

PRESS AND THE HOME RULE MOVEMENT IN BIHAR

Kumar Alok Ranjan

Moh- Pragati Nagar

Ward No. 30

P.O.- Bhaura

Block- Rahika

PS+Dist- Madhubani-847212 (Bihar)

An attempt has been made to critically analyse the role of press in the Home Rule Movement . The separation of Bihar from Bengal brought new dimensions in every field in the province, particularly it gave new vigour and zeal to both the English and vernacular newspapers of the State. Now the newspapers and journals had new ideals before them. They devoted themselves to the problems of social reform and economic emancipation from the exploiters. Economic emancipation of the country was an important subject to be dealt with by the newspapers. At the same time, press in Bihar was not lagging behind to analyze and publish events related to the Home Rule Movement to educate the masses with regard to the contemporary events. With the year 1914, the First World War began and the *Beharee* labelled it as a highly critical period in human history. Mankind everywhere was subject to the ordeals of the volcanic cataclysm of the world war. It had profound repercussions on India in various ways. There was considerable ferment in her political life leading to a new turn in the history of Indian National Movement. Mahatma Gandhi, in a speech delivered at Karanchi on 29th February, 1961,¹ remarked thus "In the course of my tour in India, I have been particularly struck with one thing and that is the awakening of the Indian people. A new hope has filled the hearts of the people, hope that something is going to happen which will raise the Motherland to a higher status."² The All India Muslim League, began to shed its separatist attitude from 1913 onwards. At its annual session held at Lucknow on 22 of March of the year, it declared its aim to be 'the attainment of self-government for India along with the other communities.'³ Bihar's newspapers such as *the Beharee* , *the Bihar Times*, *the National Herald*, *the Desh* gave wide publicity to this and pointed out that sincere cordiality between the Hindus and the Muslims was essential for the fulfilment of the cherished national aspirations.⁴ Muslim sentiments in India were also deeply stirred by War of Britain against Turkey, particularly since 1916 when the Sheriff of Mecca had rebelled against British. The Sultan of Turkey was the Khalifa and had in 'Moslem eye become

England's tool.' This facilitated co-operation between the Indian Muslims and the Indian National Congress, as a result of which the Lucknow pact was signed in 1916 and both jointly formulated a scheme of reforms, known as the 'Congress-League Scheme.' Commenting on the importance of the pact, Surendra Nath Banerjee remarked : "Today is a red letter day in our history.⁵ Today (29 December 1916), Hindus and Mohammedans and all ranks of the National Party are united on this platform inspired by a common resolve and a common purpose. May the memory of this day be embalmed in the recollections of posterity by the inauguration of a new campaign for the attainment of Self-Government ?⁶

By this time, two great leaders of the moderates, G.K. Gokhale and Pherozeshah Mehta had passed away. Annie Besant and Lokamanya Balgangadhar Tilak now came to the forefront as leaders of a new political life in the country. Both of them started two Home Rule Leagues, Lokmanya Tilak in Poona, and Annie Besant in Madras. The two began to carry on a vigorous national propaganda in support of the Congress-League-Scheme. The newspapers of Bihar felt that the influence of the Home Rule Movement was felt deeply in this province.⁷

The Beharee, (Mr. Alfred Cunningham replaced Maheshwar Prasad as editor of *the Beharee*) however, expressed doubt about the leadership of Tilak. Referring to Bal Gangadhar Tilak's interest in the movement, *the Beharee* wrote that Tilak who was undoubtedly an extremist sometime ago had not changed much yet, and though some moderate tendencies were found in his utterances now and then, he was in the main, an extremist. The scheme which practically emanated from him was of an extreme type.⁸ *The Beharee* again suggested during the year 1916 that if the home Rule League finally decided to agitate in the near future, it should confine its attention to such proposals as had some chance of success instead of overwhelming itself with a multitude of unrealisable schemes.⁹

At a meeting held at Bankipur on 16th December, 1916, it was decided to start a Home Rule League at Patna.¹⁰ Mazharul Haque was elected its President, Khan Bahadur Sarfaraj Hussain (Zamindar of Patna City) and Purnendu Narain Sinha were elected Vice-Presidents and Chandra Bansi Sahay and Baijanath Singh (Pleaders) were elected Secretaries. Mazharul Haque delivered an illuminating speech, stressing, the need for the formation of this League. He observed that Home Rule means Self-Government.¹¹ As *the Desh* pointed out the object of the league was to educate and organise the people and popularise the idea of Self-Government throughout the country. The propaganda was to be done through constitutional means.¹²

