THE POLITICAL CONDITION IN THE MADRAS PRESIDENCY

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Madras Presidency, the southern most part of British India, comprised of the whole of present Tamilnadu, and parts of Andhra Desa, Kerala, Karnataka and Orissa. Its formation was completed in 1801 by the English East India Company. It came into existence neither on linguistic basis nor on geographical factors. It was a multi-lingual, multi-religious and multi-racial Presidency created with the acquisition of Kongunadu from Mysore, Tanjore from the Marathas and Carnatic from the Wallajas by the East India Company. The English East India Company succeeded, though slowly but steadily, in establishing their rule over this Presidency through "wars, alliances and diplomacy".

After the great revolt of 1857, the administration of India passed from the East India Company to the British Crown by the


4 Ibid., p.195.
Queen Victoria's Proclamation of November 1, 1858. Yet, the Madras Presidency remained a great threat to the Company's rule in the beginning and to the Crown later. The very first opposition to the British authority came from Madras Presidency. Veera Pandiya Kattabomman, the Poligar of Panchalamkurichchi, in Tinnevelly raised his voice stoutly against the British colonial rule and refused to pay tribute and waged a heroic battle that resulted in his hanging on October 17, 1799. He was the first martyr for the cause of Indian independence.

After his demise, the flame lit by him was carried on by Marudu Pandiyas of Sivaganga, Gopala Naicker of Dindigul, Khan-i-Jha Khan of Coimbatore, Kerala varma of Malabar, Krishnappa Nayak of Mysore and Dhoondaji Waug of Maharashtra. They organised a confederacy and spear-headed the movement against the British rule. This South Indian rebellion of 1800-1801 was followed by Sepoy Mutiny in 1806 at Vellore which became the centre of activity for the rebels. Thus the Madras Presidency did not, in any way, lag behind in the struggle for freedom even prior to the great revolt of 1857.


The Indian Renaissance which started with the growth of western education and the spread of liberal thoughts and social reforms of Raja Rammohan Roy gained momentum all over India. Further, the Indian renaissance influenced the press and caused the formation of many regional associations on the eve of and after the transfer of power to the British crown to express their opinion and ventilate their grievances to the East India Company first and the British crown later.

The Crescent, a journal founded in 1844, by Gazulu Lakshminarasu Chetty, was the first journal in this Presidency to defend the Hindu values against the conversion policy of Christian missionaries. Thus, even before the founding of the Indian National Congress, political activities started in the Presidency. The Madras Native Association founded by Gazulu Lakshminarasu Chetty on February 26, 1852, with the object of bringing to the notice of the British Parliament the needs and grievances of the people was the first political organisation in the Presidency. This Association was at first started as a branch of the British Indian Association, founded in 1851 in Calcutta, and later it began to act independently.

The Crescent, highlighted the activities of the Madras Native Association. Therefore the Madras Native Association captured

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the imagination of the elites and urbans, officials and non-officials. But its activities came to a halt after the demise of Lakshminarasu Chetty in 1868. Likewise, the Madras Hindu Debating Society, founded in 1852 by M. Venkatrayulu Naidu, also created 'mental and moral development of its constituents'. But unfortunately it also became defunct after the death of its founder in 1863.

In 1868, Mir Ibrahim Ali founded the Triplicane Literary Society. Under its auspices, The Hindu started its publication as a weekly on September 29, 1878, with G. Subramaniya Ayyer as its editor. Later on it became a national daily. The Hindu, played an important role in focussing the problems of the people, shaping the public opinion and creating political awareness among the people. It earned a conspicuous place in the political life of the Presidency.

Another worthy Association which drew the elites into its fold was the Theosophical Society which shifted its head-quarters from New York to Madras in 1882 for promoting the study of religion, philosophy and science of ancient India and of modern west. At first it promoted the spiritual development and later created the

11 Ibid., p.8.
12 Ibid., p.9.
13 Ibid.
national consciousness among the people.\textsuperscript{14}

However, these regional and religious Associations, owing to their divergent view points did not, in any way, represent the nationalist feelings of the Indians at large. Hence, a national level organisation was desired by many and their aspirations were fulfilled by the founding of the Indian Association on July 26, 1876 by Surendranath Banerjee at Calcutta.\textsuperscript{15} Following it a similar Indian Association was founded in Bombay in the same year.

