

ROLE OF DISTRICT ASSOCIATIONS AND CONFERENCES IN THE AWAKENING OF NATIONALISM IN ANDHRA

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ABSTRACT

District associations and conferences in Andhra played a significant role in the formation of political consciousness in the 19th century. Andhra was the birthplace of Indian National Congress in 1885. But political awakening and nationalism did not emerge in the region until 1905. Pal was also imprisoned. Aurobindo settled down in Pondicherry, and took to spiritual life. In Andhra also the political leadership came into the hands of Moderates like Konda Venkatappaiah and B.N.Sarma. After the reunite of Bengal in 1911 the people of Andhra region were concentrated besides struggle for independence of India and also separate state for Telugus as Andhra from Madras Presidency.

INTRODUCTION

The establishment of literary associations like Rajahmundry and Kakinada as well as increasing reformation movements in Andhra and the formation of Indian National Congress (INC) in 1885 at national level had gave an impetus to the formation of various district associations in Andhra.¹ In 1892, the Krishna district Association was formed. It was the first of its kind not only in the Madras Presidency but probably also in India. Ramaswamy Gupta, was an active member of the INC had organized the Krishna District Conference at Guntur (which was then part of the Krishna district) in July 1892. The second conference was organized in June 1893 at Machalipatnam. In 1894 the farmers of Krishna held a Conference in Eluru (which was also then in Krishna district) to protest against the enhancement of water charges and refused to cultivate their lands unless the water rates were reduced.² But in the 19th century political consciousness was a result to social consciousness. Although the controversy among social and political reformers of the late 19th century as to whether social reform should herald political reform or vice versa, it was a that social reform movements paved the way for political consciousness and also the early phase of political leadership, as it was abundantly demonstrated in the case of Andhra, emerged from the these reform movements.³ However, real political awakening and nationalism in Andhra did not emerge till 1905 when Vadematararam and Swadehi

Movement shook the entire nation years 1905 to 1911. In this paper the author has made an attempt to analyze the significance of district associations and conferences in Andhra to educate the people of Andhra to have political consciousness and further how enlighten the nationalist feeling with changes occurred at national level is the core object simultaneously.

The period in between 1905-1920 was an amazing phase in the freedom struggle of India as well as in Andhra, further it shaped the movement in Andhra spurt into separate movement for Andhra. Since its inception to 1905, the Congress confined its activities to submit petitions to the Government praying for constitutional reforms. The chief demands from it the abolition of the Indian Council, expansion and reform of the legislation at the Centre and the provinces, holding simultaneous I.C.S. Examination in England and India, relaxation of the arms Act, etc. The Congress leaders who had full faith in British liberalism felt frustrated when the irresponsible British bureaucracy put on deaf ear to the prayers and petitions of the Congress.⁴ A section of the literati community under the leadership Balaganadhar Tilak began to develop a new spirit of opposition to the Government. Tilak stimulated national spirit in Maharashtra by organizing annual Ganesh festivals and by reviving the cult of Shivaji.⁵

The spirit of unrest and discontent voiced by Tilak soon spread to other parts of the country including Andhra. In Andhra the district associations and conferences which were conducted on contemporary issues had played a significant role under the initiation of the educated community. One noteworthy thing pertains to organizers most of them were pleaders or prominent personalities of the concerned area were influenced the ideas of democracy, nationalism and radicalism. The educated Indians became the best propagators and followers of extremist nationalism both because they were low-paid or unemployed and because they were in modern thought and politics, and in Europe and world history.⁶ One of the causes that had stimulated the Indian national spirit was the resounding victory of Ethiopia against Italy in 1896 and of Japan against Russia in 1905. These incidents boosted Indians confidence that some day they could become free from alien rule. In Andhra the victory of Japan created an interest in that country, Adipudi Somanath Rao, a well-known social reformer of the day wrote the history of Japan in Telugu and dedicated it to the Raja of Munagala. Sriram Virabrahman wrote a drama in telugu called Uapaneyamu. The Raja of Munagala named his beloved sons 'Tago' and 'Nogi' after the Japanese commanders of army and navy respectively.⁷

