



## **ROLE OF STUDENTS IN HOME RULE MOVEMENT 1916 – 1918**

**LALITHA.S**

Associate Professor of History  
V.V. Vanniaperumal College for Women  
Virudhunagar  
Tamil Nadu, INDIA.

### **ABSTRACT**

The history of freedom movement requires an analysis of the role of distinct social groups, classes, the regions and social variations. Students' participation in the Home Rule Movement marked a turning point in the history of freedom movement. Home Rule Organisers sought the support of the students in order to popularize the movement. Annie Besant started student oriented programmes such as Boys Scout, Volunteer Corps and National Education to attract the students. In many parts of the Madras Presidency the students fearlessly and freely participated in the freedom Movement. This paper narrates the genesis of the Home Rule Movement, how the students were brought into the fold of the movement and the nature of student's participation.

**Key words:** Home Rule Movement, Boys Scout, Volunteer Corps

### **INTRODUCTION**

The students' who are one among the important social groups contributed a lot for the cause of Indian Freedom Movement. Unmindful of their future, thousands of students left their schools and colleges and joined the liberation struggle. In their teens they remained in their vanguard of India's

struggle for independence. In this paper an attempt is made to analyse the role played by students in the Home Rule Movement.

### **GENESIS OF THE HOME RULE MOVEMENT**

Annie Besant, Irish women and fundamentally a Theosophist took keen interest in socio-education reforms in India. Her task of rejuvenating India

seemed a political and she was left free by the British to work for her Theosophical Society. She believed that the future of India and the happiness of her people can never be secured by political methods, but only by the revival of her philosophy and religion. In the meanwhile Annie Besant, who had devoted herself to the cause of social and educational uplift of India, gradually came to realize that the political advancement was quite necessary for the development of India. Since 1914 she began to divert her tireless energies to politics. However Annie Besant's main objectives in entering Indian politics was to bring union between moderates and extremists, to popularize the doctrine of self government and to promote friendship between Britain and India. To achieve her object Annie Besant decided to start the Home Rule League.

In 1914, she started the daily "New India" and the weekly "commonweal" to press the preparation for the coming changes in India, and to claim steadily India's place in the Empire. She submitted her plan to start the Home Rule League in Bombay Congress session in 1915. But the moderates dominated the congress was reluctant to allow her resolution for discussion. As a result both Annie Besant and Tilak decided to go on their own. On 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1916, Mrs. Besant formally

inaugurated the Home Rule League at a meeting held at Gokhale Hall, Madras. In the meeting about five hundred persons enrolled themselves as members of the League. Annie Besant was elected as the President, Arundale the Organising Secretary, B.P. Wadia the Treasurer and C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyar as one of the General Secretaries. The Home Rule League was to consist of two divisions, one in India and the other in England. The function of League in England was to educate the English about the conditions in India. Theosophical Society had a number of branches all over India with several thousands of members. Annie Besant utilized it for political purposes.

In order to attain swaraj Annie Besant organized a Home Rule League and preached everywhere about swadeshi, boycott of foreign goods, temperance, national education, labour welfare and responsible government, ideals similar in essence to those propounded by Indian National Congress since 1885.[1] India demanded Home Rule for two reasons. First freedom was the birth right of every nation, secondly, the most important interests were made subservient to the interest of the British empire without her consent and her resources were not utilized for her greater needs.[2] The main object of the Home Rulers is to secure reforms. If

the revenue of the country should be squandered autocratically, there would be no fund for legitimate expenditure. The resources of the state would in that case enable a few people to roll on wealth, while the number of poverty –stricken would go on swelling. While one party would thus be working for its own ruin by such extravagance, the utterly destitute in spite of toiling day and night would be left to suffer hard without food and clothing. It is out of sympathy for the poor that the Home Rulers are carrying on their agitation. [3]

She continued her agitation with unabated vigour, attacked the Press Act, appealed to the High Court, and there by gained an immense popularity because, though that court decided against her, it indulged at the same time that, out of 14 extracts of her article which had been considered as seditious by the government, only two were seditious.[4]