By this time, G. Subramania Ayyer, the editor of the \textit{The Hindu}, started the first Tamil Newspaper, the \textit{Swadesamitran} in 1882 to spread Indian nationalism to the nook and corner of the Tamil country.

When the Ilbert Bill controversy started in 1883, racial arrogance and discrimination were let loose by the Europeans, and it deeply hurt the Indians. So, the Indian response to the agitation of Europeans against the Ilbert Bill was founding a political organisation with an all India character.\textsuperscript{16} \textit{The Hindu} published an


editorial urging the need. Meanwhile, P. Anandacharulu revived the Madras Native Association into Madras Mahajana Sabha on May 16, 1884, under the presidency of P. Rangaiah Naidu. It became the premier nationalist organisation in the Madras Presidency which soon drew support from the educated youth from the Hindu and Muslim population.

By that time S.N. Banerjee also undertook a tour to muster the support of all national-minded leaders throughout the country for his Association. In December 1884, seventeen stalwarts who attended the annual convention of the Theosophical Society at Madras met at the House of the great social reformer Raghunatha Rao and mooted the subject of a national forum which later developed into 'The Indian National Conference'.

"At midday on Monday, the 28th December 1885, seventy-two gentlemen met in the hall of the Gokhuldas Tejpal Sanskrit College and Boarding House in Bombay. They were attending the inaugural session of what was originally called the 'Indian National Union'. This name was given up soon in favour of a new one by which the historic body is known to this day, the Indian National

19 Ibid., p.13.
Thus the call for a National Association culminated in the form of the Indian National Congress due to the efforts of A.O. Hume, G. Subramania Ayyer, P. Anandacharulu, P. Rangaiah Naidu, Salem C. Vijayaraghava Achariayar, Salem Ramasamy Mudaliar, S.N. Banerjee, W.C. Banerjee, Manmohan Ghosh, Dhadha Bai Naoroji, Ferozesha Mehta, Telang, Tyabji and others. Commenting on the founding of the Indian National Congress, Pattabi Sitaramayya stated that "the idea was in the air and the need and the birth of Indian National Congress was a response to the total situation prevalent in India and no single organisation not to speak of a single individual can be given exclusive credit for its emergence."  

Madras Presidency participated with enthusiasm in the First Session. Twenty-one out of the 72 delegates were from this Presidency, 16 from Tamil districts and 5 from Andhra districts. The national spirit and social urge in this Presidency were so high that the Third Annual Session was held at Maggis Garden in Madras in 1887 under the presidency of Badruddin Tyabji.  

"Since its inception the Indian National Congress has been the voice of resurgent India ... Its founding fathers represented all the geographical regions and ethnic and religious diversities of India."

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21 Ibid., p.28.  
the country and reflected Indian public opinion at its best".  

The mass base of the Congress widened in course of time with the joining of the middle class, the industrial workers and even the tribals. "Against the British Imperialism, Indian National Congress declared Swaraj as its goal and demanded it by constitutional means of boycott of British goods and use of Swadeshi (Native) goods". The Swadeshi Movement became a success inspite of the repressive measures of the British.

"What appeared to be a pressure group in 1885 developed into a political party in 1890 and was advocating a National Movement in 1900 A.D." The divide and rule policy of the British, led the Muslims of India to launch a new party called 'The Muslim League' in 1906. In the Indian National Congress also there was ideological conflict which divided the party into two factions namely the moderates and the extremists during the 1907 Surat Session. The British tried to appease the moderates with the Minto Morley Reforms of 1909. Muslims were given separate electorate, and thenceforth communal politics started in India. The extremists

24 R.R. Diwakar, "Congress, the Vanguard of India's Struggle for Freedom", Souvenir on National Seminar on Indian National Congress, Indian Political Science Association (Delhi, 1985), p.7.
were persecuted with an iron hand.

