

# National Consciousness Stimulated by Home Rule Movement in United Provinces

## Abstract

The national movement in United Provinces remained at low ebb, after the Surat split to the year 1913. The lull in the nationalist agitation was broken by the entry of Mrs. Annie Besant in the political life of India as well as of the United Provinces. The political life began to revive and the anticolonial struggle began to gather strength once again. The awakening of the masses specially the peasants and labourers was an outstanding achievement of the movement. The movement brought anew animation into the comparatively sluggish politics of U.P. in a very short interval. Though the movement was not extremist any sense yet it did have a more radical edge than the placid politics of moderates in United Provinces.

**Keywords:** Mrs. Annie Besant, Home Rule Movement in U.P.

## Introduction

Mrs. Besant, who initiated the idea of Home Rule League in Bombay Congress session, was not satisfied with the tardy way in which the congress affairs were progressing. She was in favour of some more dynamic and vigorous association in order to strike a new responsive chord in the heart of the masses. In United Provinces, 15 branches were set up in Kanpur, Allahabad, Banaras and Mathura. In U.P. a number of women had actively participated in the movement and introduced new techniques like collective prayers and fasting. She pointed out in her presidential address that the strength of movement was rendered tenfold greater by adhesion to it of a large number of women who brought to its helping uncalculatingly heroism, great endurance and self-sacrifices, of the feminine variety our League's best recruits and recruiters are the women of India. She had also made efforts to win over the labour classes and Zamindars.

## Aim of the Study

The object of the paper is to throw the light on the activities of Home Rule Movement which were responsible for the rise of national consciousness in the people of United Provinces.

The Home Rule Movement made a strong and swift impression in the United Provinces. The vigorous efforts of Mrs. Besant made the movement very strong, popular and widespread in U.P. Moderate leader DinshawWachawrote, 'I have never known in my public life of forty years such a volcanic eruption as has been going on in the United Provinces for the last two years.'<sup>1</sup> Many parts of U.P. were also being activated for the first time and constituted the backbone of Gadhian nationalism. 'The moderate life of TezBahadurSapru, H.N. Kunjru and Madan Mohan Malviya, enlisted their support and issued pamphlets, propagating Indian's ability to fulfil the conditions of Home Rule.'<sup>2</sup> Mrs. Besant had a considerable influence over the moderates of U.P. who called her to preside over the IX<sup>th</sup> Provincial Conference that was held in Gorakhpur in April 1915. She expressed in detail the programme of agitation for the self-government but asked for patience at least until the war was over.<sup>3</sup> Pt. M.M. Malviya, C.Y. Chintamani and GorakhnathMisra, joined the Home Rule Movement and stopped the work of recruitment to Indian defence force and the recruiting committee was also wound up.<sup>4</sup> The real importance of Home Rule agitation lay, in the extension to new areas, groups and something like a new generation. In U.P., some urban professional groups, like Kayasthas, Kashmiri Brahmins and some Muslims extended their support to Besant's leawue.<sup>5</sup>

The activities of Home Rule League in U.P. consisted in organizing discussion groups, reading rooms in cities, mass scale issue of pamphlet and lecture tours. 'In this regard there was no significance



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difference in the policy and working of League with that of Moderate politicians. It could differ only in regard to intensity and extent of movement. From this spirit of view, it went ahead of the Congress and was its fore-runner in reality.<sup>6</sup> It also got support from a literary group. Specially Mathili Saran Gupta and B.N. Chakabast greatly helped her through their poetic expression, like 'Aaj hum gularbhiphooldenge' and 'Na le bahistbhi hum Home Rulekebadle', created a somewhat emotional appeal for the movement.

