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## POLITICAL BACKDROP OF NATIONALISM IN TAMIL REGION OF THE MADRAS PRESIDENCY

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### Abstract :

The seed for the Indian National Congress was sown in the fertile political soil of the Tamil Nadu where congenial atmosphere existed. As a part of the political awakenings, the Madras Native Association was formed in 1852 to ventilate the grievances of the Indians before the Parliament Inquiry Committee. Thus began the technique of political agitation through the methods of petition and peaceful meetings. Gazulu Lakshminarasu Chetti was the first man to infuse political awakening in the minds of the elite people of the Madras Presidency as early as the middle of the Nineteenth Century. The Madras Native Association was followed by the Madras Hindu Debating Society and then the Triplicane Literary Society. During 1883-1884, political demonstrations were held demanding

the extension of Lord Ripon's term as the Viceroy. At that time, an idea for formation of comprehensive central association which would speak on behalf of the entire Presidency was mooted. In 1884, seventeen delegates from all over India assembled in Madras for the Second Annual Convention of the Theosophical Society and discussed the feasibility of a national association of all India interest. However, the most immediate and acceptable provincial forerunner of the Indian National Congress was the Madras Mahajana Sabha. It was founded in March 1884 by a group of educated men. Prominent among them were G Subramania Iyer, P. Rangaiah Naidu, M. Viraraghavachari, R Balaji Rao, C. Vijayaragavachari, A. Ananda Charlu and Salem Ramasami Mudaliar. The dawn of early public associations like Madras Native Association and the Madras Mahajana Sabha was remarkable because for the first time, the grievances of the people of Tamil Nadu were represented to the ruling British authority in an organized manner. No doubt, the Madras Mahajana Sabha laid the foundation for the emergence of the Indian National Congress and its leaders played a remarkable role in the early Congress sessions.

**Key Words:** Madras Presidency, Indian National Congress, Education, School, Swaraj, National Movement, British, Nationalism, Gandhiji, Thilak.

### Political Development in Nineteenth Century

In 1801, the British East India Company formed the Madras Presidency and became its ruler.<sup>1</sup> From 1801 to 1857 the Madras Presidency was under the East India Company's rule and it had mainly two objectives viz.,



commercial prospects and benefit for England. They introduced changes in the administration by removing the old orders. The rule by individual rulers was removed. The Madras Presidency was formed neither on linguistic basis nor on geographical factor.<sup>2</sup> As it comprised Kongunadu, Andhra, and Carnatic regions, it was a multi lingual, multi religious and multi racial Presidency at the beginning. The East India Company, slowly but steadily through wars, alliances and diplomatic activities, was capable of establishing and maintaining their political supremacy.<sup>3</sup>

### Political Awakening

On 1<sup>st</sup> November 1858, under Queen Victoria's Proclamation, when Indian administration was shifted to the British crown from the hands of the East India Company, the Madras Presidency was a progressive one and was always a threat to the British rule.<sup>4</sup> So even prior to the establishment of the Indian National Congress in 1885, the political activities had gained grounds in this Presidency. The Madras Native Association which got its name on 26<sup>th</sup> February 1852<sup>5</sup> was functioning only as a branch of the British Indian Association started at Calcutta in 1851.<sup>6</sup> This political organization captivated the attention of educated elites, ignorant urban population as well as the bureaucrats.<sup>7</sup> The *Crescent*, a Journal founded by Gazulu Lakshmanarasu Chetty was a weapon to highlight the activities of the Association.<sup>8</sup> With the death of Lakshmanarasu Chetty the association also stopped it. From 1852 to 1863 The Madras Hindu Debating Society also functioned to promote constitutional developments.<sup>9</sup> These are earlier associations functioning before the Indian National Congress.

The Triplicane Literary Society was another organization founded in 1868 by Mir Ibrahim Ali. Subsequently on 29<sup>th</sup> September 1878, *The Hindu* was published as a weekly Journal. Later it became a National daily. With great hopes it was a mirror which reflected the opinions of the public on various political issues. It became a guiding star of the political activities in the Madras Presidency.<sup>10</sup> It also reflected the minds of the public in the form of their expectations.

