of them 41 readily accepted her idea. One declined and another one promised to help and support he, but had not decided to join the Board.

Her concept of National Education deepened the youth’s imagination, sharpened their outlook and increased their desire to serve the country. She formed the national educational movement not as a political tool to arrest the working of the Government, but as a social measure. The first National University was established at Mandanpalli, with Sir Rabindranath Tagore as the Chancellor. Sir Subramanya Iyer acted as the pro-Chancellor; Justice Sadasiva Ayyar was appointed Acted Vice-Chancellor, and G.S. Arundale the Registrar. Madanapalli became the centre for arts and agriculture, Bengal for technology, Bombay for commerce, and Benares for the training of women teachers.

The Theosophical Fraternity in Education founded at Adyar in 1917, with Arundale as its President and Mrs. Besant as the Patron, was to give inspiration in the educational field. In December 1921 the Hindu University conferred on Mrs. Besant the Degree of Doctor of Letters, in grateful recognition of her “invaluable co-operation in establishing the University”. In 1922, Dr. H.H. Cousins and others started a new venture called the Brahmavidyasharma. In 1925, the World University Association was inaugurated with Dr. J. Emile Marcault as its Director. The work started by Mrs. Besant continued even after her death in 1933. In 1934,

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125 G.S. Arundale, National Education, A symposium, Message and Opinions of some Leading Indians, Madras, 1918, p.18, TNA.
the Besant Memorial High School was founded at Adyar in remembrance of her great services to education.

The educational movements during the Home Rule days played a very important role in the history of Indian freedom movement. The leaders of this movement never accepted the boycott of western educational institutions. Mrs. Besant never considered educational movements a political tool to suspend the work of the British Government. At the same time, she used these movements to infuse the feeling of nationalism and freedom in the minds of the Indian youth. In her opinion, such movements were essential for making the students fit for Home Rule.

In early 1917, she carried out a vigorous campaign for Self-Government and toured throughout the country, conducting many meetings. She and her lieutenant, Arundale, temporarily shifted their personal activities to Northern India on 1 January 1917. Apart from writing many articles she issued pamphlets both in English and in the local languages. In these pamphlets, she criticized the Government for its administration, foreign policy in regard to home charges, policy of recruitment, destruction of industries, education, and the land revenue policy. She wrote, column after column in her papers, about the Indian demand for Home Rule.

Mrs. Besant’s political knowledge was so great that after hearing her lecture, Sir Seshadri Ayyar called her ‘a Sharada, a Gargi and a Meitreyi’. Arundale, in his article titled Manaeest Veritas declared his firm intention to oppose the

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126 Ibid., p.8.
resistance to the executive action threatened against Home Rulers. In one of Besant’s articles, she asked her followers to form a Prayer Union and direct their prayers to the abolition of the Press Act and the modification of the Defence of India Act. She even prepared a prayer entitled ‘God helps those who help themselves’, and asked her followers to add the same to their daily prayers. The daily prayer ran as follows.

Most High God, who rulest the kingdoms of men, we pray Thee—as our Rulers do not heed our protests—that thou wilt so change their hearts that they may refrain from confiscations and internments, that they may punish none without open trial, conviction, and sentence, and that they repeal the Press Act, and restrict the Defence of India Act to the punishment of treason and rioting, so that these may no longer be turned to the injury of loyal subjects of Thy servant, the King-Emperor.127

She desired that this prayer should be translated into all the vernaculars and circulated everywhere. It formed part of every puja and worship. She asked her followers to revive the old Swadeshi vow if her paper was confiscated and she was interned. In her opinion, “Prayer and Swadeshi are both absolutely legal, and they are also peaceable means of protesting against the harsh measures of the Government.” Her Swadeshi vow ran as follows.

Whereas the Press Act and the Defence of India Act are being used to cripple the liberty of the Indian Press, and to deprive persons of their liberty against whom no evidence exists of disloyalty or of intent to resort to violence; and Whereas it is

127 Ibid., p.13.
necessary to draw the attention of the British public to the serious discontent arising from the widespread and illegitimate use of these measures, the legality of which is, moreover doubtful, as being beyond the power of the Supreme Government of India to enact; and Whereas the Supreme and Local Governments are utterly indifferent to Indian opinion, as proclaimed in hundreds of meetings and articles in Indian papers, it is therefore necessary to take such peaceable but effective action as is open to us.

It is hereby resolved that:

Invoking the blessing of Almighty God, and making appeal to His Justice, for the purpose of winning for ourselves and for unborn generations the elementary rights of freedom of person and security of property until deprived of them by judicial sentence after open trial, we make the solemn vow to purchase home-made goods in preference to foreign ones even at a sacrifice. And may almighty God give us strength of will to carry out this our solemn vow until these rights be restored to the Indian Nation.  

She emphasized in her article ‘To My Brothers and Sisters’, that “only by winning Home Rule can India secure her material prosperity, only thus can she save what is left of her trade, her industries and her agriculture, improve them and reap the rights of her own labour”. She added, “I am old, but I believe that I shall see India win Home Rule before I die. If I have helped even so little to the

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129 Ibid., 6 June, Madras 1917, p.169.
realization of that glorious hope, I am more than satisfied” 130. In the same article she made it clear that she worked vigorously for Home Rule only to save India from becoming a nation of coolies. She clarified that she would happily suffer in her campaign of achieving Self-Government, which alone would secure prosperity to India. She continued her work without any fear.

The above account of Mrs. Besant’s work reveals that she did a lot to infuse the spirit of nationalism, patriotism and freedom in the minds of the youth. It was she who made the Indian youth patriotic. She became so popular among the students that they gathered in large numbers at the meetings.

The British bureaucracy which was till then engaged in suppressing terrorist and extremist movements, was forced to gear up to face a situation created by a ‘constitutional and law-abiding agitation’. Platforms, libraries, street processions turned to be the venues from where the constitutional means of agitation began to be transmitted to the people by means of newspapers, literature, pamphlets and display of placards and flags. The intermittent educative propaganda demanding Home Rule caused the tradition of the Indian National Congress in meeting periodically to pass resolutions, to pass into oblivion. The meetings at various levels made the message of Home Rule reach every nook and corner of India rapidly and the British bureaucracy was caught unawares in the waves of a high-level political current.

130 Josephine Ransom, op.cit., p.446.
REPERCUSSIONS OF GOVERNMENT REPRESSSION

Even before the launching of the Home Rule League, the Madras Government branded Mrs. Besant’s powerful speech as ‘mischievous’, and began to watch her activities with doubt and suspicion. They feared that she was advocating violence and trying to arouse an agitation that could culminate in bloodshed, and prove dangerous to their stability. So they addressed the Indian Government to take some strong action against her. Sir Harold Stuart, a member of the Executive Council, even requested the Government to intern her in some suitable place and prohibit her from publishing any political articles. The purpose behind their crusade was to stop the tide of national awareness, which was being taken to the masses by political workers all over the country.

Sir Michael O’ Dyer and Commissioner Malcolm Hailey were dead against Mrs. Besant’s Home Rule movement. Mrs. Besant, who had a very low opinion about them, said that “their names would go down in history with the enemies of India” and added that “they are the salt of India, they trampled her right under foot.” She called them “fit yoke fellows”. Lore Pentland, the Governor of Madras, was also against her movement. Her decided to take serious legal action against the supporters of the home Rule movement and declared the League illegal.

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132 RajKumar, Annie Besant’s Rise to Power in Indian Politics; 1914-1917, New Delhi, 1981, p.121.
The British treated her demands with contempt and said: “You are not fit to govern yourselves because you cannot defend yourself”. Mrs. Besant said: “It is only Home Rule that will enable us to defend ourselves for until we have Home Rule we cannot be armed as we should be”.

Plans to arrest Mrs. Besant or to remove her from the Indian political scenario were begun in 1915. Lord Pentland went to the extent of requesting Lord Hardinage, the Viceroy, in 1915, that Mrs. Besant should be deported to England till the end of the War. His letter read: “Warnings are closely wasted on Mrs. Besant and I think the time has come to put an end to her mischievous writings and public utterances, more of which are promised”. A reluctant Viceroy replied.

Mrs. Besant’s Home Rule League is foolish and wild and I doubt whether even the National Congress will adopt it. All the calumnious attacks on the British Government, which formed the stock in trade of the extremist orators in 1907 to 1910, are fetched out again and displayed before immature students. I am not in favour of packing off the lady to Europe, but I think that she might now be warned in formal fashion.

In a press interview, a non-official member of the imperial legislative council shared this view of the Viceroy. He requested the Government to allow Mrs. Besant to go on with her work. In his opinion, “If she is exposed to

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134 Ibid., P.25.
135 Home, (Pol.) (A), Confl., No.166-168, Nov. 1915, TNA.
suffering in that cause, thousands of Indians who have not been able to see eye to eye with her in all things will think if their duty to stand by her and to follow her”. The Government considered the passing of the resolution on Self-Government by the Congress and the Muslim League during the Congress week of 1916, as dangerous to their present position and caused the Government to initiate a policy of repression.

India’s political aspirations were taking a definite shape, and more active and resourceful leaders started an extensive educative propaganda for achieving their aim. The British Government banned patriotic feelings of the Indians as sedition and their love of liberty as a crime, and decided to adopt a plan to check the growing strength of Indian nationalism. They sent a circular to all the provincial heads asking them to check the spurt of nationalism and to repress the movement in their respective areas. The provincial heads were also asked to send reports to the Government against every kind of national work. Thus, the Government started a crusade against the national activities of the Indian leaders, especially of Mrs. Besant. In Madras, Mrs. Besant was threatened by Lord Pentland. In one of his interviews with Besant, he even threatened her, saying: “You must understand, Mrs. Besant, that we shall stop all your activities.” But she continued her work for Home Rule and informed him that she would continue the movement as she felt Home Rule was necessary for the maintenance of the Empire.

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She considered the British rule ‘un-British’ as they were unsympathetic towards the rising Indian aspirations. She wrote an open letter to the people, asking them to keep the Home Rule flag fluttering under any circumstances and went to see the Governor of Madras.\footnote{T.V. Paravate, \textit{Bal Gangadhar Tilak}, Bombay, 1959, p.367.} Lord Pentland, who disliked this letter, took action against her under the Defence of India Act. He forced her to stop all her Home Rule activities. He even requested her to leave for England and to stay there as long as the War lasted. Refusing to pay any heed to him, she said that she was only implementing the Lucknow Congress resolution, which he was not against. Even then the Governor insisted on her stopping all her political activities, whether lawful or unlawful. Angry at this, she stopped the dialogue with the Governor, saying that it was no use continuing such conversation. Many papers reported this development. The Indians disliked the attitude of the Governor. Tilak requested the Indians to support the cause of Home Rule. A number of meetings, held in important centres as a protest against the attitude of the Governor, paved the way for the enrolment of thousands of people as members of the Home Rule League.

