

## Quadrant II – Notes

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**Name of the Presenter:** Mr. Alphius David Fernandes

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### Notes :

On 16 June 1914, Bal Gangadhar Tilak was released after serving a prison sentence of six years. Initially, he concentrated all his attention on seeking readmission, for himself and other Extremists, into the Indian National Congress. To conciliate the Moderates and convince them of his bonafides, he publicly declared: 'I may state once for all that we are trying in India, as the Irish Home-rulers have been doing in Ireland, for a reform of the system of administration and not for the overthrow of Government'.

#### **Role of Annie Besant in India's freedom movement**

Annie Besant since 1907 had been spreading the message of Theosophy from her headquarters in Adyar, a suburb of Madras. She had gained large number of followers among the educated members of many communities that had experienced no cultural revival of their own. In 1914, Besant decided to enlarge the sphere of her activities to include the building of a movement for Home Rule on the lines of the Irish Home Rule League. For this, she realized it was necessary both to get the sanction of the Congress, as well as the active cooperation of the Extremists. She devoted her energies, therefore, to persuading the Moderate leaders to open the doors of the Congress to Tilak and his fellow- Extremists.

At the annual Congress session in December 1914 Pherozeshah Mehta and his Bombay Moderate group succeeded, by winning over Gokhale and the Bengal Moderates, in keeping out the Extremists. Tilak and Besant thereupon decided to revive political activity on their own, while maintaining their pressure on the Congress to re-admit the Extremist group.

#### **Establishment of Home rule leagues**

Tilak took the lead and set up the Home Rule League at the Bombay Provincial Conference held at Belgaum in April 1916. Annie Besant herself inaugurated the Home Rule League at Madras in September 1916. The two Leagues avoided any friction by demarcating their area of activity: Tilak's League was to work in Maharashtra, (excluding Bombay city), Karnataka, the Central Provinces and Berar, Annie Besant's League was given charge of rest of India. The reason the two leagues did not merge was because in Annie Besant's words "some of his followers dislike me and some of mine dislike him."

The organization of Annie Besant League was much looser than that of Tilak's, As three members could form a branch. In case of Tilak's League each of the six branches had a clearly defined area and activities. Two hundred branches of Besant's League were established. Some consisted towns and others of group of villages. The membership of Annie Besant's League increased at a rate slower than that of Tilak. By March 1917 Besant's league had 7000 members.

### **Activities carried out by Tilak's HRL**

Tilak promoted the Home rule campaign with a tour of Maharashtra and through his lectures clarified and popularized the demand for Home rule. Tilak gave the popular slogan i.e. "Home Rule is my birth-right, and I will have it." He also linked up the question of swaraj with the demand for the formation of linguistic states and education in the vernacular.

Tilak's League furthered its propaganda efforts by publishing six Marathi and two English pamphlets, of which 47,000 copies were sold. Pamphlets were brought out in Gujarati and Kannada as well. By April 1917 Tilak had enlisted 14,000 members and 32,000 by 1918.

### **Work carried out by Besant's HRL**

She made an extensive tour to spread the idea of Home Rule. She declared that "the price of India's loyalty is India's Freedom". She established branches at Kanpur, Allahabad, Benaras, Mathura, Calicut and Ahmednagar. Main thrust of her activity was directed towards building up an agitation around the demand for Home Rule. This they achieved by promoting political education and discussion.

Arundale, through New India, advised members to promote political discussions, establish libraries containing material on national politics, organize lessons for students on politics, print and circulate pamphlets, collect funds, organize social work., take part in local government activities, arrange political events and lectures, present arguments to friends in favour of Home Rule and urge them to join the movement.

Many Moderate Congressmen, who were dissatisfied with the inactivity into which the Congress had lapsed, joined the Home Rule agitation. Members of Gokhale's Servants of India Society, were encouraged to add their weight to the demand for Home Rule by undertaking lecture tours and publishing pamphlets.

Many other Moderate nationalists joined the Home Rule Leaguers in U.P. in touring the surrounding towns and villages in preparation for the Lucknow session of the Congress in December 1916. Their meetings were usually organized in the local Bar libraries, and attended by students, professionals, businessmen and, if it was a market day, by agriculturists .

### **British response**

The increasing popularity of the Home Rule Movement soon attracted Government's wrath. The Government of Madras was the most harsh. First, it came out with an order banning students from attending political meetings. Next, the Government of Madras decided in June 1917 to place Mrs. Besant and her associates, BP Wadia and George Arundale, under arrest.

### **Response of India to the arbitrary arrest**

There was Nation-wide protest. Sir S. Subramania Aiyar renounced his knighthood. Many Moderate leaders like Madan Mohan Malaviya, Surendranath Banerjea and M.A. Jinnah who had stayed away, now enlisted as members of the Home Rule Leagues to record their solidarity with the internees and their condemnation of the Government's action. At a meeting of the AICC on 28 July, 1917, Tilak advocated the use of the weapon of passive resistance or civil disobedience if the Government refused to release the internees.

### **Government bows down to the demand**

The Government in Britain decided to effect change in policy and adopt a conciliatory posture. The new Secretary of State, Montagu, made a declaration in the House of Commons, on 20 August, 1917 in which he stated: "The policy of His Majesty's Government is that the increasing association of Indians in every branch of the administration and the gradual development of self-governing institutions, with a view to the progressive realization of responsible government in India as an integral part of the British Empire. "The importance of Montagu's Declaration was that after this the demand for Home Rule or self- government could no longer be treated as seditious. In keeping with the stance of the Montagu Declaration, Annie Besant was released in September 1917.

### **Movement defuses**

During 1918, the movement instead of going forward after its great advance in 1917, gradually dissolved. The Moderates who had joined the movement after Besant's arrest were pacified by the promise of reforms and by Besant's release. Annie Besant herself was undecided on the question of passive resistance. At times she would disavow passive resistance, and at other times, under pressure from her younger followers, would advocate it .Initially she along with Tilak considered the reforms unworthy of Britain to offer and India to accept but later argued in favour of acceptance.

Towards the end of the year, Tilak decided to go to England to pursue the libel case that he had filed against Valentine Chirol, the author of Indian Unrest, and was away for many critical months. With Annie Besant unable to give a firm lead, and Tilak away in England, the movement was left leaderless.

### **Importance of the Home Rule Movement**

Home Rule League was the first Indian political movement to cut across sectarian lines and have members from the Congress, League, Theosophist and the Labourites. It created a generation of ardent Nationalists who formed the backbone of the national movement in the coming years. The Home Rule Leagues also created organizational links between town and country which were to prove invaluable in later years. By popularizing the idea of Home Rule or self-government- it generated a widespread pro-nationalist atmosphere in the country. Home Rule Leagues prepared the ground for mass mobilization paving the way for the launch of Gandhi's satyagraha movements. Many of the early Gandhian satyagrahis had been members of the Home Rule Leagues. They used the organisational networks created by the Leagues to spread the Gandhian method of agitation.