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## Outlining the Preliminaries and Unveiling the Political Dimension of Lucknow Congress

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### Abstract

*Swaraj is my birthright and I shall have it. The maker of the above spontaneous slogan Tilak was undoubtedly the first Indian leader who inculcated in the people of India the fiber of firmness and strength. He fervently believed in the concept of Swaraj and dedicated his entire life for the attainment of the same. The second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was entirely different as the outbreak of Revolt of 1857 eventuated in the formation of the Indian National Congress, a pan-India organization which witnessed the robustness of the Moderates post its formation. For the attainment of his objective Tilak moved heavens and earth in order to enter Congress as it was a requisite for the achievement of his objective. The research paper takes into account the foundation work for convening the Lucknow Congress of 1916 under the dynamic leadership of Tilak. The paper also throws light on the structure of the Congress before 1916 and examine the alterations introduced to bring the Extremists into the mainstream of the Congress. The research paper is based on the primary sources consulted from National Archives of India, Prime Minister Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi. The files, correspondences and records of General Administrative Department of U.P. State Archives, Lucknow has also been taken into account.*

### Keywords

Home rule, Lucknow Congress, Swaraj, self-government, Tilak.

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## **Outlining the Preliminaries and Unveiling the Political Dimension of Lucknow Congress**

*Swaraj is my birthright and I shall have it.* The maker of the above spontaneous slogan Shri Bal Gangadhar Tilak was undoubtedly the first Indian leader who inculcated in the people of India the fiber of firmness, fortitude, fearlessness and bravery. Tilak zealously began his struggle against the British Imperialism. He always detested 'foreigners' as 'rulers' on pious Indian soil and considered the British rule as a malediction on India. For the attainment of the same, Tilak revived the old religious festivals the *Ganpati Festival* in 1883<sup>1</sup> and *Shivaji Festival* in 1895<sup>2</sup> and also engendered the feeling of oneness and self-respect. He was cognizant of the power of press and therefore he published two papers<sup>3</sup> – *The Maharatta* in English and *The Kesari* in Maharatti.

Tilak's avid and spirited feeling of patriotism very soon made him unfriendly to the British Government. The Government realized that if Tilak was not removed immediately from Indian politics, he would tangibly alter the whole situation of India and would soon oust them from India. Lord Sydenham, the Governor of Bombay, wrote to the Secretary of State Lord Morley, "*Tilak is not simply a journalist. He is one of the chief conspirators, perhaps the chief conspirator against the existence of British Government in India. His Ganpati Festivals, Shivaji Festivals, Paise Fund and National Schools were all instituted for one purpose - the overthrow of British rule. If he had been allowed more time to mature his plans, it is quite possible that he might have succeeded in promoting a general strike which is one of the Russian methods advocated by the violent Party.*"<sup>4</sup>

This fear of Tilak made the Bombay Government take the draconian step to put a cessation on Tilak's activities. The Bombay Government very soon found grounds to prosecute Tilak and oust him from the political scene for a long span of time. As a result, Tilak was arrested for his article 'The Country's Misfortune' published in *Kesari* on May 12, 1908. He was sentenced to 6 years imprisonment on June 24, 1908 and was sent to Mandalay Jail in Burma. After completing his six years, when Tilak was released from Mandalay jail

on 16-17 June, 1914, he engrossed himself completely in putting all his sinews in reorganizing the Nationalist Party.<sup>5</sup>

For the attainment of the purpose it was a requisite for Tilak to make an entry into the Congress, as after the Surat imbroglio the congress creed, Constitution and the rules of conduct of its meetings were so formed by the Moderate leaders so as to exclude the Nationalists from the mainstream of the Congress but this was a very knotty and mystifying issue for Tilak as the changed Constitution had closed the doors of the Congress against the entry of Extremists. According to Article XX of the Congress Constitution, the right of electing delegates was limited to the organization and public bodies under the control of Moderates.<sup>6</sup>

The only path, which Tilak discerned that could bring the Nationalists in the fold of Indian National Congress was to amend Article XX of the Congress Constitution.<sup>7</sup> However, the demise of two great Moderate leaders of India, Gopal Krishna Gokhale in Feb 19, 1915 and that of Pherozeshah Mehta on November 5, 1915 facilitated the re-entry of Nationalists into the Congress. Tilak was now the pre-eminent leader of Western India and one of the most powerful figures in Indian politics.