The split of 1907 at the national level was reflected in the Madras Provincial Congress Committee which also came to be divided into the moderates and the extremists. In 1907, Bipin Chandra Pal visited Madras and his speeches ignited even the moderates. However, the British Government was able to silence the moderates and tame the extremists with their repressive methods.

The outbreak of the First World War in 1914 had serious repercussions on Indian political scene. The Muslim League developed an indifference towards the British rulers. The British passed the Defence of India Act of 1911 as an emergency legislation, "which came in handy to the Government to curb revolutionary crime". Though it was designed to enlist the co-operation of all against the dangers posed by Germany, it was often misused to suppress even constitutional agitation in India.

The death of Gopalakrishna Gokhale in 1915 created a void in the leadership of the moderates. The release of Bala Gangadhar Tilak from prison strengthened the hands of the extremists, but they also could not involve themselves in any activities in the


wake of the Defence of India Act. Annie Besant, who took an active part in Indian National Congress from the Twentynineth Session at Madras in 1914, was instrumental in the reunion of the extremists and the moderates because she was convinced that "without a United Congress India could never gain all the strength and inspiration needed for the attainment of Swaraj". 28

The year 1916 was also significant because two great political organisations, the Congress and the Muslim League came together in voicing the political aspirations of the masses. Their Joint Session at Lucknow put forth the demand for a new constitution for India based on the dominion principle of self-Government, as contained in "Lucknow-Congress-League Scheme". 29 In the same year, the famous "Memorandum of Nineteen" was sent to the Viceroy explaining the nature of the reforms that would satisfy the aspirations of the Indians.

Annie Besant formed the "Home Rule League" in 1916, to demand 'Home Rule' to India as a federation in the British Empire. A woman of tremendous energy, determination, eloquence and will power she toured all over the country emphasising the need for Home Rule.

"The fundamental idea underlying the Movement, which was

28 Ibid., p.95.
to go down in history as a momentous milestone of the freedom struggle, was to bring in a reconciliation between the legitimate demands of the Congress and the needs of the British Empire to maintain its unity and integrity". The Home Rule League was formed to preach everywhere Swedeshi, National education, Labour welfare, Political training and above all Responsible Government.

The launching of the Home Rule League by Annie Besant was delayed for a long time. The moderate leaders were alarmed at the usage of the term 'Home Rule' which in the context of the Defence of India Act, paralleled the violent and aggressive Home Rule Movement of Ireland under Powell. The close association of Annie Besant with B.G. Tilak was another reason for their suspicion and hesitation.

Another section of the Congressmen felt that the new 'Home Rule Movement' might diminish the influence of the Congress, and Annie Besant, an Irish lady, an 'unsafe guide' in the struggle, would assume the Chief Dictatorship of the League. An editor from Madras described her as a hysterical autocrat and warned that "the game she is playing is fraught with mischief".

31 Extracts from Fortnightly Reports (Confidential) 1914-27, Vol. 71 (TNA, Madras), pp.3,5,12,13,14 and 16; Extracts from G.Os and consultations relating to Home Rule Movement and Rowlatt Act 1914-20, Vol. 63 (TNA, Madras), p.49.
The extremist leader Tilak accepted the idea of Annie Besant and started a branch of Home Rule League at Bombay. When she delayed the launching of Home Rule League, he launched his movement in April 1916 and a Poona branch of Home Rule League was started in Madras also.ARRY Besant allayed the fears of the Congressmen by declaring the League as an auxiliary of the Congress and approached the Executive Committee for approval. When the committee could not issue the approval in time, she launched her League in September 1916 at Madras and the Lucknow Congress of December 1916 gave the approval to the League "as a part of itself". The Members of the Theosophical Society and Youngmen's Indian Association also joined this movement.34

The Home Rule Movement had no doubt, created a tremendous effect on the nationalist sentiment of the Indians. The official organs of Home Rule League, New India and Common Weal contained articles on self-rule and took strong exceptions to the British attitude. The Government adopted repressive measures, arrested Annie Besant and the security deposit of New India was forfeited.35