During the year 1917, when the movement was spreading like wild fire, events in the United Provinces also moved like a volcanic eruption. The progress of Home Rule movement alarmed the government and they tried to suppress the activities of the government suggested the prosecution of Mrs. Besant but however the Governor of U.P. Sir James Meston was not in favour of this and wrote to the government of India that the need of agitation in England is a favourable theme of the congress party and if congress accept Besant's programme, the next idea is that she escorts a deputation home. If we remove her, we merely expediate this course, but send her home with a little halo of martyrdom and the next thing we shall have is reports of speeches more violent than those delivered here. But the government decided to do away with her. The internment of Mrs. Besant further caused great resentment and many leaders joined the league as stated by 'the Leader' - the hon'ble Pt. Motilal Nehru, TejBahadurSapru, MunsinNarain Prasad Asthana, C.Y. Chintamani and a number of other joined the Home Rule League as a protest against the arbitrary actions of the government.<sup>7</sup> There were serious repercussions in U.P. and other parts of India and it raised the popularity of Mrs. Besant so much so that she became Besant- the mother, for Indians.

The Citizens of Allahabad organised a protest meeting in Munsin Ram Prasad's gardens on the evening of June 22, attended by 4,000 persons. The meeting was presided over by Pt. M.L. Nehru, who said that the country is in midst of a crisis. "The government has openly declared crusades against our national aims... let us raise aloft the banner of Home Rule League and 330 million throats voice forth the motto of the Home Rule. The bureaucracy is preparing a coffin for Home Rule before its birth... let us advance with stout hearts saying with the poet 'Come what may, we have launched our boat into the sea'.<sup>8</sup> In united Provinces, a Home Rule League was formed with Motilal Nehru as its president and J.L. Nehru as one of its joint secretaries.<sup>9</sup> Pt. Motilal, infused a new vigour into the movement. The way the Home Rule League in Allahabad was progressing is described by U.P. government in one of its report to the Indian government as 'capable and energetic'.<sup>10</sup> The chief event of the month was the special meeting of the Provincial Congress held at Lucknow on 10<sup>th</sup> August, 1917 as protest against internment of Mrs. Besant.<sup>11</sup> It was presided over by M.L. Nehru, attended by 548 delegates from various districts of United Provinces. The moderates also participated actively and pressed for reconsideration of a resolution on passive resistance as an agenda

item in the next all party meeting.<sup>12</sup> In one of letter to editor, Jawahar Lal Nehru wrote in resentment that mere protest meetings and representations were the politics of opium eaters. What was now needed was Non-cooperation with the government.<sup>13</sup> Such protest and development was not suited to the government readily. At this juncture Montagu, on behalf of the British government declared that the goal of British policy in India is the establishment of responsible government and also released Mrs. Besant and her co-workers.

The August declaration was welcomed by the moderates in U.P. while the extremists expressed doubt in government policy. Mrs. Besant also called the reform scheme unsatisfactory. Thus a campaign for passive resistance was planned. But the situation was quite alarming in the United Provinces and Mrs. Besant also held back. A joint session of A.I.C.C. and the Muslims at Allahabad met on 6<sup>th</sup> October and gave their consensus of opinion that the question of passive resistance should be dropped and the idea was postponed in the existing situation.<sup>14</sup> With the announcement of Viceroy's declaration, Mrs. Besant called off the movement. She also developed a favourable attitude towards reform scheme. She was a strong critic of extremism. She also did not like the idea of Gandhi's Non-Cooperation movement. Her motives were denounced by the extremist leaders. Consequently, her following dwindled and she ceased to be a major force in Indian politics.

### Conclusion

The Home Rule Movement in United Provinces also created a common platform for various schools of political thought to come together and took up the work of national awakening by a continuous demand of self-government. The attitude of Mrs. Besant towards Indian national movement is a matter of puzzle to many for 'she blow hot and cold in the same breath, just as it suits her convenience', but whatever the aim of Mrs. Besant, one can't deny the fact that the movement was a fore-runner to Civil Disobedience and Non-Cooperation movement. The movement brought the Hindus and the Muslims together which frightened the bureaucracy and to ease the situation they declared 'responsible government' as the goal of British policy in India, which was indeed a progressive step in the beginning and led to realisation of self-government in India.

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## **Innovation The Research Concept**

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