The Government excluded Mrs. Besant from the Bombay Presidency on 29 June 1916. Her followers who protested against this decision felt that gagging her mouth and breaking her pen would only mean that constitutional agitation in India was fated to fail and strengthen the hands of the anarchists. In order to pacify her followers, she advised Theosophical Lodges not to pass any resolution with regard to her exclusion from the Bombay Presidency. A large number of Fellows being Government servants, any such resolution passed by a Lodge might be branded as
unconstitutional.\textsuperscript{141} To the members of the Society who were ready to help her in political matters, she said that the Society, as a religious body, had no right to support her in any political, social, educational and doctrinal question. Undeterred, she continued her activities. Large securities were demanded from the press of Besant, and the printing works of New India.

Some British officials criticized the Order of Prohibition passed by the Bombay Government. Snowden asked Chamberlain whether Mrs. Besant had been prohibited from entering the Bombay Presidency under the Defence of India Act. He also enquired about the reasons for it. In answer, Chamberlain replied that the Government of Bombay, with the approval of the Government of India, had issued the order of prohibition. He said that a prohibition against a person entering a specified area was within the power of the local Government, if they considered that the person was likely to act in a manner prejudicial to the public safety, and so it was not essential to specify reasons.

Now, the Government felt it necessary to get full information about the work of the Home Rule League. Sir, Harold Stuart, member-in-charge of Home and Judicial Affairs in the executive Council, asked District Collector to send detailed reports about the working of the Leagues Indian patriot reported that the Government had asked the police of Sembiam station to find out the number of Home Rulers and that they had even interviewed Mrs. Ranganathan Nayudu, Union Chairman of Sembiam.\textsuperscript{142}


\textsuperscript{142} ‘Indian Patriot’, 23 June Madras, 1916, p.92.
Aggravated by the vigorous activities of Besant and the increasing popularity of the League, Madras Government framed “sufficient reasons to move against her” and warned her to desist from her course of action.\textsuperscript{143} The Government raised certain objections against the growth of Home Rule. The first was the comparative illiteracy of the Indians and the incapacity of the educated men to represent the masses. So the Government requested the Indians to educate themselves before demanding Parliamentary institutions. To this, the Home Rulers replied that these educated few were after all more of the people than any foreigner could hope to be. Answering this objection, Mrs. Besant said that these educated few were the products of the educated majority who hailed from the families of the peasants and the artisans, speaking the same language, following the same religion and observing the same customs in addition to an inside knowledge of the conditions which no foreigner could ever obtain or incorporate.\textsuperscript{144} The critics of Home Rule said that this country would fall a prey to some powerful neighbor if the British granted Home Rule to Indians.

The Government adopted a policy of active discouragement and repression and issued a circular prohibiting students of schools and colleges from attending Home Rule meetings. Later, they were prohibited from attending political meetings of any kind and from joining any political association. Instructions were given to the Governors to issue strong warnings in their speeches against Home Rule. Tilak had observed that the Government was fully aware of the fact that if a nation was to prosper, it was through an active young generation and the wave of

\textsuperscript{143} Home, (Pol.), (A), Procs. No.36-53, Oct.1916, TNA.

\textsuperscript{144} Annie Besant, \textit{The Home Rule League Demand}, Madras, 1917,pp.24-25.
patriotism had struck the students most.\textsuperscript{145} Andhra Patrika commented that the unnecessary order of the Government deprived the students even of the very little freedom that the education authorities had allowed them.\textsuperscript{146} In short, the Government tried to fan the flames of communalism in the Madras Presidency.

The Government considered Mrs. Besant’s Home Rule agitation to be a ‘red hot agitation’\textsuperscript{147} and decided to suppress her power by imposing a security on her paper. This only invited protests from many Indian leaders and the press, and helped the spread of the agitation for Home Rule to the remotest areas of the country. The Indian sky was echoing with the slogan ‘Home Rule’. In the opinion of Ram Gopal, the Government turned against her because they feared her influence.

The collector of Chingleput wrote to the Government that Hindu Nesan had informed him that the theosophical Lodges served as the distributing centres for Home Rule literature and pointed out that A.G. BalaKrishna Iyer, President of the Theosophical Lodge at Kumbakonam, and T. Sadasiva Rao, Secretary of the Theosophical Lodge at Tanjore, were the agents of the Home Rule literature. He even prepared a list of the members of the editorial board of the All India Self-Government propaganda fund.\textsuperscript{148} On 17 November 1916, the Acting Secretary to the Government of Madras informed the Home Secretary, Government of India, about the continuance of the activities of the Home Rule League. Special Home

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\item Bipan Chandra, \textit{India’s Struggle for Independence}, (1857-1947), New Delhi, 1988, p.167.
\item ‘Andhra Patrika’, 8 May, Madras, 1917, p.70.
\item B.S. Baliga, Madras District Gazetteer, Coimbatore, 1996, p.112.
\end{thebibliography}
Rule classes were held twice a week in the hall of the Young Men’s Indian Association, Madras. The first meetings, taken by a member of the Theosophical Society under the presidency of Mrs. Besant, had an attendance of about 70 to 120 participants. Arundale was the organizing secretary and his influence was found undoubtedly on the increase. His name was mooted as the possible political successor to Mrs. Besant.

More attention was paid to the student classes. The students and school boys read New India regularly, studied Mrs. Besant’s political pamphlets and attended Home Rule classes and lectures that laid special stress on the great part which the youths of the day had to play in the future of India. “The bad effect which this has on discipline extends outside Madras; it has been specially noticed at St. Joseph’s College, Trichinopoly and the College at Coimbatore, where notices inviting the readers to ‘Kill the English’ and to ‘worship Mrs. Besant’ were recently found posted up on the College gates”\textsuperscript{149}. The Government officials recorded some of the speeches and articles of Mrs. Besant. Most of them turned against her for fear that the Home Rule movement might greatly weaken the speedy working of the various Departments during the period of the War.

His Excellency Lord Willingdom was the first to turn his face against the Home Rule propaganda during the War period. He strove to suppress the power of Tilak, but failed because the Bombay High Court sided with Tilak. He made a futile request to the people not to lend their cars to his political speeches or to attend any political meetings. They went on with their propaganda work. Most of the officers turned against Home Rule. Some tried to declare Home Rule League

\textsuperscript{149} Home (Pol.), Deposit, File 42, Jan.1917, TNA.
illegal. Some others issued orders to certain persons not to speak or write on political subjects.

The anti-indenture campaign that Mrs. Besant started in Madras became very popular in early 1917.\textsuperscript{150} In one of her lectures in the anti-indenture League, she declared that she would say definitely and clearly to the Viceroy that indentured labour must stop, by his own action. She held him responsible for its continuance and said that India would not tolerate him for the misery of the men and for the dishonor of the women.\textsuperscript{151} This was not to the liking of the Government, and it served as one of the main causes for her internment. Lord Pentland issued warnings to Mrs. Besant, and forced her to stop her activities. But she informed him: “Since she felt Home Rule was necessary for the maintenance of the Empire it was therefore not possible to change or modify the tone of New India”\textsuperscript{152}. In 1917, an attempt was also made by G.A. Natesan to translate and circulate the political pamphlets of Mrs. Besant in all the vernacular languages of the Madras Presidency. It held the administration responsible for the damage to the reputation of the prevailing state of affairs\textsuperscript{153}.

Realising the intensity of the movement, the Home Member of the Government of India asked the British Government, in a confidential report dated 17 January 1917, to introduce certain reforms in favour of the moderates. He

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Pattabhi Sitaramayya, \textit{The History of the Indian National Congress (1885-1935)} New Delhi, 1969, p.197.
\item ‘New India’, 9 May, Madras, 1917, p.60.
\item Manmohan Kaur, \textit{Women in India’s Freedom Struggle}, New Delhi, 1985, p.125.
\item Home Rule Files 6, 7 June 1917, G.O.No.744, TNA. Also see Home, (Pub.), 23 June 1917, File No.836, TNA.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
severely commented about Mrs. Besant that she was “influenced by the passionate desire of a vain old lady to be a leader of movements”, and Tilak, by the “venom of hatred against everything British”\textsuperscript{154}. Sensing the success of her activities, the Government turned against Mrs. Besant, much against the criticism of the Indian leaders. But these repressive measures enhanced the desire among the people to win Home Rule. In one of her articles, she wrote that the more the Government tried to strike her, the more determined India would become to win freedom from autocracy.

Lord Pentland considered the Home Rule Leagues to be revolutionary bodies. He said “If, as stated far and wide, Home Rule means nothing else than at a very early date the placing of the Executive Government in all the departments under the direct and full control of Legislative Councils, containing a large majority of elected members, then I feel sure that I carry you with me when I say that among Indians acquainted with public affairs nobody, having any time or sense of responsibility, consider it or will declare it within the range of practical politics”\textsuperscript{155}. Lord Pentland practically took the policies of the Congress and the Muslim league, and declared: “Nobody with any true sense of responsibility thinks it within the range of practical politics”\textsuperscript{156}. He considered that most of the educated Indians were irresponsible and not well experienced, and criticized the Indian demand for Home Rule while the British were engaged in a war. He warned the people against the demands of Home Rule and he even uttered a threat,

\textsuperscript{154} S.R. Bakshi, \textit{The Documents of Home Rule Movement}, New Delhi, P.31.

\textsuperscript{155} ‘New India’, 26 May, Madras, 1917, p.29.

\textsuperscript{156} Ibid., 1 May 1917.
which was soon followed by action. He asked the Viceroy to take action against
the propaganda for Home Rule.

The Madras Government wanted to deport Mrs. Besant from India or to
restrict her from writing, speaking or taking part in the meetings. But the
Government changed its mind and issued many orders against Mrs. Besant. The
Governments of Bear and the Central Provinces prohibited Mrs. Besant’s entry
into their provinces. She and her friends were prohibited from writing new or
republishing old articles or books and from corresponding with anyone. The
Government kept on checking Besant’s letters. She challenged the Government to
punish her if they had clear evidence against her. Securities deposited for
Besant’s press and paper were forfeited. On 20 March 1917, the Government
issued the so-called Home Rule Circular, which condemned the Home Rulers as
“catastrophic, revolutionary and subversive of the existing situation”.157 In this
circular, the Government advised the local Governments to warn all men of
influence to dissociate themselves from the Home Rule agitation because the
Government had no idea of granting Self-Government to India. The local
Governments were also asked to take steps to check the growth of Home Rule.

Mrs. Besant continued her work without any fear. She pointed out that most
of the Courts of India declared the Home Rule propaganda legal. The High Court
of Bombay freed Tilak from securities for making the most vigorous Home Rule
speeches. The High Court of Calcutta also declared that the advocacy of Swaraj
was legitimate. The Advocate General even declared the same view in the Madras
High Court. The Chief Justice accepted the view of the Advocate General. After

hearing the petition of Mrs. Besant, he said that it was difficult to regard this movement as illegal. On the basis of the Court order, Mrs. Besant criticized the Governor mercilessly. She held that her views with regard to Home Rule for India were based on the sincerest desire for the prosperity of the Empire and her Home Rule work, whether in the field of politics or in the field of education, was an attempt to express all that was best in her. She asked the Government to grant Home Rule at an early date for the sake of the happiness and strength of the Empire. In her opinion, the Home Rulers were a nuisance only to people of the bureaucratic cast of mind. The High Court judgement, which seemed to have got a sanction from the highest court of law, made the way smooth for the Home Rule movement. Tilak and other Home Rulers celebrated the victory all over the country. The Young India of Gandhi summed up the popular feeling. “Thus, a great victory has been won for the cause of Home Rule which has, thus, been freed from the chains that were sought to be put upon it”. Later the Government, alarmed by the judgment, even held that the High Court’s decision had a mischievous effect. But the Government was forced to accept Home Rule as legitimate. Mrs. Besant said happily: “I may be ruined but Home Rule for India is secure by my method, and I am content to pay the price”.