Thy startling event that gave a new loaf to oat national struggle was the partition of Bengal In 1905, on the wounds of administrative convenience, The teal reason was in break the solidarity of the Bengali intelligentsia and to create a Hindu-Muslim rift. In Bengal under the strong leadership of Surendranath Benerjee a strong movement was launched to pressurize the

Government In annual the partition. Picketing of shops and the bonfire of foreign goods became the order of the day. The movement was popularly known as the Swadesh Movement. In this period Balgangadhar Tilak, Lala Lajpat Rai, Bipin Chandra Pal and Aurobindo Ghosh appeared on the national scene as an objective with militant (extremist) nationalism. Of these the last may be said to be the philosopher of the new ideology. They believed that Indians themselves must work out their own salvation and make the effort to rise from their degraded position. They declared that great sacrifices and sufferings were needed for this task. Their speeches, writings and political work were full of boldness and self-confidence, and they considered no personal sacrifice too great for the good of their country. It was their ideas that shaped the course of the freedom movement in every part of the country in the years immediately following 1905.⁸

In this scenario the district organizations of Andhra had under the initiation of the educated community like at national scene they started Swaraj movement in an aim to inculcate feeling of patriotism towards motherland, spurt the nationalism and develop the political consciousness. As a creed it is in essence the worship of the motherland, the Bharata Bhumi. The motherland, however, is not a mere piece of earth. It is a mighty shakti, composed of all the Shaktis of all the millions of units that make up the nation. Furthermore they used Vande Mataram song of Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay as a Mantra for worship the mother.

During the years 1906-11 Andhra politics were by the Vande Mataram Movement and Its ideals. The effort to popularize Swadeshi was the main characteristic of the events of 1906. Madras, the capital of the province, of which Andhra was then a part, contained a large Andhra population and numerous Andhra leaders. It was the Centre from which ideas regarding Swadeshi spread to all the districts, although Andhra, unlike the other parts of the province, was subject to greater influence from Bengal in political as well as cultural fields. The spirit which permeated the man of the day in regard to Swadeshi was best reflected in a speech delivered by K. Krishnaswamy Rao at a public meeting held on the subject in Madras on February 24, 1906, the first of a series of mass meetings proposed to be held for spreading the message of Swadeshi. Mr. Rao observed: "Swadeshimism is nothing but self-help and self-improvement, Our aim and object is to emulate the civilized and prosperous nations of the world. The work before us is colossal and often seems to be hopeless. But we should not forget the Providence has constituted man that nothing is unobtainable by him if he sincerely and steadily works". In this campaign on March 29, Harisarvottama Rao was an MA student of Madras Christian College made a speech exhorting his countrymen to practice self-help. He followed by Adipudi Somanatha Rao, a well-known Arya Samajist and social reformer of Andhra, who compared India to a house only rented to the British and made frequent references to the industrial and political progress of Japan.⁹

In 1906 at Madras an Industrial Association was started by the leading citizens to propagate the ideal of Swadeshi and for the sale of Swadeshi articles. It deputed Nyapathi Subbarao and K. Venkataramana Rao, an advocate and a journalist to tour Andhra to popularize Swadeshi. In this period educated people prepared through the Swaraj and Swadesi concept developed the each and every region of the country the significance of Swadeshi goods and establishment national education.¹⁰ This phase of development under the leadership of educated served as bedrock for national movement and prepared ground for to be mass national movement under the leadership of Mohan Das Karanchand Gandhi, especially from the region of Andhra. Without this kind of stirring efforts at regional level there was no question of mass movement under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi.

The Mahajana Sabha which was an old organization played a prominent part in this connection at the level of Madras presidency. Both the Mahajana Sabha and Industrial Association enlisted the support of students in the cause of Swadeshi. They were enrolled as volunteers and K. Venkataramana Rao, an advocate and a journalist, was appointed their captain. The involvement of students in the public movements became an important feature of the freedom struggle from this time onwards. A Swadeshi League was also started. At that time merchants of Guntur abstain from the imprinting foreign goods as far as possible.¹¹