## **STUDENTS IN HOME RULE MOVEMENT**

Home Rule classes were organized to inculcate patriotism among the students. At Madras special Home Rule classes had been arranged twice in the Hall of Young men's Association, attacking the backwardness of the England Educational system in India. The Home Rule

organizers sought the support of the students in order to popularize the movement. Annie Besant felt that by imparting political propaganda in the minds of the students it would help them to inculcate patriotism, more courage and sincerity, which would enable them to serve the country after completing their studies. [5] She then with the help of G.S.Arundale, the organizing Secretary of Home Rule League, begun to enthuse the students and enlist their aid and sympathy. She condemned the existing educational system as being backward, reactionary and unpatriotic, hailed the students as the rising hope of India who were destined to secure for the country freedom from foreign yoke, instituted Home Rule Class for them, formed Boy Scouts and Volunteer Troops for them and took up their cause on every occasion. She turned the Theosophical Society, of which she was the president, into a political organization. She brought into the national arena hundreds of teachers, government servants, social workers and other intellectuals. Her Home Rule League, which she looked upon as a n auxiliary to the Indian National Congress, now begun to carry on political propaganda. [6]

## **BOY SCOUTS**

Annie Besant was first been to develop patriotism among the students. In

Western countries patriotism and nationalism were taught to students through Boy Scout and other such agencies.[7] Annie Besant and her League urged the Government to extend the benefits of Boy Scout Movement to the Indian students. But the government rejected the plan. It pointed out that the conditions were so different in India and explained the difficulties in introducing the Boy Scout on account of climate habits and caste system etc.,[8] In reality the government did not want to create material spirit among the students. But the Home Rulers continued to press the government to start Boy Scouts. When the demand for Boy Scout became more vocal the government relented and decided to start Boy Scout movement in Madras. Arundale who expressed his reservation over the nature of the Boy Scouts proposed by the government said that the movement should be made thoroughly Indian in tone and in aspiration.[9]

In January 1916, an Indian Boy Scout Movement was inaugurated in Madras under the auspices of Home Rule League. During Christmas holiday Scouts were trained by Pearce the Vice principal of Mahindra College, Galla. The Scout Commissioner for Ceylon was invited specially for this purpose. The Scout master T.P.Sinha gave training in drill.

The headquarters for Boy Scout Movement was established in a building adjacent to the office of the Madras branch of the Home Rule League.[10] Arundale instructed the boys in flag signaling and Kamath another instructor, taught them dumb bell exercise. Annie Besant advised the scouts to paint a large map of India on one of the walls of Home Rule Office, with the words, "Vande Mataram" and "Be Prepared" written Sanskrit in the centre.[11] The Boy Scout Movement attracted the attention of the student population and created patriotic feeling among them. It is evident from the fact that after the formation of Boy Scout the student participation in the Home Rule Movement increased considerably.

### **VOLUNTEER CORPS**

For any movement a Volunteer Corps is a must to organize meeting and spread the ideas and principles of the movement. The leaders of the Home Rule Movement who felt the urgent need for creating a volunteer corps formed the Home Rule Volunteer Corps on 14 November 1916 in Madras. To start with it has seventy five members of whom many were students. The main purpose of this corps was to keep order in League meeting. The volunteers who wore crimson turbans were also required to do social and public service and assist such of

those local bodies which were not hostile to the cause of Home Rule.[12] For the volunteers physical training was given by Arundale. Separate uniform was also provided to them.[13] Thus the students were given training to keep order in League meeting which helped them to develop some expertise in the sphere of organization. The students who were required to do social and public service had established links with various segments of the society. They worked closely with adult leaders to the cause of the Home Rule Movement.

### **NATIONAL EDUCATION**

National education must live in the atmosphere of proud and growing patriotism, and this atmosphere must be kept sweet, fresh and bracing, by the study of Indian literature, Indian history, Indian triumph in science, in art, in politics, in war, in colonization, in manufacture, in trade and in commerce. The Arthasastra must be studied as well as Dharmasastra, science, politics as well as religion. National education must meet the National temperament at every point, and develop the National character. British ideals are good for Britain, India's ideal are good for India.[14] Annie Besant charged that the English teachers who worked in Indian schools were mainly responsible for

creating a sense of inferiority complex among the Indian students.

The Home Rulers formed a separate Board of Education to spread the ideals of National Education. The main aim of the Board was to give religious instruction to the students, make them to respect the mother tongue and enable them to have greater knowledge about their motherland and train the students as patriotic citizens. Several National schools and colleges were started in many parts of the country.[15] In TamilNadu National schools were started at Madras, Rajapalayam and other places. Vernacular was the medium of instruction in all the National Schools and English was taught only as the second language.[16] The concept of National Education deepened the Youth's imagination and increased their ardour to serve the country.