During 1916, a new struggle started in Madras Presidency within the Congress organisation. A powerful group of non-Brahmin

34 Extracts from Fortnightly Reports (Confidential) 1914-27, Vol. 71 (TNA, Madras), pp.7 and 11.
Congress leaders opposed the domination of Brahmins in the Congress organisation. They accused the party of being a vanguard of Brahminism, and in order to gain the rightful place for the non-Brahmins in society and public service they started a new organisation. It was started with the name of South Indian Liberal Federation in 1916. They brought out publications in English and other South Indian Languages. Their party came to be popularly called the 'Justice Party' named after their English publication Justice. Their writings accused the Brahmins of occupying key positions both in Congress and Government services. They denounced both Brahmins and Congress and announced that they would rather be ruled over by the British than 'by a Brahmin oligarchy'.

The Justiciestes openly supported the British and condemned the Congress and Home Rule Movement. Their cry for social justice and an egalitarian society received some response from people. However, Home Rule Movement went on with vigour amidst repressive measures.

By 1917 new developments made Madras Presidency a 'storm centre of Indian politics'. The Madras Provincial Congress


37 Extracts from Fortnightly Reports 1914-27, Vol. 71 (TNA, Madras), p.34.

Committee, allowed a Telugu unit to function separately, from April 8, 1917.\textsuperscript{39} This was the culmination of events which started since 1906, when Madras Pradesh Congress Committee decided that "if Congress were to be important in the life of the Presidency, provincial meetings and branches should be encouraged to carry on their proceedings in Tamil or Telugu, since it would be only through a more intense mass contact that Congress could have any steady and permanent effect".\textsuperscript{40} Accordingly the Telugu group, first aimed at forming a separate Telugu unit in Bapatla in Guntur in May 1913. They published a pamphlet demanding autonomy for a Telugu unit, and hence the formation in 1917.

The World War posed a threat to the very existence of the British colonies, and the power of Allied nations was weakening day by day. So the British wanted to restore peace and order in India. In order to enlist the collective support of the Indians, Montagu made a declaration in the House of Commons on August 20, 1917 that, "the Policy of His Majesty's Government in regard to India is that of increasing association of Indians in every branch of administration and the gradual development of self-governing institutions, with a view to the progressive realisation of responsible Government in India as an integral part of the British empire".\textsuperscript{41}

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., p.36.
\textsuperscript{41} Bipan Chandra and others, \textit{Indian's Struggle for Independence} (New Delhi, 1988), p.168.
However it did not mean that India would be given self-Government. The accompanying clause in the statement clarified that the manner, nature and timing of the advance towards responsible Government would be decided by the British Government alone and it gave enough leeway to prevent any real transfer of power to Indian hands for a long time.\footnote{42}

Meanwhile the British wanted to please the Indians by releasing Annie Besant and her popularity led to her being elected as the President of the Congress in 1917.\footnote{43}

Congress in the Madras Presidency began to suffer certain setbacks after the inception of the Justice Party. To counter the growing influence of the Justice Party, and to strengthen the Congress, the non-Brahmin leaders of the Congress started "The Madras Presidency Association" in September 1917. Kesava Pillai was the President and an Executive Committee was also elected, consisting of prominent leaders like P. Varadarajulu Naidu, E.V. Ramasamy Naicker, T.V. Kalyanasundara Mudaliar, popularly known as Thiru.Vi.Ka and others. \textit{Indian Patriot} was its news organ. The aims of the Association were to protect and promote the educational, social and political advancement of the non-Brahmins of the Madras Presidency.\footnote{44}

\footnote{42} Ibid., p.168.  
The closing months of 1917, proved to be disastrous for the British. They had to face serious threats not only external but also internal. The war was not over and the withdrawal of Russia from the war greatly handicapped their position. Added to that, submarine warfare had intensified and France, the ally of England collapsed. The British expected concrete help and co-operation from their Indian colony.