In their campaign of Swadeshi concept by Nyapathi Subba Rao and Venkataramana Rao in Andhra another prominent personality was added to them later namely C.Y. Chintamani, the Assistant Secretary of the Indian Industrial Conference. He toured the Telugu districts along Nyapathi Subba Rao and addressed meetings in Nellore, Guntur, Cocanada, Vizagapatnam and Vijayanagaram. One significant feature of the meetings was that highly placed officials of the locality including members of the Civil Service participated in them. In his messages Chintamani took, with the help of facts and figures, a bird's eye-view of India's industrial position and pointed out the immense difficulties with which they were confronted at every step. In this series of meetings addresses by him resolutions were passed urging people to start industrial concerns and organize an industrial wing to district associations. Meetings like these were of great value in making the people Swadeshi-minded.¹² Both the moderates and Extremists worked together in promoting Swadeshi. However, boycott of foreign goods concerned there acute differences were arises between extremists and moderates. Moderates thought objection foreign goods hatred towards government even though they know without boycott of goods Swadeshi may not success.¹³

At Vizagapatam district conference held in May-June, Mr. Venkataramana Rao, the captain of the Madras volunteers, stressed on Swadeshi as envisaged by the National Fund and

Industrial Association and a resolution was passed on the need for promoting industries and technical education. The Krishna-Guntur conference held a week later at Nuzvidu also passed a similar resolution. But tepid response from the public even newspapers published about the significance of Swadeshi, Swaraj and boycott in 1906. But with fund collection from zamindars and others many students were sent Japan to get industrial training.¹⁴

The Krishna-Guntur district Conference of 1907 assembled at Nandigama in the Krishna district under the reception committee Chairman of Raja of Munagala and Vaid Suryanarayana Rao of the Masulipatnam bar as President. Both were nationalists and set the tone to the proceedings of the conference. The Raja observed that Swaraj, Swadeshi, boycott and national education were the four Vedas of the reformers. The President referred the utter failure of the old Congress methods and advocated Swaraj as the ideal to be aimed at. He spoke strongly in favour of Swadeshi, boycott and national education as instruments for securing Swaraj. Ten resolutions were passed including one on boycott on the line suggested by President.¹⁵

At the Guntur District Conference held at Tenali under the Presidentship of Konda Venkatappayya there was great excitement when the resolutions on Swadeshi and boycott were taken up for consideration. The police were waiting for an opportunity to interfere. However, they did not give for chance and the resolutions were passed by a large majority in an orderly manner.¹⁶

As a result of propaganda in favour of Swadeshi, donations were raised for helping the students who went to Japan and other countries for technical training. In this regard, Mahajana Shabha which was an old organization played a prominent part in this connection. A soap and candle manufacturing company was started. In many towns Swadeshi stores were opened. It was suggested that gold and silver ornaments should be sold and the proceeds invested in Swadeshi industries. All this indicated- though not on large scale-that people were not satisfied merely with making speeches or listening to them but that they were also determined to take action to the extent possible. The habit of using Swadeshi articles was becoming common especially among the educated classes in towns. It was also in this year that steps were taken under the leadership of Nyapathi Subba Rao Pantulu to establish a national school in Rajahmundry, the first institution of its kind in Andhra.¹⁷

The year 1907 was very significant in regard to Swadeshi and Swaraj especially with the tour of Bipin Chandra Pal. By that time Pal's name along with that of Tilak and Lajpat Rai was known throughout the country. They constituted a triumvirate and were recognized as the foremost leaders—Bal-Pal-Lal- of the Nationalist party though as an exponent of the new nationalist

philosophy Aurobindo towered over them all. According to Bipin Chandra Pal, Nationalism in India is a part of the worship of the Mother. The Mother is Kali, Durga, Bhawani or Jagadhatri all manifestation of the earth goddess. Nationalism and the worship of the Mother should go together. The mother is in no bondage. To worship her is to liberate her from bondage and in this process her children should be prepared to undergo any amount of suffering.

For the time being, he said, the sacrifice should take the form of Swadeshi, boycott and national education. Every child of the mother should take a vow that he would boycott foreign articles, and use only Swadesi ones even though they might be more costly. He should boycott government schools and join national schools. He should boycott government courts and resort to indigenous courts or to methods of arbitration.