The Theosophical Society which was shifted to Adayar from New York in 1882 also rejuvenated the philosophical pursuits of Ancient India and infused a political consciousness in the Indian mind.<sup>11</sup> It also stood for the unification of eastern and western political ideas and philosophies. In the same way Indian Associations were formed at Calcutta and Bombay in 1876 and the very name will explicate their activities.<sup>12</sup> In 1882 itself the Tamil Daily, *Swadesimittiran* was founded at Madras with the objective of inculcating the spirit of Nationalism among the Tamils.<sup>13</sup>

The defunct Madras Native Association was revived as Madras Mahajana Sabha on 16<sup>th</sup> May 1884 by the efforts of P. Anandacharlu. It turned out a tremendous task in making the Youth of the Tamil country to involve in national politics without any commercial disparities.<sup>14</sup> Further only at Madras foundation was laid for the Indian National Conference during December 1884.<sup>15</sup>

When 72 delegates met at the hall of the Gohaldas Tyapji Sanskrit College, Bombay on 28 December 1885, among them 22 were from Madras Presidency.<sup>16</sup> Due to the great zeal and enthusiasm and spirit of nationalism and social need the third Annual session of the Indian National Congress met at Madras in 1887.<sup>17</sup> All the above facts stand testimony to the spirit of nationalism and political enthusiasm of the Tamils even during the end of the Nineteenth Century.

### Administrative Transition

It is worth to note that Modern Government system came up only after 1800. Due to the income from the Madras Presidency the Central authorities had to give a free hand to the Madras Government to appoint officials and contractors to finish up public works. The administration was also functioning independently. At the

district level the Collector, Sub-Collectors, Tahsildars, Revenue Inspectors were the revenue officials.<sup>18</sup> There are separate police officials.

### Welfare Measures

The British East India Company wanted to introduce legislation on humanitarian backgrounds. Importance was assigned to social justice and socialization only after 1813 when the East India Company adopted a liberal policy with regard to religion. But from 1833 onwards the administration adopted the policy of non-intervention. Anyhow it never hesitated to follow the following economic and educational activities for the welfare of the common public.

1. Between 1880-87 steps were taken to lay railway tracks.
2. After 1833 slavery was abolished.
3. From 1834 onwards High School, Libraries and Literary Societies were established.
4. For promoting agriculture in 1836 the upper Canal Dam was built.
5. From 1838 onwards the conditions of the prisons were improved.
6. In 1855 the Inspector General of Police was made as the administrators of prisons.

The Ryotwari System was introduced in 1814 in the Madras Presidency. Though it was beneficial to the peasants it caused a lot of troubles to the farmers in the form of oppressive land tax. The officials created a lot of problems. The ryots were not relieved from the strict rulers of revenue collection. And they had to face the money-problems to execute their activities regularly. So the intervention of the Government was essential.

### Educational Progress

The Nineteenth Century witnessed the introduction of changes in the field of education also. The old conventional and traditional educational system was an out dated one. The endeavours made by the Christian Missionaries during the 17, 18 and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries took the education even to the majority of the downtrodden. The limitations of the then existed *Gurukula* system and pial schools allowed the British to introduce a new system which offered scope for radical social changes and economic development. The Christian Missionaries in order to propagate Christian faith started devoting their attention on education.

In 1717 the first Missionary School was established at Cuddalore. The Society of Jesus and London Missionary Society promoted the Western Education at Nagapattinam, Neyyur, Nagercoil, Palayamkottai and other areas after 1813. In 1834 Madurai American Mission started schools at Madurai, Dindigul and other areas.<sup>19</sup> With the amount of 700 rupees allotted by Sir Thomas Monroe in 1819 a School Book Society was constituted. Further due to his efforts in 1835 the British decided to impart European system of Education in India. On 15<sup>th</sup> October 1840 an Elementary School was established in Madras and on 14<sup>th</sup> April 1841 The Madras High School came up in Madras. In 1834 Taluk schools and Training schools were instituted. But the introduction of the Filtration Theory in 1836 brought in the concept of disparity among the students in imparting education. But it encouraged the natives to establish many schools under the western system of schools. As a result The Madras Christian School (1840), Madras Pachaiyappan School (1841), the Presidency School (1847), the Madras Medical School (1835) etc. came up. The Diffusion Theory of Education was also adopted and the integrated system of education at all levels was also introduced. On the basis of Woods Despatch (1854) District and Taluk schools were established. The Hunter Commission of 1882 also recommended Municipal and District Board Schools.<sup>20</sup> Thus the Nineteenth Century witnessed the development of education in the Madras Presidency in a new dimension.