But the publications of the report in 1917 of the "Messopotomian muddle of 1916", came under severe criticism of the Government. The fateful Indian Contingent which was destroyed at Messopotomia following the unwise organisation of the British, tarnished their image.45 The Ghadar Party was floating a Ghadar ideology, which incited the Sikh soldiers in the British Army to revolt against the British. The ideology in its democratic and egalitarian context declared that they were not Sikhs or Punjabis, but Indians. Their religion was patriotism and their objective was the establishment of an Independent Republic of India.46 The Government was confronted with similar uprisings all over the country.

Therefore, the British Government wanted to put down the terrorist activities in India, and appointed a committee on December 10, 1917 popularly known as "Rowlatt Committee" after the name of its President Sydney Rowlatt of the Kings Bench Division

of His Majesty's High Court of Justice. Four other members were also appointed in that committee, two of them being Indians. The Rowlatt Committee was formed to frame legislations to liquidate the revolutionary movements.

The year 1918 started with high hopes and ambitions. The Anglo-Indians and the Indian Christians demanded special electorate. The Sikhs on their part demanded separate electorate for them based on their socio-economic contributions. Congress Party was divided over the acceptance of the proposals of Lord Montagu. While a dismayed Annie Besant decided that the offer ought to be accepted with 'drastic revisions', others pleaded for its 'out-right refusal'.

The Justicites voiced their demand for separate electorate and reservation for the non-Brahmins. T.M. Nair, Veteran Leader of the Justice Party went ahead demanding a franchise right whereby only non-Brahmins should be permitted to vote for non-Brahmin candidates in the Provincial Legislative Councils. P. Theyagaraya Chetty, one of the founder leaders of the Justice Party, sent a cablegram to Lord Montagu stating that the Justice Party represented

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50 Ibid., p.92.
40 million non-Brahmins (the total population of the Province being 41 millions) in Madras Presidency and hence they should be given a fair representation. 51

Representatives of the Home Rule League, the Muslim League, the Congress, the Madras Presidency Association and the Justice Party went to London to present their cases and to press their own demands. "Of all the groups that were primarily concerned with securing communal representation for the non-Brahmins in Madras, the Justice Party as before carried the main burden". 52

The Government had published the Montagu Chelmsford Report on July 2, 1918 and the Rowlatt Report on July 19, 1918. 53 The Montagu Chelmsford Reform proposals contained the devolution of legislative, and administrative powers to the Indians in the Provincial Legislative Councils. 54

"The Rowlatt Report recommended the reenactment of Legislation passed under the Defence of India Act, a war time measure, so as to give the Government of India, summary powers to control, detain and try without jury, persons whom the Rowlatt Report described as revolutionaries likely to menace the security of India". 55

52 Ibid., p.136.
Though the report stated that this Legislation should be used only in unusual circumstances when peace and order were jeopardised, the time and manner in which the Government would use it alarmed the people. By publishing the Rowlatt Report just a few days after the publication of the Montagu-Chelmsford Report, the British Government, made a mockery of the proposed grant of self-Government. In other words, "it seemed that with one hand the British Government was offering a measure of freedom and with the other determinedly crushing any attempt to use that freedom".  

The Rowlatt Report created an uproar among the Congress leaders. They appealed to the Government to defer the implementation of the report as there was no explosive situation building up in the country and there was no disruption of normal life anywhere.

The reaction of the Congress for the Reform proposals was mixed. During the special session of the Congress in August 1918 at Bombay it was categorically resolved that nothing short of self-Government would be acceptable. However, the moderates met at a separate Conference in November 1918 in Bombay and resolved to co-operate with the Government even if the modifications suggested

56 Ibid., p.133.
by them were not incorporated.\textsuperscript{57}

The Political developments in India, as they were, the Muslim League was concerned about the fate of the Kaliphate. By the time the First World War was almost nearing an end, it became evident that the popularity and territorial integrity of Turkey would be undermined by the British. During the last months of 1918, the ulterior motive of United States of America and England became obvious. So, the Indian Muslims wanted that the honour of the Kaliph should be restored and no damage be done to the Holy places.