She made it clear that by repeated disappointments, Indians and learnt the great lesson, “if you want a thing done, do it yourself”.

158 ‘New India’, 1 May, Madras, 1917, p.16.
159 Bipan Chandra, op.cit., p.163.
161 ‘New India’, op.cit., p.31.
Some of Lord Pentland’s speeches expressed the view that methods of propaganda of an untimely movement might shake the confidence of the friends of India on the fitness of Indians for Self-Government. The second cause was his sense of responsibility for the peace of Madras. In his opinion the discussions conducted by the home Rulers were one-sided and they were unfruitful and unsafe to act upon. But critics of Lord Pentland held that the home Rule movement was perfectly legal, loyal and legitimate. They gleaned in the observations, the forthcoming repressive measures of lord Pentland.

Many other British officials followed Pentland in criticizing the Home Rule movement. Sir Michael O’Dyer hated and misrepresented the Home Rule movement, because it would put an end to the autocracy that he loved. Mrs. Besant had criticized the harsh and oppressive rule of O’Dyer. She also condemned his forced war-loans and his cruel pestering of the political leaders. The Chief Commissioner of Delhi tried to close down a famous girls’ school, only because of the reason that its supervisor was the secretary to a Home Rule League. Again the executive also tried to issue orders to certain persons not to speak or write on political subjects. But fortunately for the India’s the then Advocate General tried his best to check them.

Lord Pentland, the Governor of Madras, and Sir Michael O’Dyer, the Lt. Governor of Madras and the Punjab, warned the people against their demand. On 25 May 1917, Lord Pentland said in the Madras Legislative Assembly to put entirely out of mind all thoughts of the early grant of responsible Government. He
also condemned all violence of language\textsuperscript{162}. At Ootacamund, Pentland even asked Indians not to agitate for Self-Government. He warned that the Indian demand for Home Rule would make a situation with dangerous possibilities and requested the co-operation of sensible and reasonable people.

\textbf{Protest against the Speech of Lord Pentland}

Home Rule leaders took the threats of Lord Pentland as a challenge. One such Home Ruler wrote in New India: “Home Rule must be won and I must put even my poor shoulder to the Home Rule wheel and help it to roll to victory”\textsuperscript{163}. Sir S. Subramanya Iyer in his article, ‘To my countrymen’, said that he was once a High Court judge and knew well what responsibility in politics meant. He fearlessly declared that he couldn’t retrace his steps” “I will not resign my office, even if the League be declared unlawful. I am ready to face any penalties which may follow on my decision… To defend Home Rule is to me a religious as well as a civic duty, and this duty I will discharge. I call on you, my countrymen, to do the same”\textsuperscript{164}. In this article he wrote that he was even ready to suffer any punishment for supporting the Home Rulers. This brave stand of Subramania Iyer greatly inspired the people and many decided to follow his path. More than two thousand influential persons pledged themselves to support the Home Rule League if it was declared illegal.

\textsuperscript{162} Ibid, 26 May 1917; Also see D.P. Karmarkar, Bal Gangadhar Tilak-A Study, Bombay, 1956, pp.264-265.

\textsuperscript{163} ‘New India’, 11 June, Madras, 1917, p.20.

\textsuperscript{164} Ibid., p.22.
K.V. Rangaswami Iyangar, who represented the landed nobility in the Supreme Legislative Council, wrote to Lord Pentland making it clear that “Home Rule is the goal and the methods of attaining it are legitimate and constitutional, and I am prepared to brave any penalty or humiliation for holding that conviction… Repression is ever the reviver of the national Conscience, and if the present time does not teach us methods of organization and work, what else is going to do it?” Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya and Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru also wrote letters in protest against the repressive policy of the Governor. Some of the Indian leaders sent a petition against the Governor, to the Viceroy. Many even demanded the recall of Lord Pentland. Many leaders expressed their decision to continue their Home Rule propaganda in a constitutional manner. Mrs. Besant declared in one of her articles.

It is not Lord Pentland who cares for us, it is not the Viceroy who protects us, it is not the Empire which watches over us. India is our mother, India is our protector … Britain’s practice gives the lie to her theories. Are other nations to ask Britain what she is doing for her own citizens, while she is fighting for the liberty to the citizens of other countries? … Lord Pentland’s speech was neither (i.e., Imperial in action, and true to the Imperial Professions). In all loyalty to the Crown, for the honour of the Empire, and in the service of the Motherland, it must be unhesitatingly condemned. 

Mrs. Besant further said, “In no civilized country, not even in Germany under the Kaiser, are people fined or imprisoned for saying and wiring things like

\[165\] Ibid., 12 June Madras, 1917, p.44.
\[166\] Ibid., 2 June, Madras, 1917, p.45.
those I have written and said”.¹⁶⁷ Through the pamphlets, she issued both in English and in local languages, she criticized the Government and demanded Home Rule for India. In The Commonweal and in New India, she wrote column after column about the miserable condition of India. Mrs. Besant neglected the warning of the Governor and even referred to him in an article as a renegade liberal and justified the cry for Home Rule for India.¹⁶⁸

Venkatapati Raju, one of the Councillors of Lord Pentland, declared in a meetings held at Guntur that the Home Rule agitation was their birthright and that “they should not give it up, even if His Excellency asked them”¹⁶⁹. He requested the people to carry on constitutional agitation for attaining Home Rule at an early date. Many Congress leaders like Srinivasa Sastri, B.N. Sarma and V.K. Ramanuja Achariyar accepted his views.

Some members of the Madras Legislative Council jointed the League in protest against the policy adopted by Lord Pentland. In Alahabad, some leaders who were trying to form a committee for obtaining recruits for the Defence Force cancelled the meeting, as a protest against the policy of repression. Ladies also protested against Lord Pentland’s Policy. Expressing their compassion with Mrs. Besant, they joined the League in large numbers. In the Labore Tribune, a correspondent made a suggestion that in protest against the Governor’s repressive policy, the members of the councils should resign.

¹⁶⁷ ‘Commonweal’, 1 June, Madras 1917, p.52.
¹⁶⁹ ‘Commonweal’ op.cit., p.52.
Bouquets and Brickbats for Lord Pentland’s Utterance

The media treated Lord Pentland’s speech in the Legislative Council with contempt. As such, they demanded an explanation from the Government of India. The nationalist papers in the provinces viewed that the Provincial Governor should not have been permitted to declare war on Mrs. Besant. Andhra Patrika cited that his speech in the Legislative Council was the best proof that the administration of Lord Pentland was a failure and that he lacked administrative capacity. Yogakshemam considered it “impolitic on the part of His Excellency to have made such a speech and threatened those who strive for the attainment of Self-Government”.\(^{170}\) Kerala Patrika pointed out: “His Excellency has never said so, not could he, who has advocated the granting of Self-Government to Ireland”.\(^{171}\) Papers like desamata, Kristna Patrika and Prapanchamitran also criticized the speech of Lord Pentland. But papers like The Hindu supported Lord Pentland. The Hindu described the anti-Home Rule talk of His Excellency as preposterous and “impatient and petuland in tone”.\(^{172}\) To Sampad abhyudaya, “the statement that Home Rule will not be granted and the circular about students and polities reveal his moral courage”.\(^{173}\) United India and Native State, congratulated Lord Pentland for the outspokenness of his political utterance delivered in the closing session of the legislative council.


\(^{172}\) ‘New India’, 26 May, Madras, 1917, p.55.

Legislature and Council.\textsuperscript{174} The Non-Brahman praised Lord Pentland for his open speech. In its opinion, Lord Pentland showed his excellent statemenship and grasp of affairs, when he made an open statement at the meeting of the Madras Legislative Council, on the subject of Home Rule.\textsuperscript{175} Justice also favoured Lorde Pentland by saying: "Lord Pentland knew that there were a few Home Rulers in this Presidency, and that there were some, perhaps, in his own Legislative Council".\textsuperscript{176} Some newspapers like Wednesday Review and Indian Patriot even condemned Mrs. Besant’s extravagance and the idea of her candidature for the presidency of the Congress. Indian Patriot considered the League an auxiliary to the great Congress.

Many protest meetings were held against Lord Pentland’s speech in the council. The people of Salem passed a resolution of protest against the speech, under the leadership of Yellappa Chetti and dispatched the same to the Secretary of State for India in London. A press communiqué that the Government issued defined their attitude to political agitation. Pentland was considered by many as ‘Madras’ greatest disappointment’.\textsuperscript{177} In May 1917, Lord Pentland publicly warned Besant. He said:

If Home Rule means nothing less than at a very early date the placing of the executive Governments in all its departments in the direct and full control of legislative councils containing a large majority of elected members, I feel sure that

\textsuperscript{174} ‘United India and Native States’, 31 May, 1917, p.8.
\textsuperscript{175} ‘Non-Brahman’, 27 May, Madras, 1917, p.12.
\textsuperscript{176} ‘Justice’, 30 May, Madras, 1917, p.7.
among Indians acquainted with public affairs, nobody having any true sense of responsibility considers it or will declare it within the range of practical politics.178

Lord Pentland even warned the people against the demands of Home Rule. His threat was soon followed by action, when he decided to remove Mrs. Besant from the political scene of India and issued orders, accordingly.

Lord Willingdon, the Governor of Bombay, who vehemently opposed the Home Rule movement, considered Mrs. Besant an extremely dangerous element in the Indian political scenario. In his letter to the Government of India, saying that his Government had been watching the development of home rule movements with anxiety, and had felt “that the time has now come, when it is necessary in the interests of the public security of India, that some check should be put on the movement”.179

Willingdon requested the Viceroy to issue a definite order to take effective action against persons who were supporting the movement. In his telegram on the Home Rule agitation, with reference to Home Department Letter No.770, March 20, he strongly impressed on the Viceroy the necessity of common action in all provinces. He urged personal discussion to secure this and appealed to all provinces, accordingly, suggesting the meeting at Bombay of representatives of April 7th.180

178 Government of India, Some Eminent Indian Editors, New Delhi, p.42.
180 Home, (Pol.), (A), No.292-298 and K.W., July 1917, NAI.
The Viceroy telegraphically asked Willingdon to stop sending wires to provinces. He suggested that in such cases the Government of India must be consulted first.\textsuperscript{181} As a sequel, Lord Willingdon cancelled the said meeting. The Governor now tried to conduct an informal personal conference between two or more local Governments regarding particular concrete cases, which might concern more than one province. The Government of Bombay even prepared an agenda for the suggested informal Home Rule Conference to discuss subjects like the issue of either an Imperial declaration or provincial pronouncements and the settlements of the conditions of such pronouncement, the treatment of famous agitators, the pre-censorship of newspapers, the control of Home Rule meetings, the issues of circulars concerning students, etc.\textsuperscript{182}

The Governor wished to have everything settled before the oncoming Nasik Congress. He even sent invitations to various provinces to depute representatives to a conference to be held at Bombay on the subject of the policy of the Government towards Home Rule. The Punjab Government enquired about this to the Government of India. This helped the Government of India to know about the development for the first time. The Viceroy asked the Government of Bombay to drop the whole idea and conveyed the Governor of Bombay that it was then impossible to make any pronouncement of policy. At the same time, he allowed the Government of Bombay to issue public and private warnings against undesirable speeches or actions likely to promote disorder or to disturb the public.