Indeed, the Madras Presidency during the Nineteenth Century witnessed a formative period in political, social and economic pursuits. Such new ventures undertaken in various fields by the British in India led to transitions and transformations in different spheres in the ensuing periods.

### Political Developments in the Twentieth Century

The Twentieth Century was a period in which the British rule had achieved stability. People of all stages and all walks of life began to concentrate on the resurgence of India. The regional religious, ethnic differences enabled them to think of the concept of unity in diversity. Gradually an anti-British Imperialist policy too crept in the political field.<sup>21</sup> Demand for *Swaraj* became popular. On the basis of the policies and activities of the Government both constitutional and harsh measures of agitations began to take place. The Indian National Congress started the Indian National Movement as a pressure group.<sup>22</sup> The establishment of the Muslim League in 1906, the moderates and extremists factions in the Congress session at Surat (1907), the involvement of Annie Besant in Home Rule League encouraged united action for getting strength and inspiration required for achieving *Swaraj*<sup>23</sup> etc. created the political resurgence. The Home Rule League dedicated itself for promoting *Swadeshi* and achieving national welfare, political training, national education and responsible Government.<sup>24</sup>

The Congress had to face many critical situations. The antipathies between the Telugus and Tamils, the tussle between the pro-reformers and anti-reformers, the stress on provincial problems and the needs for supporting national interests were all problems which the Congress of the Madras Presidency had to face.<sup>25</sup> But the arrival of Gandhi had already made Madras as a centre of national politics. The meeting at the Madras Beach on 18<sup>th</sup> March, 1919 created a stir and Gandhi demanded, by an appeal to the Viceroy to withhold assent to the Rowlett Act.<sup>26</sup> But it was opposed by the moderate leaders of Madras including Annie Besant, C.P. Ramaswamy Ayyer and others. They resigned from the Madras Provincial Congress Committee.<sup>27</sup> But Gandhi by touring in areas such as Thanjavur, Trichirappalli, Coimbatore, Madurai etc. gained the support of the people for a *Satyagraha*.<sup>28</sup> Anyhow the repressive Government adhered to oppressive measures. Several people were killed in firing. The uncivilised Jallian Wallah Bagh Tragedy was also executed. The people of Madras became sympathetic towards those who were affected and condemned the British atrocities.<sup>29</sup>

Under the Press Act of 1910 the security deposits of *The Hindu*, *Nationalist* and *Desabhaktan* were forfeited.<sup>30</sup> To show their opposition to the unfair and oppressive act of the Government a Press Defence Fund was created to fight out the atrocities of the Government and in the Madras Provincial Congress Committee which met at Trichy a resolution was passed for the recall of the Viceroy who was responsible for such arbitrary and unjust acts.<sup>31</sup> The Youth of Madras were induced by such unlawful measures. Further all such calamities directed the Madras Presidency to fall in line with the main stream at the all India level National Movement. Due to the mingling of the Madras leaders with others assisted the latter to look at Madras in taking decisions about the future of India.<sup>32</sup>

### Tamil Leaders in Tilak Era

In the Madras Presidency the role played by few eminent personalities also served as catalytic agents for future functionaries. V.O. Chidambaram Pillai who lived between 5<sup>th</sup> September 1872 and 18<sup>th</sup> November 1936 was an eminent lawyer. He gave up his Profession, started the *Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company* and plunged into politics.<sup>33</sup> Being an extremist like B.G. Tilak and Aurobindo<sup>34</sup> he aimed at the elimination of the British rule from India.<sup>35</sup> Through his *Patriotic Association* founded in 1908 he executed his anti British activities.<sup>36</sup> He was the only patriot who was given 40 years of imprisonment on 7<sup>th</sup> July 1908 for treason.<sup>37</sup> Later, his sentence was reduced to six years. He had contacts with Labour Unions and Vice Chairman of the central council constituted to conduct the Indian National Congress at Chennai.<sup>38</sup> He attended the Anti Rowlett