At the Congress Session of 1917, Annie Besant was voted to the Presidential chair mainly because of her Home Rule Campaign. In her presidential address she said, "India demands Home Rule for two reasons, one essential and vital, the other less important and weighty. First, because freedom is the birthright of every nation; secondly, because her most important interests are now made subservient to the interests of the British Empire and without the consent of British ruler her own resources are not utilized for her greatest needs. It is enough

only to mention the money spent on the Army, which was meant not for local defence but for imperial purposes, as compared with that spent on primary education. Self-government is necessary to the self-respect and dignity of a people; other governments emasculate a Nation, lower its character and lessen its capacity.¹³ She also emphasised that a Bill should be brought before parliament during 1918, establishing self-government in India on lines resembling those of the Commonwealth on a date to be laid down therein, preferably 1923, the latest 1928, the intermediate five to ten years being occupied with transference of the Government from British to Indian hands, maintaining the British tie as in the dominions.¹⁴

The agitation was at its peak in 1918. A meeting was held at Patna on the 17 February, 1918 and office-bearers of the Provincial committee of the Home Rule League were elected.¹⁵ Annie Besant came to Patna on 18 April, 1918.¹⁶ She was escorted from the station in a procession to the residence of Purnendu Narain Sinha located in Bikhna Pahari Mohalla of Patna.¹⁷ The local papers published details of her visit and its objective. The procession was cheered by nearly 5000 men, Arati was performed at several points. Flowers were showered at her and streets were decorated. At one place, the people washed her feet and she was offered *sherbat*. At Chowk Bazar, she was received by Mazharul Haque. At the house of Babu Balgovind Malviya where she was taken to see the Barahmihir Library, she was offered a costly Benarasi Chadar by the owner of the house. Mazharul Haque delivered a shock welcome speech and a small purse was offered to her on behalf of the Biparni Rakshak Sabha. K.B. Sarfaraz Hussain Khan and Balgovind Malviya delivered short eulogistic speeches to which Mrs. Besant replied suitably. A large number of students, both Hindus and Mohammedans lined the streets and stood on housetops. A large number of women also greeted her. She was greeted with cries of 'Bande Matram' 'Bharat Mata Ki Jai' 'Swaraj Mata Ki Jai.' At 4.30 p.m. she visited the Anglo-Sanskrit School, Purnendu Babu's institutions, and at 5.30 she delivered a lecture at Ali Manzil and then left for Madras via Calcutta.¹⁸ About 5000 people were present and K.B. Sarfaraz Hussain Khan was in the chair.¹⁹ The local Home Rule leaders, Hasan Imam (Pleader), Purnendu Narain Sinha and Sarfaraz Hussain Khan signed public manifestoes.²⁰ Annie Besant paid a flying visit to Patna again on 25 July 1918, for ascertaining the views of the local Home Rulers regarding the reforms. Here, she met among others Hasan Imam and Sachchidanand Sinha.²¹

In Bihar, Home Rule Movement was Popularised in course of time in every district except Champaran where Gandhiji had started a movement against the Indigo-Planters. He did not allow his associates to take part in Home Rule Movement, as to him the Champaran Movement was more important and it was also a part of the Home Rule Movement.²² Gandhiji, however attended Home Rule meetings at Bhagalpur, Chhapra and other places encouraging the people. One of his associates in the Champaran Movement had set up a Home Rule League at Muzaffarpur²³ and remained its Secretary till 1920.

According to an officer of the CID deputed to Saran district, Home Rule meetings were arranged in almost all the villages and the movement was a universal topic of conversation.

Pleaders and Mukhtears used to visit villages in the interior during the vacation to spread Home Rule Propaganda. The raiyyats had been advised not to render any service to the Maniara factory unless they were amply paid for it. Home Rule had also caused disturbances at Sipaya Farm.²⁴ At a meeting at Chhapra on June 15, 1918, mahadeo Saran Pande asked the audience to use indigenous articles and he exhorted them to grow cotton and to sent raw materials to Indian factories instead of a foreign country.²⁵ Banke Behari Lal, Bindeshwari Prasad, Kamala Prasad, Murli Manohar Prasad²⁶ Chandra Deo Narayan, Jagat Narayan and Mahadeo Saran Pande were the prominent Home Rulers in Saran district.