### **STUDENT AGITATION**

Everywhere in the city and in the districts, speeches were delivered, pamphlets were issued, and students' strikes and demonstrations were staged, all of which greatly disconcerted the government and speedily led to the internment of Annie Besant and her associates, Arundale Wadia in the Nilgris. This did not however abate the ardour of the movement; on the contrary it increased the ardour. A wave of resentment against

the government swept over the whole state. Protest meetings were held in every district, students' strikes were organized in many schools and colleges, public processions were taken out and leaflets in Indian languages as well as picture post cards on Home Rule were widely distributed."The Olcott Lodge "at Ootacamund in she fixed up her residence became a centre of pilgrimage for all kinds of intellectuals and political workers. Thither went continually for instruction and inspiration men like Subramania Ayyar, Dr.C.P.Ramaswami Ayyar and Dr. Patabhi Sitaramayya. Her residence was transferred to Coimbatore. That district became a centre of Home Rule activity.Home Rule meetings were continued to be held in the city and in the districts. Home Rule volunteers continued to carry on propaganda in towns as well as villages and the Home Rule Monster Petition was signed by thousands of people in all walks of life.[17]

The Madras Presidency became the center of Home Rule agitation in India and thrust into the forefront of all Indian politics.[18] .As the Home Rule League movement became very popular and grew in its strength, the government was alarmed. The students were becoming the backbone of the movement in Madras. Naturally decided to curb the tendency of

the students to identify themselves with the political movements and take part in its activities, the government of Madras passed orders to prevent them from entering into politics. The government wanted to bring students in schools and colleges.[19] The impact of Home Rule agitation on students in Madras was tremendous. On 24<sup>th</sup> July, they occupied a compartment reserved for Europeans at the Egmore station. Three days later anti reservation agitation led to a clash between the students and Europeans at the Fort station, Madras.[20] In many parts of the Madras Presidency the students fearlessly and freely disobeyed government orders and restrictions.[21] So, the English administration decided to separate the students from the political movements. In 1917, an order was passed by the government to restrict the students to participate in the political affairs. The government therefore decided that undergraduate student in any college and no pupil in any school should be permitted to take part in public political discussion, to attend political meeting, to join any political association or to take part in any movement. The government sent the order to all educational institutions to the Madras Presidency and the Heads of colleges and schools were instructed to enforce the directions strictly.[22]

## CONCLUSION

Students played a significant role in the Home Rule Movement. Instead of remaining spectator of events happening around them, students stood forefront of the movement. It is mainly because of the fact that Annie Besant started student oriented organizations such as Boy Scouts and Volunteer Corps. These organizations not only provided an organizational structure but also inculcated a sense of oneness and unity. But in fact the government measures increased the students' participation in the movement. The Home Rule Movement very soon merged itself into the two greater movements – the Non Co-operation and the Khilafat movements. These movements took the whole country by storm and by identifying themselves with the Indian National Congress and utilising its whole machinery for effective propaganda, gave a permanent character to nationalism. Thus the Home Rule Movement imparted political training to the students who fought with determination to liberate the country.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Madras Information, August 1957, Vol. XI, No.8, P-2.
- [2] Indian Review,, Vol.XIX, No.10, 1918, p-49.
- [3] Sampad Abhyudaya, 20<sup>th</sup> July, 1918.
- [4] Madras Information, op.cit, P-2.
- [5] New India, 9<sup>th</sup> May 1917, Madras.
- [6] Madras Information, op.cit, P-2.
- [7] New India, 27 September 1916.
- [8] New India, and 27th July 1916.
- [9] New India, and 22 November 1916.
- [10] Fortnightly Report, 18 June 1917.
- [11] Ibid.,
- [12] Fortnightly Report, 1 December 1916.
- [13] Ibid.,
- [14] United India, 30 October 1920.
- [15] Fortnightly Report, 18 June 1917.
- [16] Fortnightly Report, 2 April 1918.
- [17] Madras Information, op.cit, P.3.
- [18] Baker,C.J., The Politics of South India, NewDelhi,1979, p.1.
- [19] G.O.No.559, Home Department, 1<sup>st</sup> May 1917.
- [20] G.O.No.3098, Home Department, 19<sup>th</sup> August 1916.
- [21] Venkatesan,G, History of Freedom Struggle in India, P.156.
- [22] G.O. No. 559, Home Department, 1 May 1917.