\textsuperscript{181} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{182} Ibid.,
Realising the difficulties of the situation in Bombay, he agreed to discuss any points of difficulty with a representative of the Bombay Government.\textsuperscript{183}

The Government passes an internment order on 7 June 1917, which prohibited Mrs. Besant, Arundale and B.P. Waida from taking part directly or indirectly in any organization, which mobilized the support of the students for the movement.\textsuperscript{184} On 7th June, the Governor ordered that she should not reside in the Madras City or in the Chingleleput district, which included Adyar. Mrs. Besant selected Ootacamund as her residence, where she stayed in the Theosophical Society’s bungalow. In answer to a statement issued by Mrs. Besant, Chamberlain, Secretary of State for India, said in July that her communication emphasized the unity of The Theosophical Society with the political aims of other organizations. The Executive Committee of the Theosophical Society requested the Prime Minister to publish Mrs. Besant’s letter, which the Government refused.

On 14 June 1917, the Government amended the order of internment. The Madras Government sent a letter to the Government of India explaining in detail the circumstances that compelled the Government to restrict her activities. This letter gave a summary of her role in Indian politics. On 15 June 1917, in a press communiqué, the Madras Government declared its attitude towards political discussions. In the meantime, Arundale resigned his post as the Organizing Secretary of the Home Rule League to enable K.V. Rangaswami Kyengar to succeed.

\textsuperscript{183} Letter to the secretary, Government of Bombay, Judicial Department, No.1344, 22 May 1917, NAI.

\textsuperscript{184} Home, (Pub.), G.O.No.744, 7 June.1917, NAI.
In her article, “To my brothers and sisters in India’, published on the eve of her internment, Besant vehemently criticized the Government. “The internment news will reach all over the world, if the Government strained to muzzle the whole Indian Press as well as Reuter”, she wrote. “This will expose how England, fighting for liberty in Europe and posing as its champion, is more false to liberty in India than she is even in Ireland; it is autocratic, naked and unashamed, under which neither liberty of person and speech nor possession of property is safe”.

In the same article she wrote: “I shall do neither. I do not run away from a struggle into which I have led others, and leave them in the middle of the field”.

In order to avoid internment, she was to be asked by some officials either to go to England or to promise to stop all political activities. But she refused to do so. She made it clear that her work had been truly constitutional and that there had been no threat or act of violence. She felt that the real cause for her internment was the fact that she had awakened the national self-respect of the Indians, which was sleeping. In a signed article, in the same paper, she discussed how to carry on the propaganda work of Home Rule, if it was declared to be an illegal movement. Apart from that, she wrote her own epitaph. The language she used there was of the most unrestrained character.

In another article entitled ‘What is my Crime?’ published a day before her internment, Mrs. Besant declared that Self-Government alone would secure richness to India and save Indian trade and farming. She had made thousands of educated men think that to be content with being a “subject race was a dishonor

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185 ‘New India’, 15 June Madras 1917, P.90, Also see Home, (Pol.), (B), No.438-41, June 1917, NAI.

186 Ibid.,
…. I write plainly for this is my last world. I go into enforced silence and imprisonment, because I love India …. It is better to suffer than to consent to do wrong. It is better to lose liberty than to lose honour”.187

In the meeting Mrs. Besant had with His Excellency the Governor, on 16 June 1917, the latter said that the Government had planned to put a stop to all her activities. In answer Mrs. Besant said: “You have all the power and I am helpless and you must do what you like. There is just one thing I should like to say to your Excellency and that is that, I believe you are striking the deadliest blow against the British Empire in India. You will pardon my saying to your Excellency that, as you are acting as the Governor, I have no personal feeling against Your Excellency”.188 The Governor asked Mrs. Besant whether she had any proposals to make. In answer she said that she had nothing to withdraw or explain. His Excellency gave her time to consider, to which she said it was not necessary and she asked leave to withdraw. Thus, the interview ended in failure.

The much-anticipated Government order to intern Mrs. Besant and her two associates, Mrs. Arundale and Mr. Wadis, was served on 16 June 1917. The notice asked them to select one of the six places mentioned, where they should live in internment.189 Mrs. Besant chose Ootacamund in the Nilgiri District, and the Government agreed. During her stay there at Ooty, her health deteriorated much. Later on the suggestion of Government, she was shifted to Coimbatore. The entire Coimbatore soon became the centre of special Home Rule activity. The

188 Annie Besant, The Make of Modern India, Madras, 1933, p.17.
189 Home (Pub.), G.O.No.836, 23 June 1917, NAI.
Home Rule flag, which was hoisted at her residence, was pulled down by the orders of the District Magistrate.\textsuperscript{190} The order of the Magistrate enraged the public. Pentland now requested the Viceroy to consider the immediate deportation of Besant to England as “her opportunities for mischief at home will be infinitely less than they are here, even under the present limitation”.\textsuperscript{191}

Before her arrest, she was given no time to put her affairs in order, not even to transfer the responsibility of the publication of her paper or any other publication to other hands. The publication of her paper stopped the moment the order was served. The fact that she and her associates were interned on the same day when Mrs. Besant Law announced in the House of Commons the release of the Irish rebel prisoners, in order to create a peaceful atmosphere at the convention for Irish Home Rule, is a coincidence. The internment gave Besant a chance to tell her critics that a foreigner she was, her sufferings in the jail would make one think that she was not a hidden instrument of imperialism, and was not the mere agent of the British Government.\textsuperscript{192} On 3 July 1917 they were allowed to carry on their work in association with the Theosophical Society. But three of them refused to disassociate political work from their religious work. Mrs. Besant’s statement regarding this, published on 10 August 1917, runs as follows.

All I write is equally theosophical and religious, being directed to the evolution of the spiritual intelligence in man exerted in spiritual, intellectual,

\textsuperscript{190} Fortnightly Reports, 17 Aug. & 1 Sept. 1917.
\textsuperscript{192} C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar, Dr. Besant as a Comrade, New Delhi, pp.12-13.
emotional and physical departments of human life; they all form part of one great movement for human progress and liberty and order… The Theosophical Society cannot identify itself with any special creed, religious, social or political, but it can and ought to stand for the sacred right of free speech for all opinions, which do not incite to crime…. It has therefore allied itself in this struggle in entente cordiale with the National Congress, the Moslem League and the Home Rule Leagues in one solid body untied in resistance to autocracy and in defence of the liberty of the people, and I as the President of the Theosophical Society will conclude no separate peace.\textsuperscript{193}

New India, whose publication was suspended after Besant’s internment for three days, reappeared on 21 June with P.K. Telang as its editor. A. Rangaswamy Iyengar assisted him. Kelkar and Horniman came all along from Bombay and C.P. Ramaswami Aiyer helped Telang for some days. The paper continued to carry news of Mrs. Besant’s internment, which provoked a wave of protest. The Government also protested against many articles published by P.K. Telang. Thirteen articles published in the New India were mainly found offensive to the Government.

The article ‘Resurgam’ streamlined the goal of Mrs. Besant’s Home Rule to be the ultimate attainment of full Self-Government within the British Empire. After the war, the immediate introduction of the scheme of reforms was drawn up by the Congress and the Muslim League was demanded. In this scheme, the power of the purse and all legislation was envisaged to be under the control of Legislative Councils, to be elected, by the people, in the proportion of four-fifths,

\textsuperscript{193} Home Rule Files 6-7, G.O.No.744, Confl. Pub. Dept. June 1917, TNA.
and the Executive Councils or ‘Cabinets’ of the Viceroy and the Provincial Governors consisted in the proportion of one-half, of Indians to be elected by the respective Legislative Councils. This article also spoke about a merchant in Bombay who gave a lakh of rupees to the Home Rule League. Again, in Madras, men of all shades of life had signed a meetings of protest. Moreover, resolutions of protest had come from powerful bodies like the Council of the Bombay Presidency Association. The Government also realized the fact that all these activities showed the force of opinion against the Government and that the whole people of India supported by Mrs. Besant were getting ready to fight the battle for freedom. The article also criticized the Government for their abuse of power. It also questioned the Government for interning people who were agitating for popular Government, without trial.\textsuperscript{194}

Criticizing the British policy in both India and America, the article entitled ‘America and India’ clearly mentioned the various notorious Acts like the Stamp Act passed by the British in America as well as the British policy of ‘divide and rule’.\textsuperscript{195} The article entitled ‘Mr. Chamberlain’s irresponsibility’ criticized Mr. Chamberlain for his irresponsible activities. The British Government considered the article entitled ‘The Daily Prayer of the Home Rule’ to be offensive. Mrs. Besant prepared a prayer to be added to her followers’ daily prayers.\textsuperscript{196}

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\textsuperscript{194} ‘New India’, 21 June, Madras, 1917, p.79.
\textsuperscript{196} Mrs. Chamberlain’s Irresponsibility, in ‘New India’, 6 July, Madras, 1917, p.29.
\end{flushright}
In the article ‘Genesis of the Present Repression’: Mrs. Besant criticized bitterly the Government policy to repress the National movement in India.\textsuperscript{197} In ‘The Making of Leaders’, Mrs. Besant asked the Indians not to wait to be led, but to become leaders themselves and to lead the national movement without any fear. She made the rousing call that until the intern leaders were release, it was their duty to intern, boycott and reject everything offered by the Government.\textsuperscript{198}

The Secretary to the Government of Madras considered all these writings as an attempt to breed hatred or contempt in the minds of the Indians against the Government and requested the Secretary to the Government of India to take action against New India under the management of Telang, under Section 4 of the India Press act, 1910.

Pentland’s persecution did not stop with Mrs. Besant. Her close associates and their relatives too were affected. Many of her staff were ordered to leave the Presidency under Rule 3 of the Defense of India Rules, 1915. Her internment was the best example of a wrong use of the provisions of the Defence of India Act, because Mrs. Besant or her associates had not done anything wrong even in an indirect manner, under the operations of that Act. For example, they had not conspired with the enemy or put any obstacles to the conduct of the War or done anything against the safety of the country. Here, it may be noted that the Madras

\textsuperscript{197} The Making of Leaders, in ‘New India’, 12 July, Madras, 1917, p.43

\textsuperscript{198} New India’, 13 July, Madras, 1917, P.47. The names of the remaining articles are given as follows: ‘Drawing Sense’ (23) June 1917; ‘Home Rule leagues in the Commons’ (5 July 1917); ‘The Mesopotamia Muddle and After-11’ (11 July 1917); ‘The Daily Prayer of the home Rule’ (12 July 1917); ‘The 14\textsuperscript{th} of July The day of France’s Liberty’ (14 July 1917); ‘A Practical Question 1’ (14 July 1917); ‘Defence of India Force’ (20 July 1917).
Government had not told her the reason for her internment. The Anglo-Indian papers attributed her arrest mainly to writings and speeches. Some viewed that the Government did not use the ordinary laws of the country against her as they were not sure of the result of a persecution and wanted to avoid any publicity. In his letter to the Chief Secretary, Madras Government, On 28 June 1917, the Home Secretary to the Government of India wrote.