In the Madras Province, there was a peculiar situation. As Irschick has pointed out, "Congress politics in Madras Presidency were characterised not only by antipathies between Telugus and Tamils, between pro-Reformers and anti-Reformers, but also between those who were interested mainly in provincial problems as opposed to those who had national interests".\textsuperscript{58}

Thus the year 1919 began with disorder and disillusionment all over India. The proposed reforms, Rowlatt Act, reservation to communal sections, ideological differences in Congress, religious sentiment of the Muslim League and above all "price rise made the people desperate".\textsuperscript{59}

\textsuperscript{57} Nehru Clippings, The Madras Mail, 2nd November 1918 (Nehru Memorial Museum and Library [NMML], New Delhi).


However, Motilal Nehru was prophetic while stating in his Presidential Address of the Indian National Congress (INC) at Amritsar in 1919: "We shall have a difficult path, full of obstacles and pitfalls before us. Let us march ahead with truth as our guide and courage as our watchword, and before long, we shall reach the promised land". 60

To realise the dream of Motilal Nehru and to take the masses to the 'promised land', there emerged a leader of uncommon calibre. That leader was Mohandass Karamchand Gandhi and his new technique was Sathyagraha. 61 His unique technique of combining politics with religion was so impressive and awe-inspiring that the elite as well as the ignorant vied with each other to join the campaigns he was leading. After the demise of Gokhale and Tilak, India found in him a suitable leader to fight against the British Raj and to take the people to the 'promised land'. 62

Mahatma Gandhi's advent into Indian politics in 1915, after twenty years of eventful life in South Africa, was at first little noticed. "His successful attempts in removing the grievances of the peasants of Champan, mill workers in Ahmadabad and triumph

62 Ibid.
of Kheda farmers in getting revenue remission through Sathyagraha had filled the people with hope.\textsuperscript{63} Mahatma Gandhi's rise in 1919, however meteoric, was a response to the situation India faced at the end of the First World War.

Mahatma Gandhi opposed the Rowlatt Report tooth and nail. To mobilise popular opinion he made extensive tours. As a strategy to counter the British he adopted Sathyagraha, a struggle based on non-violence which was successful in South Africa.

When his repeated efforts to persuade the Government to repeal the Act failed, he decided upon a nationwide agitation on the issue. He enlisted supporters for the 'Sathyagraha Sabha' whose members took a solemn vow to disobey the Act and court arrest.\textsuperscript{64} Mahatma Gandhi, on receiving an invitation from Kasthuri Ranga Ayyengar, decided to visit Madras where the Home Rule Movement had already made much headway.

On the arrival of Mahatma Gandhi, Madras became the centre of national politics. The Congress under Mahatma Gandhi welded the people of India into a political entity inspite of the multiplicity of languages, inspite of illiteracy and inspite of the Colonial Government's efforts to discredit it through its loyal cadres.


On March 18, 1919 a large public meeting was held on the Beach at Madras where more than one lakh people gathered. Kasthuri Ranga Ayyengar presided over the meeting and Sarojini Naidu, C. Vijayaraghava Achary, Sathyamoorthi, V.O. Chidambaram Pillai, Subramania Siva and Subramania Bharathi spoke. Mahatma Gandhi addressed the people with an appeal to the Viceroy to withhold assent to the Act. 65

Some of the moderate leaders of Madras Presidency felt that Sathyagraha and Hartal would hinder the reform proposals from becoming Act, and so issued a manifesto condemning the passive resistance as unwise, inexpedient and injurious to the best interests of the country. 66 After the Beach meeting of Mahatma Gandhi, several members including L.A. Gvindaraghava Ayyer, President, Annie Besant Vice-President, B.P. Wadia, Secretary and C.P. Ramasamy Ayyer, Member resigned from the Executive Committee of the Madras Provincial Congress Committee as a protest. 67

Despite his ill health, Mahatma Gandhi toured the Southern districts of Tanjore, Trichinopoly, Madurai, Coimbatore and Malabar

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65 Extracts from G.Os relating to Home Rule Movement and Rowlatt Act 1914-20, Vol. 63 (TNA, Madras), pp.89,91 and 93; Interview with M. Bakthavatsalam at Madras on 20th March 1983.


and appealed to the huge audience to join the Sathyagraha. Owing to unavoidable circumstances the day of nationwide hartal was changed to April 6, 1919 from March 30, 1919. The change of the date from March 30, 1919 to April 4, 1919 could not reach North India, particularly Delhi and Punjab in time. There hartal was observed on March 30, 1919. In Delhi Swami Saraddhanand of Aryasamaj carried out the hartal programme successfully. The Government was shocked at the overwhelming response of the people. Their antipathy was so great that the Army and the Railway Protection Force fired at the crowd causing death and wounds to several people.