Pal in his Andhra tour from Rajahmundry proceeded to Bezwada where he was the guest of Raja of Munagala. Here also there was a good deal of political activity by the time of his arrival. Ayyadevara Kaleswara Rao, who had just then started his career as an advocate, tells us in his autobiography that much of the new activity was inspired by the victory of Japan, an Asian country, over Russia, a European country. This created Confidence among the Indians in general and Andhras in particular that with a determined effort it would be possible for them also to free themselves from bondage to the British rule.¹⁸ In this scenario a divisional Congress Committee was formed with jurisdiction over Bezwada and four other talugs with Peddibhotla Veerayya as President and KaleswaraRao as Secretary. Several young men joined it and regular meetings were held under its LAuspices. Several members belonged to the national school of politics.¹⁹

On arrival at Bezwada, Pal was taken through the streets in a huge procession. On the first day he delivered a lecture on "Vedanta and the message of freedom". On the second day he spoke on Swadesi and other allied subjects.

From Bezwada he went to Masulipatnam which was another center of political activity in those days. A reception committee consisting of the leading men including the government pleader was formed to receive him and to make arrangements for his lectures. A police report for 1906 refers to the activities of the Krishina District Association and gives the names of more than a dozen persons from all communities who took a prominent part in its work. It also refers to a gathering of the gymnasts of Masulipatnam in September 1906 at which collections were made, prizes distributed and speeches were delivered on Swadesi and physical training an event which scared the government to some extent. It is, therefore, no wonder that Pal received an enthusiastic welcome in the town. Moreover, it was the home town of Mutnuri Krishna Rao, the editor of 'Krishna Patrika'.²⁰ The significant ideals of his lectures were at Masulipatnam on

Swadeshi, boycott, national education and Swaraj. He also spoke on the new theology; "with great force he reiterated the one fact that the problem we have to face is neither a political, a social nor an economic one but an essentially spiritual one. True religion is impossible in India unless the foreign yoke is removed".²¹ The most substantial result of Pal's visit to Masulipatnam was the foundation of the National College. Then he left for Madras after the Andhra tour on May 1, 1907.

Shortly after Bipin Chandra Pal's tour in Andhra (1907), Lala Lajapati Rai was deported under an old and antiquated regulation of the East India Company. Protest meetings were held in all important towns throughout Andhra. Similar meetings were held to protest against the Seditious Meetings Bill which was considered to be a breach of man's primary right of freedom of speech and of meeting. Several speakers suggested that as a mark of protest against it people should resort to boycott of British goods on a more extensive scale and call on members of legislatures to resign in a body.²²

Pal's tour in Andhra was a roaring success. It electrified the whole political atmosphere and made the people more militant and self-assertive than they were before. The desire to do something and not to remain merely passive took hold of them. Government attributed to his tour the trouble in Coconda and Rajahmundry in 1907 and the holding of meetings even in rural areas of Gadavari for spreading the message of Swaraj and Swadeshi. Pal's visit was really a landmark in the history of freedom struggle of Andhra. The tone and the content of the Telugu newspapers also underwent a change after Pal's visit. They wrote more boldly and freely on the meaning and significance of Bandemataram, of swaraj and of Swadeshi, boycott and national education. They looked at Swaraj as a natural right. They repudiated the argument that Indians were unfit for Swaraj and unable to govern themselves. They persuaded the people to use Swadeshi articles even though they were more costly. They argued that self-help was the best help and that like Japan they should rise out of their own effort, that the British could not rule India for all time, that Indians should not wage a bloody war to get Swaraj and they should prefer to send them away peacefully through boycott.²³

The Vandemataram Movement apart from quickening the political awakening and ignited patriotism in Andhra also led to the establishment of national educational institutions and Swadeshi stores. Many young men went to Japan for industrial training. Another off-shoot of the movement was the establishment of secret terrorist societies in different parts of the country. But in Andhra the terrorists did not make much impact. Darsy Chenchiah was the only one from Andhra who joined the Gadhar party but he did not stay in it for long.

The Vandemataram and Swadeshi movement began to lose their momentum by 1910. From that year onwards the moderates were in ascendancy. Tilak, Pal and Aurobindo who had led the militant nationalist movement were no longer in the limelight. Tilak was imprisoned at Mandalay. Pal was also imprisoned. Aurobindo settled down in Pondicherry, and took to spiritual life. In Andhra also the political leadership came into the hands of Moderates like Konda Venkatappaiah and B.N. Sarma. After the reunite of Bengal in 1911 the people of Andhra region were concentrated besides struggle for independence of India and also separate state for Telugus as Andhra from Madras Presidency.

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