The effective control of Home Rule meetings raises a question of considerable difficulty. The utilization of Rule 3 of the Defense of India Rules, in order generally to prohibit organizers of any meeting from including in their agenda of business, the subject of Home Rule would not, in the opinion of the Government of India, be legitimate. It was indeed impossible to maintain that a meetings called to advocate the policy of Self-Government within the Empire, in due course of time, was in any way open to objection. The Government of India realized the great difficulties to which the local Governments were exposed in this matter. They thought, however, that these difficulties would only be increased by a general prohibition of this character, and they were of the opinion that the question of prohibiting organizers of meetings from including the subject of Home Rule in their agenda can only be decided with reference to the particular facts in each case.199

Lord Chamberlain, Secretary of State for India supported the policies of Pentland, as they shared the same views. Lord Chamberlain’s famous speech in the Council bears testimony to this. He considered the work of Mrs. Besant an effort to destroy the credit of the British administration in India and condemned

199 Home (Pol.), File 25, Sept.1917, NAI.
her activities as dangerous, naughty, and disastrous.\textsuperscript{200} Answering this comment, Mrs. Besant wrote that her movement would be dangerous only to autocracy. Chamberlain even recommended secretly to the Heads of the Government in India to keep away from her or not to mingle with her.

To a question of Sir A. Williamson, Chamberlain justified the action of the Madras Government in regard to Mrs. Besant and Messrs. Arundale and Wadia, as necessary.\textsuperscript{201} He pointed out that other Governments were satisfied with the action taken by the Madras Government against her. The attitude of the Secretary towards Mrs. Besant was clear from this statement. But the real situation was just the opposite. Madras had been more free from political disorder than many of the other provinces during the war period, owing to, it was pointed out, a hope-inspiring, active, constitutional propaganda. to a question of J.D. Rees, a member of the House of Commons, regarding Mrs. besant’s internment, Montagu answered that the action taken by the Government of Madras in June restricting Mrs. Besant, Arundale and Wadia under the Defence of India Regulations was essentially defensive rather than disciplinary.\textsuperscript{202} One reason for Mrs. Besant’s internment, as pointed out by Montagu, was that she conducted a particular campaigning and advocated in a particular way her policy during a time when there was no alternative policy in the field.\textsuperscript{203}

\textsuperscript{200} ‘New India’, 6 July, Madras, 1917, p.82.
\textsuperscript{202} S.R. Bakshi, op.cit., p.36.
\textsuperscript{203} ‘Wednesday Review’, 24 October, Madras, 1917, p.27.
In Commonweal she wrote that no civilized country would arrest or intern anyone except for military crimes during wartime. But in India, the Government had interned her only for spreading a non-violent constitutional agitation. About Wadia’s arrest, the article said: “Lord Pentland may desire to amek us bankrupt by taking away the one in whom the business centres”, 204 She also criticized the Government for interning Arundale, the famous educationist. Further, she made it clear that “facts do not change because a voice is silenced; they remain, and silencing, as history proves, prevents reform and brings about revolution as in Russia”. 205 She criticized Lord Pentland mercilessly for his attempt to blacken the innocent for whitewashing the autocracy and also for encouraging various Indian papers like Madras Mail, the non-Brahmin and Justice, for creating hatred and contempt against the various classes of His Majesty’s subjects. In her opinion, it reminded her “of a compound of nitrogen and chlorine, and if we touch it with a feather it explodes”. 206

**Reaction of the Newspapers**

The Hindu felt that the decision to intern Mrs. Besant was unfortunate, and that it would be widely interpreted “as a hostile act directed against a movement which as met with much popular support and which she had led with singular self-sacrifice, ability and intrepidity”. 207 The paper regarded the action of the Government as a violent and unconstitutional act of aggression upon India. The

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204 ‘Commonweal’, I June, Madras, 1917, p.91.
205 Ibid., p.92.
206 Ibid., p.94.
news of her internment pained the Indian Patriot also. This South Indian Mail considered the day of her internment as the darkest day in the records of Indian history. Andhra Patrika expressed that by the internment, Lord Pentland introduced new unrest in this Presidency. The paper also compared Mrs. Besant’s letter to her Indian brothers and sisters, to the rock inscriptions of Asoka, and said that it had won “an eternal place in the annals of the history of India. With no exaggeration, it depicted Mrs. Besant as an incarnation of liberty”.

To the Mysore Patriot, the internment of Mrs. Besant was a controversial bomb thrown into the midst of India, that had burst, and the sparks were engulfing every town and every village. As a protest against Mrs. Besant’s internment, Krishna Patrika even brought out a scheme for Home Rule. It runs as follows: (1) Join the Home Rule Leagues, (2) sacrifice everything for the service of the country, (3) Encourage National Schools, (4) Use only Swadeshi articles, (5) Use soul force in all acts (6) Strengthen the national spirit in every way, (7) Remove all differences in society, (8) Raise the depressed classes, (9) Let Women also take the vow to do good to the country, (10) Honour mother tongue, (11) Follow the leaders obediently, and (12) Chant the Swadeshi hymn.

The internment of Mrs. Besant made the Anglo-Indian Press in India very jubilant. The Madras Mail frankly accused educated Indians of their attitudes towards her activities. The Wednesday Review justified the government action by saying that the Government had no other alternative but proceed against her under

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the Act. Justice and Dravidian too held the same view. In the opinion of Justice, the Ghokale Hall Protest meetings was a carefully organized and expensive affair. West Coast Spectator said that Lord Pentland gave Mrs. Besant an opportunity to consider her case and allow her to leave for England to stay. In its opinion, “during the interview Lord Pentland was most courteous and exhibited an anxiety for smooth sailing and expressed his great consideration for Mrs. Besant. The letter’s followers may ignore these facts, but we cannot, and should acknowledge His Excellency’s courtesy and efforts to sugarcoat the bitter pill”.211

**Besant Home Rule Fund**

After her arrest, some of her followers launched the ‘Besant Home Rule Fund’, with C. Jinarajadasa, C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar, D. Morarji and Jamnadas Dwarkadas as the Trustees. It was Bhavana Char, a famous Home Ruler, who suggested the establishment of the fund and promised to contribute Rs.100 to form its nucleus. Sampad Abhyudaya reported that “every India, rich and poor, man and woman, boy and girl, old and young, will respond to this patriotic call and make the Home Rule Fund an accomplished fact”.212 The Home Rulers paid liberally to this fund. Miss. Hawabai Petit gave five thousand rupees to the Fund in Madras, and a sum of twenty thousand rupees to the Home Rule League in Bombay. S.R. Bomanji, another prominent member in Bombay, promised to pay a sum of one lakh rupees for the future activities of the League.213 Davidson’s report to the Secretary of State for India contained details about the fund raising in

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211 ‘West Coast Spectator’, 23 June, Madras, 1917, p.171.


213 Pub. Dept., No.3589-W-1, 17 July 1917, p.132, TNA.
the name of Besant. “The subscriptions to the ‘Besant Fund’ up to the 13th instand amounted to Rs.52,391, while Rs.864 had on the same date been contributed towards the Besant Statue Fund”. They began yet another fund for the Besant State. The contribution to the same was limited to one rupee.

The members, of a new body, called ‘The Indignant Group of the Home Rule League’ formed in Madras, began to wear the Besant pendant as a badge and took a pledge to make any sacrifices for freedom. Its followers were asked to take a vow to carry on any tow of the following seven activities: a monthly subscription of 4 annas, the spreading of the vow of Swadeshi, the giving of weekly Home Rule lectures, the securing of at least one new member a week for the Home Rule League, the inducing of householders to fly Home Rule flags, the composition and popularization of national songs, and the organization of processions on national days. The local leaders of the Home Rule League also formed another committee called ‘Parents and Guardians’ Committee to look after the affairs of the students. The internment of Mrs. Besant affected the British Empire negatively and sounded its death-knell.

**Protest Meetings**

Protest meetings were held in different parts of India. The Collector of Madras requested the organizers of the Home Rule League not to conduct meetings and not to indulge in unduly strong criticism. But nobody paid any attention to this request. On 21 June 1917, the day Mrs. Besant left for Ooty, a public meeting was held at the Gokhale Hall, a meetings unique in several

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214 Pub. Dept., No.3589-W-1, 18 Sept. 1917, p.146, TNA.

respects. Leaders from all parts of the Madras Province, prominently C.v. Venkataramana Aiyangar, Ramaswami Aiyangar, Narasimha Aiyar, C. Rajagopalcharier, Kasturi Ranga Iyengar, dewan Behadur Govinda Raghava Aiyar, V.K. Ramanujacharier, A.R. Rangaswami Iyangar and Sir Subrahmanya Iyer attended this meetings. Students were not allowed to enter the hall. A group photograph of the three ‘martyrs’ was placed upon the stage where it was decorated and camphor was burned. Sharma, as the Chairman, criticized the Government for putting down all constitutional agitation in the province. The audience took the Swadeshi pledge. The resolution of protest, proposed by Diewan Bahadur P. Kesava Pillai, was passed. Dr. Nanjuda Rao, who was not on friendly terms with Mrs. Besant, declared on the stage that he became a Home Ruler on the spot and praised Mrs. Besant for her work for the political uplift of Mother India. Kelkar and Hormiman also attended the meeting and assured Bombay’s dependable support to Madras.

The leaders also requested the people to frame the Swadeshi Vow and hang it up in their houses. Booklets like the ‘Swadeshi Vow “Why Indians should now take it?” were also issued. Home Rule placards and invitations were issued. Picture postcards with the pictures of the internees were circulated. The Home Rule League of Madras even awarded medals to those who suffered jail for the cause of the nation. Sir Subramaniya Iyer sent such a golden medal to Tilak. He requested Tilak to accept the award, which he deserved so highly. The award bore an inscription of a Lock with two letters “F.I”, meaning Fellowship of the
Interned”.\textsuperscript{216} On the 16\textsuperscript{th} of every succeeding month, large processions were taken out in all important towns of the Madras Province. National education continued to be in the fore-front of the Home Rule propaganda. The leaders gave a number of public speeches on this subject. Arundale even wrote a special page about this in almost every issue of New India. Protest meetings began to spread to Madanapalle, conjeevaram, Tindivanam, Lucknow, Hubli, Rasipur, Calcutta, Nandalur, Alattur, Salem, Tenali, Omalur, Alahabad and Tuticorin. The meeting held at Madanappale requested the Government to cancel the order in the interests of the Indians as well as those of the empire.\textsuperscript{217} As Swadeshi vow was reported to have been take at the meetings held at Trichinopoly and Tindivanam. At Salem, S.V. Subrahmania Ayyar, moving the resolution condemning the action of the Government, said: “We have suffered a serious loss. Now Lord Pentland has thrown a bomb amidst us. The Government will never care for us, long as we do not act as we speak. We should boldly criticize by lawful means, the measures of the Government. It is only then that the british authorities will listen to our prayers”.\textsuperscript{218} The meeting held at Kumarapalayam, Salem District, even passed a resolution to buy Swadeshi goods even at a loss. The trichinopoly branch even passed a resolution to adopt the method of passive resistance. In Trichinopoly, Varadarajulu Naidu lectured on the present condition of India in a meeting attend mainly by students. In a letter to the Government, the District Magistrate reported, “This man is doing real harm and is deliberately trying to stir up racial


\textsuperscript{217} ‘Swadesamitran’, 18 June, Madras, 1917, p.120.