Act meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> March 1919 at Marina Beach Madras along with Mahatma Gandhi, Sarojini Naidu and C. Rajagopalachari. To concede to the non-co-operation call of Mahatma Gandhi in 1921 he led the Cotton Mill worker's strike at Tuticorin. He was hailed by E.V. Ramasamy as his Guru. From 1927 onwards he kept aloof from politics. But he had contacts with Gandhiji.

Subramania Siva (1884-1925) born at Battlagundu as the son of Rajam Ayyar and Nagammenal was also a great patriot who was a combination of simplicity, truth, courage, kindness, eloquence and patriotism. Through his newspapers *Ganabam* and *Prabanchamitran* he made the Tamils to have a correct picture of the British; as a close associate of V.O. Chidambaram Pillai he preached the principles of *Bande Mataram*. In 1908 he was arrested and imprisoned. To inculcate the spirit of dedication and sacrifice among people he established the Bharat Ashram at Karaikudi in 1921. He participated in the non-co-operation movement launched by Gandhiji.<sup>39</sup> He dedicated his entire life for the cause of his country even without minding his leprosy disease, with which he was suffering a lot.

Subramania Bharathi (1882-1921) viewed the Indian Freedom Movement as a world perspective. He desired to have political, social and economic freedom for India. He condemned the religionists and stood for women-empowerment and advocated the removal of untouchability. He was a teacher, editor, scribe and poet. He introduced a new chapter in Tamil poetry and gave importance to Nationalism.<sup>40</sup> His economic distresses also did not affect his spirit of nationalism. He was a fearless undaunted national, Tamil warrior.

V.V. Subrahmania Iyer (1881-1925) from Varahaneri was a lawyer and an extremist nationalist. He believed that only by agitations and riots the English could be driven out from India. Through his *Desabandhu* and *Balabharathi* the Tamil daily newspapers he propagated and promoted extremist Indian Nationalism. From 1910 onwards he started training the Tamil Youths in using pistols. At Cheranmadevi he was running a *Gurukulam* and there taught self help and *Swadeshi* to the inmates. He wrote the Biography of Napoleon Bonaparte in Tamil but it was banned by the then British Government.<sup>41</sup>

While the above mentioned members were Tamil personalities who served as model for others, Vanchinathan (1886-1911) was a member of the extremist organization called Bharatha Matha. Forsaking his family he involved in extremist activities and on 17 June 1911 he shot Collector Ash at Maniyachi junction and killed himself.<sup>42</sup> The above revolutionaries and extremists by their personal traits and calibre maintained the tempo of the freedom struggle in Tamil Nadu. They even served as pioneers and functioned as models for others. At this juncture the Home Rule League of Annie Besant was founded in Madras in 1916, Bala Gangadhara Tilak's Home Rule Movement started in 1916 at Poona too created an awakening. But the Home Rule Movement was a failure.<sup>43</sup>

To conclude, in the last years of the Nineteenth Century and the early years of the Twentieth, a new development took place in the political and economic developments in Tamil Region. The political and economic spheres, between 1906 and 1922, witnessed significant events which engaged both the governmental and people's attention. In the early stage of the Indian National Congress, the nationalistic leaders followed the policy of constitutional reforms through prayer and petitions. As the moderates led the Congress, they were loyal to the British Government. This type of mendicant attitude in 1905 changed with the Partition of Bengal. The people of Bengal raised their voice against the Government and demanded Swaraj. Soon extremist leaders like Tilak took over the leadership of the Congress. The swadeshi spirit attracted the people of Tamil Nadu and hence they vigorously participated in the Swadeshi and Boycott Movements. V.O. Chidambaram and Subramania Siva took the leadership of Swadeshi Movement in Tamil Region .

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