Braj Kishore Prasad²⁷ was the chief organizer of the Home Rule agitation in Darbhanga district. During the home Rule agitation, different pamphlets were in circulation in Bihar propagating the movement. At the time when Gandhiji visited Chhapra on January 27, 1918, a pamphlet in the form of an address to Gandhiji was in Circulation containing an unfavourable comparison between the British rule and that of the reign of Chandragupta. During the reign of Chandragupta, it said, Bihar was prosperous while during the British regime it was on the verge of collapse.²⁸

There was also a circulation in Chhapra, a colourful Home Rule Picture headed Bande Mataram. In the center, the king George, standing on a lotus flower, was presenting the Charter of Home Rule to India. Directly above were Queen Victoria and King Edward apparently looking down from Heaven, and on such side of them were departed Indian leaders such as Dada Bhai naoroji, Gokhale, Hume and others. Besides, their majesties were depicted, among others Lord Curzon and Montague, while on India's side were Tilak, Annie Besant, Gandhi, Madan Mohan Malaviya, Rabindra Nath Tagore, Iyer and others, and immediately below them, with very wry faces, were portraits of the editors of the *Englishman*, *Madras Mail*, *Pioneer* and *Steman*.²⁹

A leaflet headed 'Sabadhan' was in circulation in Muzaffarpur district. It exhorted people to send telegrams to Tilak expressing their firm confidence in him and urging him to point out to the British people at home the evils of the present administration and the immediate grant of Home Role.³⁰

On the whole, newspapers of Bihar published the proceedings of almost all the public meetings in order to familiarize the people about the objectives of Home Rule Movement. Rajendra Prasad has written that throughout the Movement. Rajendra Prasad has written that throughout the country, a large number of workers were going about delivering lectures and arousing and organising the people. Bihar too had its share of political agitation.³¹ As I have already mentioned earlier that at Muzaffarpur, Janakdhari Prasad, a co-workers of Mahatma Gandhi, started a Home Rule-League in co-operation with some members of the local Bar and businessmen and was elected its Secretary. Similarly, in Saran district, several meetings were held, Mahindra Nandi of Arrah was actively addressing these meetings.³² Mahatma Gandhi

addressed a meeting of Chhapra on 27 January, 1918. In this meeting, Home Rule badges were sold and subscriptions amounting to Rs.800 were collected from the people.³³ The Chief Secretary to the Government of Bihar reported that "the Maharani of Hathwa also told me this morning that there is a tendency in Saran for the ryots to withhold their rent because of the unrest caused by Gandhi and the Home Rule propaganda.³⁴ The Government was considering the desirability of warning the raiyats that "they will themselves be the sufferers, if they withhold payment. The District Magistrate, Saran, F.M. Luce, wrote to the Commissioner, "I have frequently drawn your attention during the last years to the activities of the so called Home Rulers in this district. They consist mainly of a number of second-rate pleaders of Chapra Bar, and for sometime, they have been concentrating their efforts on starting a trouble between the Managers and Raiyats of Mareais.³⁵

In the course of this speech delivered in the Theosophical House of Gaya, in July, 1917, Surendra Nath Banerjee advised the members of the Home Rule League to publish booklets in Hindi on the subject of Home Rule and to circulate these in the villages.³⁶ To motivate people, the papers informed the people that a pamphlet entitled *Swaraj katha* by Balmukund Bajpai, a Home Ruler, was prosecuted by the Government of Bihar and Orissa as also by the Government of U.P. and the Punjab. Bajrang Sahai of Hazaribagh, a prominent political workers of Bihar and a lawyer at Patna met Annie Besant in 1917 at Calcutta.³⁷ There, he met Tarini Prasad Sinha who originally belonged to village Deokutti in Gaya district, who, after having received his education at the Banaras Central Hindu College, went out to Japan and America on the eve of World War I and served as a Lieutenant in England during this war. On his return to India, he became intimately associated with the Home Rule Movement, for which he and some of his associates were even jailed.³⁸

The newspapers of Bihar highlighted a significant event that took place about this time. Rai Puranchand of Patna city, Joint Secretary of the Patna Home Rule League, mooted the idea of starting the worship of Bharat Mata on the Vijaya Dashmi Day.³⁹ He himself could not give effect to the idea, because he died soon afterwards. But it materialized soon through he efforts of his two sons, Rai Baldeo Prasad and Rai Damodar Prasad. On this occasion, prominent public men and nationalists were invited to deliver lectures, which were preceded by singing of national songs. Such functions continued till 1930. A Bulletin of the Patna Hindi Sabha contained the following notification about worship of Bharat Mata : "Worship of Bharat Mata will be solemnized on the occasion of Vijaya Dashmi. All communities, Hindu, Musalman, Christian, Buddhist, Sikh and Parsi are cordially invited to join hands in the performance of the function.⁴⁰

Thus, in course of the Home Rule Movement in Bihar prominent part was played by the following persons belonging to the new middle class : Mazharul Haque, Purnendu Narayan Sinha, Chandra Bansi Sahay, Baijanath Narayan Sinha, Hasan Imam, Sachchidanand Sinha, Rajendra Prasad, Janakdhari Prasad, Bajrang Sahay, Khan Sarfaraz Hussain, Tarini Prasad Sinha,

Manindra Nand, Balmukund Bajpai and Puranchand. Their activities were highlighted by papers. All except the last five were lawyers.

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