\textsuperscript{218} Ibid., 19 June 1917, p.121.
feeling. With a view to restrict his activities, legal opinion is being taken on a
collection of his speeches”. The Tenali Home Rule League decided to present
Mr. Montagu a memorial demanding certain privileges.

The students began to disobey the authorities openly. The leaders of the
Home Rule Movement organized meetings in which they exhorted the students to
challenge the orders of the Government. At Madurai also, P. Varadarajulu
Naidu delivered a series of lectures in Tamil, criticizing the action of the
Government. The Madurai branch passed a resolution to send a deputation to
England.

On 2 July, a public meeting was held in the Gokahle Hall to collect
subscriptions for the Besant Relief Fund. At Kumbakonam, a protest meeting
saws held under the presidency of V.K. Ramanuja Achariya, at which a Swadeshi
Vow was taken. Similar meetings were held at periyakulam, Madura, Chingleput,
Negapatam, Tanjore, Kaniyur, Sangaguri Abinavam, Mudikondan, Rajahmundry
and Calicut. At Calicut, her followers decided to start a Swadeshi mart. The
Calicut branch of the Home Rule League passed a resolution in favour of Home
Rule under the leadership of Manjeri S. Rama Iyer. The Madras Provincial
Congress Committee and the Mahajana Sabha also protested against her
internment.

A resolution to take a vow for purchasing only Swadeshi goods was passed
at the meetings held in Tanajore and Tiruppur. In all these meetings, resolutions

219 Pub. Dept., No.300, W-1, 4 Feb.1918, p.19, TNA.
220 Confidential Government Records on the Home Rule Movement in Madras, Bundle No.4,
TNA.
for buying Swadeshi goods and taking the Swadeshi Vow were passed. At
Vizagaptaam, a resolution to join the Home Rule League in large numbers and to
take the Swadeshi Vow was passed. At Palghat, a resolution was passed under the
presidency of B.N. Sarma. At Palghat, a resolution was passed under the
leadership of Kesava Menon to purchase only Swadeshi goods. The members of
the branch of the Home Rule League at Tiruvallur went from house to house and
requested the Mohammdans and merchants of the area to take part in the work of
the League. The Home Rulers of Machilipatam passed a resolution to exhort the
people to agitate constitutionally and to resort to the adoption of passive
resistance, if necessary, against repressive measures which might curb the freedom
of the individual and of speech, and on the failure of Government to take
necessary steps, to release Mrs. Besant and others interned without trial. 221

There were about twenty-eight protest meetings in Madras. The protesters
regarded the internment order as unwanted, ill-advised and unfair, and criticized
the Government for using the Press Act without any judicial enquiry. They
criticized the action of the Government in high sounding words like “A death blow
to the nation’s cause”, Dragon’s teeth”, “Flouting public opinion”, “Bureaucracy
excels”, and “The wolf and the lamb”. 222

In the women’s meetings held at Sankaridurg to protest against the order,
Srimati, Rukmani Ammal, wife of Varadarajulu Naidu, requested the ladies to
work for Home Rule by purchasing only Swadeshi goods and boycotting English
goods with a view to condemning the repressive actions of the Government.

222 ‘New India’, 31 May, Madras 1916, p.16.
Processions and open-air mass meetings in the mofussil areas as well as in Madras city, organized prominently, were a feature that raised the question whether it was necessary to place any restriction on the holding of such demonstrations. The conditions differed widely in different districts. However, the Government viewed it necessary to discourage public meetings to protest against the action of the Government in interning Mrs. Besant and her colleagues.²²³

The followers of the Home Rule League hoisted Home Rule flags over their houses at Coimbatore. The District Magistrate’s order prohibiting the same roused the feelings of the Home Rulers. In protest, members of the Home Rule Leagues in Salem, Thiruvannamalai, Cuntur, Erode and many other places passed resolutions recommending the hoisting of the Home Rule Flag in every house. In the procession conducted on 16 August 1917 in Kumbakonam, the Home Rule Flag was carried with the Union Jack just above it. On 31 August 1917, the Home Rule League members of Ootacamund held a special meetings for the purpose of taking the opinions of the members to hoist the Home Rule Flag at the premises to fly day and night.

The common people expressed their respects to the Home Rulers in many ways. For example, some poor clerks decided to save money to invest in the Home Rule Fund. They decided to send this money to Sir Subramania Iyer. In Anantapur District, two peasants protested against her internment. They even sent a letter of protest to editor of Andhra Patrika, saying that: “We are not the cattle you would take us to be. Though we are ignorant of some smattering knowledge

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²²³ Home Rule Files 6, (Confl.) G.O.No.744, 7 June 1917, TNA.
of English, we have the capacity to manage our village concerns, and to satisfactorily conduct the Panchayat affairs”.

Protest meetings gradually spread to other provinces. They were about twelve such meetings in Bombay. S.R. Bomanji of Bombay promised to contribute a lakh rupees in aid of the Home Rule League. In July 1917, the All India Congress Committee and the Muslim League Committee at Bombay passed a resolution demanding the release of Besant and the Ali brothers. Resolutions of protest came also from the council of the Bombay Presidency Association, whose President was Sir Din Shah Wancha. He sent a letter to the prime Minister of England to interfere in the present problem. Pandit Madan Mohan Malavia even went to Simla to have an interview with the Viceroy on the subject of these internments. Dr. Sapru said: “It is the duty of the leaders of the people to tell the Government that they are creating circumstances hostile to themselves, and to ask the people not to fear and not to give up the belief that their movement is a righteous one”.

Some of the members of the Bengal Legislative Council resigned their seats to express their disapproval of the internment of Mrs. Besant and others. Rash Behari Bose decided in Bengal to hold a protest meeting against the internment of Mrs. Besant and others. The Government of Bengal prohibited this meetings. The joint session of the Congress and the league, which held its meeting at Bombay, recorded its strong protest against this action of the Government of Bengal and


requested the Government of India and the Secretary of State, warning him about the seriousness of the situation created in India by the policy of repression. Surendranath Benerjee considered the internment to be the beginning and end of the height of bureaucratic power. Mrs. Sivakami Ammal, later a sister-in-law of S. Arundale, left the medical College as a mark of protest. Many prominent Muslim leaders too held protest meetings.

Theodore Besterman, biographer of Mrs. Besant, quoted the situation in her own words as follows.

When we, the internness, foregathered at Ootacamund, a whirlwind broke out, up and down the country, stormed over to Britain, Russia, France, America at several hundred miles an hour. Questions were asked in the House of Commons and the Viceroy’s Legislative Council. ‘Who would have thought’, said a very high official pensively, ‘that there would have been such a fuss over an old woman’.

Alarmed at the protest meeting of the people, the Government issued an order prohibiting such meetings and street processions. The Government even sent letters to Braidwood, the Resident in Travancore and Cochin, to check such processions and to get the support of the Rajas of both these States. In his return letter, Braidwood, The Resident in Travancore and Cochin, wrote that the Rajas of Travancore and Cochin had promised, “to render all assistance in checking the use of violent language either in the Press or at public meetings in connection with the

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228 Home Rule Files 8, Mrs. Besant and New India, No.2341 W-3, 29 June 1917, TNA.
States and in the Commonwealth dominions. Her internment was widely criticized in all these countries, and made her a great national hero.

A committee formed in London, under George Lansbury, M.P. and to work for her release, wrote to the Government, compelling Montagu to cancel the internment order. It pointed out: “What happens to Mrs. Besant and her colleagues may not seem of great importance-they are but individuals but it is of importance that the British people should understand that these persecutions must mean in the eyes of the world that Great Britain will fight to put down tyranny in foreign lands, but at the same time allows tyranny to flourish in lands under her control. Therefore, all who care for the fair name of Britain, all lovers of freedom, all who wish the British Empire to become a Commonwealth of Free Nations, must join us in demanding the immediate release of Mrs. Besant and her Colleagues”.  

A pamphlet eneiled ‘the Internment of Mrs. Annie Besant’, published by the Canada India League, Toronto, contained extracts from British and Indian papers on subjects like the neutrality of the Theosophical Society, the attitude of India, other internments, the joint demand of the Congress and the Muslim League, and Mrs. Besant as Congress President.

His Highness the Maharaja of Bikaner, Sir James Meston, Lieutenant-Governor of the united Provinces, and Sir Satyendra Singh, Member of the Bengal Executive Council, decided to return from England. at that time they were sent to England by the Indian Government to attend the Imperial War Conference. The Maharaja of Bikaner expressed the sympathy of the Indian princes for the

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230 Home (Pol.), File No.29, March 1918.
legitimate aspirations of the Indians. In the opinion of Sir V. Lovett, for the first time, a ruling prince and an Indian member of the Council had “shared in the innermost deliberations of the Empire”.\textsuperscript{231} In a private letter to the British Government, the famous Aga Khan requested the Indians to reward her suitably for her war services.\textsuperscript{232}

The policy of repression adopted by the British caused widespread anger. Repression only served to harden the attitude of the home Rulers and strengthen their desire to resist the Government. The Indians as a whole rose in protest against this policy. The launching of many new branches of the League pushed the membership from 7,000 in March 1917 to 27,000 in December. This shattered the power of the moderates and gave a new turn to the Indian freedom movement. Under the influence of Tilak, the All India Congress Committee drafted a powerful resolution condemning the action of the Government. In this resolution he also demanded the release of Mrs. Besant and her associates.

By September 1917, the All India Home Rule league had 132 branches in the Madras Presidency, more than the total in the rest of India. The number of branches in Tamil areas was sixty-three there were nine in Malabar, fourty-eight in Telegu areas, and twelve in Kannada areas.\textsuperscript{233} The number of branches in different parts of India is listed below:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{231} V. Lovett, \textit{A History of the Indian Nationalist Movement}, New Delhi, 1972, p.140.
\item \textsuperscript{232} Kanji Dwarkads, \textit{India’s Fight for Freedom}, Bombay, 1966, p.36.
\item \textsuperscript{233} ‘New India’, 11 Sept, Madras, 1917, p.19.
\end{itemize}
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>Delhi</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Madras Presidency</td>
<td>- 132</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>196</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**Attitude of The Indian Leaders**

Mrs. Besant’s internment gave a great shock to the Indian and achieved just in one day what she could not have achieved in so many years. She became very popular and her movement engulfed the whole of India. People began to take part in the Home Rule activities with enthusiasm. Prominent Indian leaders wrote patriotic articles. Arthur H. Nethercot says that the attacks of the Indian elders from the side, centre and even from the back finally wore the Government down. In her Diary, Besant wrote that “an autocracy could not kill an immortality” and noted that people were influenced by the true spirit of patriotism.