This news spread to all parts of the country, and wild protests followed. Government resorted to oppression and the situation in Punjab became very bad, as the province was already seething with intense discontent as a result of the strong arm tactics of the Lieutenant Governor. The news of Delhi brutality set the whole of Punjab aflame, and to put down the disturbances, the Lieutenant Governor Michael O'Dwyer resorted to severe repression.

68 Ibid., p.157.
69 Native Newspaper Report from April to June 1919 (TNA, Madras), p.601.
The Lieutenant Governor issued orders prohibiting Mahatma Gandhi from entering into Punjab, as part of his programme on April 4, 1919. Again on April 6, 1919, Punjab observed a day of hartal, but the administration forced the shops to be opened and articles sold at a low price to the people as an attempt to defeat the hartal. The Lieutenant Governor issued a warning on April 7, 1919 to the Sathyagrahis.

The Prohibitory Order dated April 4, 1919 preventing the entry of Mahatma Gandhi into Punjab was shown to him on April 9, 1919 when he reached Palwal, a small Railway Station on the border of Punjab. When Mahatma Gandhi politely refused to obey the order he was arrested and taken to Bombay. Subsequently Kitchlieu and Sathyapal the leaders of Punjab Congress were arrested. When an infuriated gathering before the residence of the Deputy Commissioner demanded their release, atrocities were committed on civilians by the Army.

Situation in Punjab passed from bad to worse, when Brigadier General Dyer took over charge of the troops on April 12, 1919 and issued Prohibitory Orders for the conduct of gatherings or meetings. But he failed to make the order public. Not knowing

the fact the people of Amritsar assembled at Jallianwala Bagh on the evening of April 13, 1919 for a public meeting. General Dyer ordered firing to disperse the gathering. This resulted in the massacre of innocent people.  

In the firing, hundreds of people were killed and more than thousand wounded due to lack of medical facility. The reign of terror with the 'cult of bullets' shocked and silenced the people of Punjab.  

The Jallianwala Bagh tragedy elicited widespread condemnation of the British and earned the sympathy of the common people all over India. Even the moderate leaders openly condemned the British attitude. Rabindranath Tagore gave up his knighthood and C. Sankaran Nair resigned from the membership of the Executive Council of the Viceroy, describing the act of the Government as uncivilised and inhuman.  

The tragedy evoked sympathy in the minds of the people of the Madras Presidency. A hartal was observed and people

74 Extracts from Secret Reports relating to Civil Disobedience Movement (1929-30), Vol. 65, pp.421-422; V.D. Mahajan, History of India since 1526 (New Delhi, 1972), p.467.

75 Native Newspaper Reports 1919 from April to June (TNA, Madras), pp.650-651.

irrespective of caste, creed and religion met on the Madras Beach and condemned the British atrocity. Newspapers published the gruesome events and charged the Government.

Government resorted to repressive measures on The Hindu, Nationalist, and Desabakthan under the press Act of 1910. The security deposit was forfeited and the Nationalist suspended the publication. The Government action was condemned as unfair, unjustifiable, arbitrary and oppressive, and a "press defence fund" was created by the committee of journalists and politicians to fight against it. When the Madras Provincial Congress Committee met at Trichy, Vaidyanatha Ayyer moved the resolution to immediately recall the Viceroy who had lost the confidence of the people.

The tragedy of Punjab ignited the fire in Madras Presidency and the horror drove many youngsters and the educated towards the National Movement.