The question of Congress compromise was discussed at the Bombay Congress session in 1915. The Constitution of the Congress was amended, granting automatic affiliation to political bodies in existence for 2 years on 31<sup>st</sup> December, 1915, fixing the maximum number of their delegates at 15. The amendment facilitated the re-union of the Congress with the Nationalists. The amendment of the Constitution of the Congress, enabled Tilak to capture the Congress in two years' time.<sup>8</sup> Tilak accepted the amendment whole heartedly and was now allowed to send delegates to the Congress. Though there was a strong opposition from Tilak's own Party to the acceptance of the compromise as some of the Nationalists thought that they were stronger than the Moderates both in terms of popular support, member and political thinking. But Tilak obviated all the hurdles in the path of compromise and made a remarkable re-entry into the Congress of 1916 at Lucknow.

Before the establishment of Home Rule League it was mandatory for Tilak to create a strong public opinion and to invigorate the Nationalist Party, which had lost its strength and direction during his absence. He therefore thought to revive the Bombay Provincial

Conference, which had been in abeyance for sometime and through it to revitalize his Party. Accordingly, 17<sup>th</sup> Bombay Provincial Conference met at Poona on May 8, 1915, under the Presidentship of Joseph Baptista, a staunch Nationalist and a leading member of the Bombay Bar. Immensely attended by 1000 number of delegates the Conference proved that the people had retained their old faith and confidence in Tilak's chairmaistic leadership and above all it proved that the masses were ready to work on the principal of self-help to attain the ideal of self-government. It was in this Conference that Tilak made his first political speech since his release from jail and gave the magic words "*Home Rule*" which echoed through the length and breadth of the country. "*Home Rule for India with provincial autonomy*" as its salient feature was the avowed objective of the Nationalists. Thus, the seed of Swaraj was sown and the people felt to harvest it. According to a contemporary police report "*the whole affair was triumph for Tilak.*"<sup>9</sup>

Now, the stage was all set-up for the formation of the Home Rule League. A meeting of Nationalists of Bombay, Central Provinces and Berar was held at Tilak's house in Poona on December 23-24, 1915, where it was resolved that a Home Rule League for Maharashtra should be established. To prompt the idea, an effective step was taken in this regard and a Conference of Nationalists was held at Belgaun on 27-29 April 1916. The Conference represented the Extremists who had held themselves aloof from the congress after the Surat split in 1907. The Conference was attended by 1600 number of delegates under the Presidentship of G.S. Kharparde. S.M. Paranjpee, B.S. Moonjee, L.B. Bhopathar and A.B. Kolhatkar were among those who did not wished to rejoin the Congress, but the resolution accepting the terms of compromise moved by Tilak was unanimously passed.<sup>10</sup>

The most important resolution passed by the Conference was to adopt a scheme for granting Home Rule to India within a definite period. It was decided that the League, should, in the first instance be a pioneer organization for Bombay and Central Provinces and that the formation of an All-India League should be postponed until similar organization had been founded in the province. Joseph Baptista was selected as President, N.C. Kelkar Secretary and D.V.Gokhale as Assistant Secretary.<sup>11</sup>

A provisional committee of 17 members was appointed. It was decided that the League should first of all aim at obtaining 10,000

members. When this had been secured, the league would have a Home Rule Bill drafted by expert lawyers and entrusted to a member of Parliament who would move it in the House of Commons. Tilak's league was to work in central Provinces and Bombay Presidency. Six branches were established at the following centers. Central Maharashtra, Central Provinces, Berar, Bombay and Karnataka. To explain its purpose, the league published 6 books in Marathi and 2 in English with translations in *Gujarati* and *Kannada*.