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234 Ibid., P.21. Also see Theosophical Society Annual Reports – 1914, Adyar.


236 Annie Besant, Internment Diary, 30 June 1917.
The internment added greatly to the excitement of the intelligentsia. It vitalized the Home Rule Movement all over the country and attracted even the old extremists who had been kept out of the Congress since 1907. Many prominent leaders came forward to join it. Among them, the most important were Surendranath Benerji, Kalyana Sundaram, Rajaji, Kesava Pillai, Jinnah, Tej Bhadur Sapru, Motilal Nehru, C.Y. Chintamani, C.R. Das, D.N. Baharduji, Bhulabhai Desai, M.R. Jayakar, K.M. Munshi and Horniman. Accepting offices of responsibility, all of them decided to continue the work left incomplete by Mrs. Besant. In short, after her arrest, Home Rule became the common demand of the Congress and the Muslim League, a live issue for the people of India. They declared their intention of fighting “once for the entire question whether self-government was a legitimate aspiration for India or not”. The popularity of the Home Rule Movement revealed that the capture of the Congress organization by Mrs. Besant and Tilak was complete at the

In his letter to the Private Secretary to Viceroy on 7 July 1917, Gandhi wrote that in his humble opinion, the internments were a big mistake. As Besant’s arrest disturbed the Madras city badly, he requested the Government to release her. In his articles like ‘Satyagraha Non Passive Resistance’, he forcefully pleaded for the release of Mrs. Besant. In another article, he requested the Home Rulers to observe the 16th of every month as the Home Rule Day. After Mrs. Besant’s internment, Jinnah joined the League and became its President. He brought with him the whole legal profession of the city. Leading lawyears like

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237 L.F. Rush Brook, India in the Year 1917-18, Calcutta, 1919, p.29.

Bhulabhai Desai and M.R. Jayakar joined the League. Jinnah’s High Court Chamber was the main centre for discussions and planning of continuous political agitations. Jinnah, Kanji Dwarkadas, Umar Sobhani and Shankerla Banker took the final decisions. Jinnah viewed that her arrest was an attempt of the Government to destroy the idea of Home Rule adopted by the Indian national Congress and the All Indian Muslim League at Lucknow. In protesting the internment of Mrs. Besant, Jinnah said that like Mrs. Besant no other person had worked and served for the freedom of India.

Benjamin Horniman, the well-known editor of the Bombay Chronicle joined the League and played a very important role in its activities. He described the situation created by the arrest as follows.

They were arrested not because they have rebelled or given comfort to the enemy, not because they have opposed the war, not because they have not loyally supported the war, and not for any military reasons whatsoever, but because they have led a movement for the extension in practice of those principles of popular liberty to the people of India, whose loyal support of the Empire and sacrifices in the war undoubtedly served the cause of the Allies at the supremely critical juncture and at every subsequent stage.  

He also suggested that the only remedy to all the problems “is to confer on the people of this country liberty and control over their own affairs, which British statesmen have declared to be the right of every people, for which right they are

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waging the most stupendous war known to history”. After her arrest, C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyar came to the forefront and kept the movement strictly within constitutional limits.

From all over the world, Indians co-operated with the Home Rule movement. Under the leadership of Sir Subrahmania Iyer, a pledge was drafted in the Madras city. After Subrahmania Iyer and S. Kasturi ranga Kyengar, Editor of The Hindu, the pledge was signed by a host of Home Rules. They declared their willingness to resort to passive resistance. C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyar signed the pledge in Bombay. Sir Subramania Iyer requested the people to protect Home Rule as a religious as well as civic duty. He wrote a letter of protest to President Wilson about the internment of Mrs. Besant without any trial. Mrs. and Mrs. Hotchener carried this letter to President Wilson Personally. Requesting the President to use his goodwill for the grant of Home Rule to India, he wrote:

At present we are a subject nation, held in chains, forbidden by our alien rulers to express publicly our desire for the ideals presented in your famous was message; The liberation of people, the rights of national great and small, and small and the privilege of men everywhere to choose their ways of life and of obedience. The world must be made safe for democracy. It peace must be plated upon the tested foundations of political liberty.  

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240 Kanji Dwarkadas, op.cit., p.35.

Officials of an alien nation, speaking a foreign tongue, force their will upon us, they grant themselves exorbitant salaries and large allowances, they refuse us education, they rob us of our wealth; they impose crushing taxes without our consent, they cast thousands of our people into prisons for uttering patriotic sentiments, prisons so filthy that often the inmates die from loathsome diseases…

A recent instance of misrule is imprisonment of Mrs. Annie Besant, that noble Irish woman, who has done so much for India. As set forth in the accompanying statement signed by eminent legislators, editors, educators and pleaders, she had done nothing except carry on all low-abiding and constitutional propaganda of reforms: the climax being her internment, without charges and without trial, shortly after printing and circulating your War message.\textsuperscript{242}

President Wilson asked the British Prime Minister, Lloyd George, to explain to him in detail what was happening in India. President Wilson sent the letter of Subramanîya Iyer to the Secretary of State, Mr. Lansing, for consideration. The essential features of his letter were telegraphed far and wide by the Associated Press and the International News Service. The main points of his letter appeared in all the main newspapers in America. It estimated that “this information has been published in not less than 1,500 newspapers, with an aggregate circulation of not less than 20,000,000 readers”.\textsuperscript{243}

The letter of S. Subrahmania Iyer received wide publicity in the United States. This letter created such commotion in the House of Commons that some Anglo-Indian papers in the south made the false charge against him that he had

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[\textsuperscript{242}] Ibid., p.223.
\item[\textsuperscript{243}] H.N. Mitra, (ed.), The Indian Annual Register, Calcutta, 1919, pp.44-45.
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conspired with Germany and uncleared the facts to the united States of America. But the reception of this letter in America was very different. A Home Rule League was formed with its headquarters located at 1965, Broadway, New York, which started publishing Young India, a monthly magazine in order to propagate the Home Rule idea in the states. The Government was also compelled to release Mrs. Besant and contributed to the declaration in Parliament, of the policy of Great Britain, in August 1917.

Montagu who called this letter ‘disgraceful’ wrote to Subramania Iyer, saying that the Government of India viewed his action with shock and regret, but in view of his great age, failing health, and past judicial services, they did not intend to take any further action. But Montagu warned Subrahmaniya Iyer that the Government could not tolerate any repetition of such act. S Subrahmania Iyer renounced his titles of K.C.I.E. and Diwan Bahadur in protest. Lord Chelmsford, who did not like this action, stormed at Aiyer, when he was in Madras. Celebrations of ‘Internment Day’ were organized on August 16 in different parts of the Madras presidency. S. Subramania Iyer opened new Swadeshi Stores in the Madras city.

On 5th September the Government put a condition to remove the restrictions placed upon the interness if they would promise to refrain from illegal and aggressive methods of political agitation during the rest of the war. But Mrs. Besant refused to accept this condition saying that her methods had never been unconstitutional.
Idea of Passive Resistance

While Mrs. Besant suffeed internment in Ootacamund, her close followers like Umar Sobani, Jamnadas Dwarkadas and C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar sought Gandhi’s intervention for her release. This gave Gandhi the occasion to talk about passive resistance for the first time. He asked them to collect about 100 faithful volunteers and to walk from Bombay to Coimbatore. Shankerla Banker and Jamnadas Dwarkadas not only collected signatures of one thousand men willing to protest against the internment orders and march to Besant’s internment place, but also started collection of signatures of a million peasants and workers in favour of Home Rule.

The national leaders came forward to launch the passive resistance movement if the Government refused to release Mrs. Besant and her associates. On 28 July 1917, at a meeting of the A.I.C.C. Tilak advocated the use of passive resistance and some Provincial Congress Committees including Madras accepted his proposal. They were ready to adopt it immediately. The Madras provincial Congress Committee supported this idea and resolved on the 14 August 1917, “that in the opinion of the Madras Provincial Congress Committee, it is advisable to adopt the policy of Passive resistance in so far as it involved opposition to all unjust and unconstitutional orders against the carrying on of constitutional agitation, and also against the prohibition of public meetings peacefully and constitutionally conducted to protest against the unjust and unconstitutional orders of internment and against the Repressive Policy of Government”.244

244 Ibid., P.45; Also See Nagendra Mohan Prasad Srivastava, Growth of Nationalism Effects of International Events, New Delhi, 1973, p.94.
But later, the Congress and the League changed their attitude. Most of the leaders decided to wait for some more time. On the 6th October, a joint session of the All India Congress committee and the Muslim League, held at Allahabad, decided to drop the idea of passive resistance. Mrs. Besant herself was against the idea of passive resistance. On 28 September 1917, the Madras Provincial Congress Committee passed a resolution regarding this. The dropping of this scheme dissatisfied many Home Rulers.

All these activities of the Indian leaders alarmed the Government General. He reported to the Secretary of State about the actual political condition of India thus.

Mrs. Besant, Tilak and others are fomenting with great vigour, the agitation for immediate Home Rule and in the absence of any definite announcement by the Government of India, India as to their policy in the matter, it is attracting many of those who hitherto have held less advanced views, the agitation is having a mischievous effect on public feeling throughout the country.245

Montagu was appointed the new Secretary of State for India. Lord Chelmsford did not like the coming of Montagu to India to talk with Indian leaders about the future Government of India. He insisted that “Montagu should not meet the Indian leaders all by himself and that both together should meet them”.246 But with the help of Charles Roberts M.P., Montagu met Mrs. Besant alone and talked with her for an hour. Later, Mrs. Besant and Tilak presented a memorial to him on behalf of the Congress and the League. Montagu later criticized the Chamberlain

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245 Annie Besant, An Abominable Plot, Adyar, 1918, p.10.

246 Pattabhi Sitaramayya, Home Rule and Indian State, Madras, 1918, p.133.
Government as “far too wooden, far too iron, far too inelastic and far to antediluvian to subserve its purposes in modern times”. Chamberlain did not like the comment and, on 12 July, he resigned from his post following the publication of the Mesopotamian Commissions’ Report, which held him responsible for the mismanagement of the Mesopotamian campaign.

The most important result of Besant’s internment was Montagu’s announcements made on the 20 August 1917, which said that the policy of the British Government was that of introducing responsible Government in India by stages. In the second announcement that followed, the British Government decided to admit nine Indians to commissioned ranks in the army as a token of their trust on Indians. Montagu also decided to visit India. But the decision of the Indian politicians to boycott him, as a protest against Mrs. Besant’s internment, compelled the Government to release her. On 10 November 1917, Montagu arrived at Bombay. After reaching India he studied the Indian political condition very well. About the internment of Mrs. Besant he wrote “I... particularly liked that Shiva who cut his wife into fifty-two pieces, only to discover that he had fifty-two wives. This is what happened to the Government of India when it interns Mrs. Besant.”