The 'Sathyagraha' and the 'Punjab Tragedy' drew the Madras Presidency into the national mainstream. It provided an opportunity

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77 Extracts from Fortnightly Reports (Confidential) 1914-27, Vol. 71 (TNA, Madras), pp.173 and 175.


79 Ibid., p.181.

80 Ibid., p.193.

81 Ibid., p.175.
to the regional leaders for an interaction with other regional and national leaders. Madras became a pivotal centre not only in decision making but also in moulding the future of the country.

The Punjab Tragedy and the failure of the British to uphold the integrity of Turkey left the Indian Muslims confused about their future stance with the British. Mahatma Gandhi used this opportunity to start a Khilafat Conference at Delhi in November 1919, to help the Indian Muslims and thereby narrow down the differences dividing them from the Hindus.

Mahatma Gandhi realised that the country's honour, dignity and freedom could not be upheld by pursuing a policy of conciliation. So he adopted his new policy of Non-co-operation, the only answer to the injustice perpetuated by the Government.

The people completely lost their confidence in the Government, when the report of the Hunter Committee was published. Edward Thompson commented, "the bitterness created over this controversy has had a marked effect on recent Indian history. It formed a turning point in Indo-British relations almost as important as mutiny. The concerted struggle against the imperialist British


in the form of Non-co-operation and Khilafat got favour from the Congress.

In 1920, the Congress considered the proposal of Mahatma Gandhi's Non-co-operation struggle and the Nagpur Session of December 1920 endorsed it. The Central Kilafat Committee which met in June 1920 at Allahabad, where Mahatma Gandhi participated as an invitee resolved to launch a non-violent Kilafat struggle against the British Government.

In carrying out the Non-co-operation Movement the Congress of the Madras Province had some setbacks. Regarding the reform proposals of Montagu and Chelmsford, there were three different opinions in the Madras Province. The first group, called the nationalists, demanded the outright rejection of the scheme as nothing short of self-rule. The second group represented by the moderates wanted the scheme to be accepted with improvements. The third group did not want any reform because any reform would lead to a Brahmin Raj. The third group reflected the view of the Justice Party. 85

The Congressmen of Madras thus divided on the question of reform proposals, were also divided on the issue of Non-co-operation. The success of the agitation in Madras depended

largely upon a compromise which would make them unite and work.

So Non-co-operation Movement did not evoke much reaction in the Southern districts of Madras Presidency where the Justicites dominated. Hence it was decided by the Provincial Congress to invite Mahatma Gandhi to tour Madras Province again to inspire the people to join the struggle.\textsuperscript{86}

Mahatma Gandhi accepted the invitation and undertook a tour of Madras for propagating the ideas of Non-co-operation among the Youth of Madras Presidency. The tour had its desired effect. According to the Government report Mahatma Gandhi created a tremendous enthusiasm and attracted enormous crowds wherever he went.\textsuperscript{87}

Rajiv Gandhi observed: "In drawing the masses in, the Congress attracted gifted personalities at the pinnacle of their professions, like Motilal Nehru and Chitraranjan Das, men and women who had already made a mark, like Vallabhbhai Patel, Abdul Khalam Azad, Rajagopalachari, Rajan Babu and Sarojini Naidu, and the most dynamic leaders of the younger generation, like Jawaharlal Nehru, Badsah Khan, Subash Bose, and Jayaprakash Narain. Many humble workers came into the Congress who later became stalwarts. like

\textsuperscript{87} Extracts from Fortnightly Reports 1914-27 (Confidential), Vol. 71 (TNA, Madras), p.325.
Lal Bahadur Shastri and Kamaraj. 88

Inspired by Mahatma Gandhi and the Punjab Tragedy, Kamaraj, a youth of 16 from Virudhunagar, with limited education but filled with nationalist sentiments chose to join the National Movement. 89 The shrill shrieks of the victims of Jallianwala Bagh echoed in his ears.

Kamaraj became an active political worker in 1920, and four decades later he was to decide the course of Indian politics.


89 R.P. Kapur, Kamaraj, the Iron Man (New Delhi, 1966), pp.67-68.