Tilak in his leading article in *Mahratta* explained the reason for the necessity of the League. He wrote "*It was generally recognized that the time had positively come for an organization to be started for educating public opinion and agitating for Home Rule throughout the country. The Congress was the body, which would naturally possess the greatest authority for undertaking such a work with responsibility. The scheme of self-government, which the Congress is supposed to be intending to hatch, served as a plausible excuse for most of the Moderates to negative a definite proposal to establish a Home Rule League. But the Congress, it is generally recognized, is too unwieldy to be easily moved to prepare a scheme for self-government, and actively work for its practical success. The spadework has got to be done by someone. It can afford to wait no longer. The league may be regarded as the pioneer movement, and is not intended in any sense to be an exclusive movement.*"<sup>12</sup>

The year 1916 was the most eventful in Tilak's career. The first half of the year saw the foundation of the Indian Home Rule League and the second half saw the joint session of Moderates and Extremists after the Surat imbroglio of 1907. After a long spell of nine year's, the extremists under the staunch leadership of Tilak returned to the Congress in 1916 at Lucknow. The 31<sup>st</sup> session of Indian National Congress opened at the historic Kaiser Bagh (Royal Garden) of Lucknow on December 26, 1916 with 2300 delegates attending the session.

The resolution of *Self-Government for India* was passed by the Congress on 29<sup>th</sup> December. The resolution was proposed by Dr. S.N. Banerjee, seconded by Annie Besant and was supported by Tilak. The XIII resolution regarding self-government for India stated "*That having regard to the fact that the great communities of India are the inheritors of ancient civilizations and have shown great capacity for Government and administration, and to the progress in education and public spirit made by them during a century of British rule, and further*

*having regard to the fact that the present system of Government does not satisfy the legitimate aspirations of the people and has become unsuited to the existing conditions and requirements, this Congress is of opinion that the time has come when His Majesty the King Emperor should be pleased to issue a proclamation announcing that it is the aim and intention of British policy to confer self-government of India at an early date.*

*That this Congress demands that a definite step should be taken towards self-government by granting the reform contained in the scheme prepared by the All-India Congress Committee in concert with the Reform Committee appointed by the All-India Muslim League.*

*That in the re-construction of the Empire, India shall be lifted from the position of a dependency to that of an equal partner in the Empire with the self-governing Dominions."*

Tilak spoke on the resolution - *"The resolution which I wish to support embodies all those principles, it is the resolution on self-government. It may not be Swaraj in the widest sense but it is far better than Swadeshi and Boycott. It is infact, a synthesis of all the Congress resolutions, passed during the past 30 years - a synthesis that will help us all to proceed to work in a definite and responsible manner. We cannot now afford to spend our energy on all - 30 resolutions - public service resolutions, arms act, sundry others All that is included in this one resolution on self-government."* Tilak said *"I am glad to say, that I have lived these 10 years to see that we are going to put our voice and shoulder together to push on the claim of self-government. We have found luck in Lucknow. We are now united in everyway in the United Provinces."*<sup>13</sup>

Emphasizing the importance of Lucknow session, Tilak said *"The Lucknow session has become one of the most important sessions of the Congress. Two things of transcendental importance happened at Lucknow. One was that a definite demand for Swaraj was unanimously formulated. The other was that the Hindus and Muslims made the demand with a united voice."*

The proceedings of the Lucknow Congress were marked by great enthusiasm and satisfaction reigned supreme that a united demand has been formulated and presented to the Government. Tilak took a vital part in the Congress session and in moving the resolution of self-government for India. Acceptance of the ideal of self-government by the Congress and the Muslim League enabled the two political parties to converge together against the British. Thus, the myth that the two communities would not be united, was

exploded by Tilak. The Lucknow Congress finally buried the hatchet between Hindus and Muslims and also between the moderates and extremists. The Hindu Muslim unity achieved by Tilak at the Lucknow Congress was the crowning event of his career. Tilak's round the clock endeavor and strenuous efforts gave birth to a definite demand of *Swarajya* or Home Rule on a truly nationwide scale.

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