The Government of India asked Mrs. Besant to give a statement promising that she would co-operate with the Government of India in making Mr. S. Montagu’s tour in the country a great success. After receiving such a letter, the

248 C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar, Annie Besant, New Delhi, 1992, p.81.
Government of India asked the Madras Government to cancel the orders of internment and the order of release was signed on 17 September 1917.

**Release of Mrs. Besant**

Montagu asked the Government of India to release the prisoners. The unwilling Madras Government expressed their attitude to the Secretary to State. But the Secretary informed the Government that she could not be kept in prison for an indefinite period because a strong agitation on her behalf had been started in England. So he advised the Government to release Mrs. Besant. Owing to the pressure of the Home Department, the Madras Government released her and her companions on 18th September, after an internment of 93 days. Their strongly worded letter sent to the Indian Government said that they were releasing the interned under compulsion against their desire, and this letter formed an important document in the history of Home Rule Movement, Madras. Lord Pentland continued to be hostile towards Mrs. Besant even after her release. She was not invited to the Garden Party conducted in honour of Montagu in 1917. When Montagu came to known about this, he observed: “If I had been Pentland, I think I should have asked her to the Garden Party and sat her at tea between the Viceroy and myself: it would have been a pretty revenge”.

Mrs. Besant pointed her accusing fingers on Lord Pentland Governor of Madras, and the members of his Executive Council, Sir Alexander Cardew, Gillman and Rajagopalachari as the persons who were mainly responsible for her

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249 Pattabhi Sitaramayya, op.cit., p.134.

Again she said about the absence of English statesmen in India; instead, there were plenty of ‘smart’ businessmen who lacked broad outlook.\(^{252}\)

Sir William Vincent’s statement made in reply to the question of Sir Hugh Bray, in the Imperial Council, made it clear that Mrs. Besant’s release was conditional. His Excellency the Viceroy had received a telegram from Mrs. Besant, in which she assured her co-operation with the Government in obtaining a calm atmosphere during Mrs. Montagu’s visit to India. Similar assurances were also received from some influential people.\(^{253}\) About this, Mrs. Montagu revealed some strong recommendations that he had received from many quarters suggesting her release and assuring her conduct.\(^{254}\)

On Besant’s release, she was accorded a warm welcome in Madras, Calcutta, Allahabad and Bombay. When she was being brought in procession to Adyar, some coolly women pointing to her, said: “The Government has put her in prison and still she says she is right”.\(^{255}\) After her release, she tried to form a united front by bringing every class of people to organize the work more effectively.

Arundale, in a public meetings at Coimbatore, expressed his gratitude to the people of India for freeing them. India “is standing up upon her feet, she articulates, she demands; she is able to insist with success. This is a magnificent


\(^{252}\) E.S. Montagu, op.cit., pp.118-119.


\(^{254}\) Ibid., pp.9-17.

achievement and one that should make all lovers of India rejoice that she can at last protect those who are her servants”. 256

After a few days’ rest, Mrs. Besant returned to active politics only to find that after her internment, people had begun to consider her a heroine. This helped the Home Rule Movement to leap ahead, and it unified India in a great measure. The sales of New India increased ahead of other papers. In the Calcutta Session of the Congress, she declared that she was determined to keep up political propaganda throughout the following year.

Mrs. Besant’s political ideology as well as her attitude towards the Government underwent certain changes after her internment. Her internment experience discouraged her from moving on to more intensive agitation. In the words of David Arnold, for Besant, agitation must have given way to negotiation. In the succeeding A.I.C.C. meetings, she stood for unconditional support for the War. This change in Mrs. Besant’s attitude shocked her followers and paved the way for the beginning of the decline of her influence.

Now, the idea of home Rule became the one and only topic of conversation all over India and many new branches of the Home Rule League were founded after her release. All the contemporary newspapers carried articles for and against Home Rule. A meeting held on 23 November 1917 at Trichinopoly passed resolutions welcoming the visit of Montagu and accusing the agitation of the Anglo-Indian against the Home Rule Movement. It also supported the Congress-League scheme of reforms. Meetings were also held in Arni, Desur (both in North

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Arcot District) and Vellore. The Desure meeting, held on 22 November 1917, passed a resolution advocating the release of Muhammandali and Shaukat Ali and passed resolutions in favour of Home Rule. The Tamil version of Mrs. Besant’s Presidential Address at the Congress was read out in all the meetings conducted after her election as the Congress President.

V.P. Madhava Rao, ex-Diwan of three Native States, even declared that without Home Rule there could be no scope for good and unbiased administration in India. The Tenali Home Rule League decided to present Montagu a memorial demanding certain privileges. Resolutions were also passed in different branches welcoming Montagu, supporting the Congress-League scheme of reforms and condemning the agitation of the Anglo-Indians against the Home Rule Movement.

Estimates of the Fourth Estate

Some papers attributed the credit for Mrs. Besant’s release to the people who carried on the constitutional agitation. Modern Review argued that the people should not be given all the credit for her release. The release was effected partly owing to influential friends in England and other western lands. The release of Wadia, an Indian, was partly because, having been interned along with Mrs. Besant and Arundale for the same imaginary offence, he could not with any decency be kept deprived of his freedom after the release of his two companions in misery. The Amrita Bazar Patrika wrote that India had bitterly wept at the sufferings of the saintly lady. But her release converted the country from one end

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258 Ibid., p.463.
to the other unprecedently with a wave of extreme joy. The Hindu viewed Mrs. Besant’s release as a signal victory of a popular agitation.\(^{259}\) Students celebrated the occasion by gathering on the banks of the Kaveri River.

The Anglos-Indian papers disliked the growing influence of Mrs. Besant and her movement. They quipped at those who joined the Home Rule League after her internment. The papers supporting Mrs. Besant answered this question saying that it was natural for men to declare their support to a cause when it was threatened. The Anglo-Indian papers and the non-official European community disliked her release and they considered it a sign of weakness. At the same time, The Bengali said that it was a sign of strength. The Indian Daily News called Mrs. Besant and Mr. Arundale “a couple of European renegades”.\(^{260}\) It further said that it was surely a proof that the Government of India had the knowledge to recognize the needs of the situation.\(^{261}\)

**Anti-Home Rule Meetings**

A movement to oppose Home Rule movement meetings was found coming up even before her imprisonment. Anti-Home Rule meetings began to be held in different parts of the country. Sampad Abhyudaya reported about the agitation that the Raja of Kuruppam had begun a counter-Besantine movement.\(^{262}\) A public meeting of the Mussalmans of Arcot, held on the 15\(^{th}\) October, passed a resolution saying that the grant of Home Rule would result in the rule of bigotry and

\(^{259}\) ‘Sampad Abhyudaya’, 28 May, Calcutta, 1917, p.177.


\(^{261}\) The Hindu, 18 Sept.1917.

selfishness, and as such they did not want Home Rule; the British Government should show special regard to the advancement of Mussalmans; to make Arcot the headquarters of a district in commemoration of the forthcoming visit of the Secretary of State of India, as they made Delhi the capital of the country in commemoration of the visit of His Majesty the King-Emperor; the Government of India should set all the Mussalman internees free just as Mrs. Besant had been released.²⁶³ Another meeting held at Royapettah passed a resolution against the grant of Home Rule to India on the ground that “it would greatly benefit only the Hindus”.²⁶⁴

The All India Missionary Conference held at Coonor in 1917 passed resolutions against Home Rule and said that India was completely unit for Home Rule. At Cuddappa, a meeting of Muslims under the presidency of P. Muthukrishna Aiyar also passed the following resolution against Home Rule, asking the Government not to regard the Congress Muslim League scheme as beneficial, requesting the Government of India to release Mrs. Muhammed Ali and Mrs. Shaukat Ali on suitable condition, and treating the monster petition of the Home Rule League with contempt, on the ground that the signatures of the public were obtained by fraud.²⁶⁵

The anti-Home Rule meeting held at Sattur, in December 1917, under the Roman Catholic Christians, requested the Government to grant Home Rule only

²⁶⁴ ‘Sampad Abhyudaya’ 11 May, Calcutta, 1917, p.73.
after all the Indians had become equal in every respect. Anti-Home Rule meetings were held in Malabar and Velukkudi in Mannargudi Taluk. The Zamindars of Madras, who were prepared more to go with the Maharaja of Bikanir, turned against Home Rule and Tilak. The leading Zamindars of the Madras Presidency, in a manifesto published on 30 June 1917, declared their decision to disassociate themselves from the Home Rule movement. Many ruling Princes and members of the executive Council also published letters of warning and protest against the Home Rule Movement. For example, the Maharaja of Bobbili and the Raja of Kollengode published such protest letters. Again, Kavalappara Nayar, a member of the Madras Legislative council, and Miraz Hussain also wrote letters of protest and warning which were soothing to the Government, who, in order to satisfy them and to bring them to their side, adopted certain measures in their favour. The South Indian Labour party also accepted the creed of the South India Liberal Federation and decided to oppose the Home Rule Movement. Anti-Home Rule meetings were held at Trichiniopoly and in Tanjore. There arose friction between home Rulers and the conservative non-Brahmans.

Small meetings for and against Home Rule were reported from different parts of the Madras Presidency. But there had been very little political activity in favour of the Home Rule Movement. The Adi Dravidans in the city of Madras held a meeting against the Home Rule League and the Brahmnas. In North Arcot, Varadarajulu Naidu conducted meetings. But his speeches were now undergoing scrutiny by the legal advisers of the Government, with a view to effecting his

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prosecution. In Malabar, the Home Rulers tried to get the sympathy of the Home Rule absconded to Pondicherry to avoid his creditors.\textsuperscript{268}

The repression proved to be a blessing in disguise. But mooting the concept of Home Rule, she was offering an olive branch to the British and the Indian politicians. The failure of both the parties to rise to the occasion failed them both. The English were able to hold India for another three decades only. The Union Jack had a place in the Indian National Congress that was unfurled in 1917. But in 1947, the Union Jack had to be pulled down ever from the mast of the Viceroy’s Estate in Delhi, in order to allow the tricolor flag to flutter forever.

The barbarous act Col. Macaulay meted out at Dewan Velu Thampi, and of the foremost freedom fighters of India, in the days after his heroic death, was condemned universally. On hearing about that, Lord Minto, the Governor General, denounced it as “repugnant to the feelings of common humanity and the principles of a civilized government”.\textsuperscript{269} That was in 1809. Similarly, the atrocities against Mrs. Besant reached the House of Commons and the Viceroy’s Council; the reaction of a very high official was that ‘who would have thought that there would have been such a fuss over an old woman’.

Great Britain championed the cause of democracy in their own country. The First World War was fought to protect the liberty of Europe. But in India, liberty of person, speech and possession was denied while Great Britain was trying to put down tyranny in the foreign lands. It allowed tyranny to flourish in lands under her control. It was at a time when Great Britain was engaged in a war for

\textsuperscript{269} ‘Non-Brahman’, 3 June, Madras, 1917, p.30.
democracy that Annie Besant advocated the case of India for self-government as a matter of right. In the face of reluctant bureaucratic machinery, the constitutional method of Annie Besant was interpreted as a follow-up of a revolutionary method of an early era. Even though the nation woke up in honouring Annie Besant at the time of her peril, the imperialist rulers as well as the ruled failed to catch her ideas.