



SWARAJ PARTY AND KANPUR SESSION OF CONGRESS IN 1925

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In the annual session of the congress held at Kanpur a resolution was passed outlining the future political programme of the Congress which was now meant of course also of the Swaraj Party. The programme included the imparting of education to the people in understanding their political right and to win those rights by carrying out the constructive programme of the Congress¹

AICC met at Patna in 1925, does not fail to strike as particularly interesting, because at this meeting three outstanding changes were effected in the position of the congress. Khaddar was divested of all political significance. The leader of the party in the central provinces legislative council, S.B. Tambe, accepting the office of a minister in the Governor's Executive council². The Tambe example became the forerunner of the disruption in the Swaraj Party. All this had the effect of the Swaraj Party losing its hold on the congress, which in 1925 again went over to Gandhi³.

The Kanpur Congress was ahead. Sarojini Devi was elected President according to the constitution. Gandhiji had said at Balgaum that he was stepping where really Sarojini should have been. Early in October the President elect published her message for the New Year.

Altogether, the year 1925 was a stormy year⁴. The session of Kanpur had to decide the attitude to be adopted by the congress on the occasion. It was considered desirable that the Indian National Congress should itself take up the task of running the elections, instead of leaving it to the Swaraj Party. President Sarojini Naidu, arrived at this decision without much controversy, because by then the opposition of the Mahatma and his orthodox followers had been disarmed, but the question that raised a storm was as to the policy to be followed in the legislatures⁵.

The Kanpur session was to confirm what Patna had decreed. It was a moot point each at Patna whether such cataclysmal changes as Patna had effected in Franchise, contrary to Balgaum's decree, -in partition of properties, and in division of functions could be done by an All India Congress Committee. Then there was the larger question whether the congress should

¹ Bose, S.C.: The Indian Struggle, Pg. 118.

² Sitaramyaa, P. History of the Congress, Pg. 75

³ Ram Gopal How India Struggle for freedom, Pg. 346.

⁴ Sitaramyaa, P., History of the congress, Pg. 78-79.

⁵ Bose, S.C. The Indian Struggle : Pg. 120-21



endorse the demand of the Swaraj Party in the Assembly which was embodied in their Amendment to the resolution of the muddiman Report. All these complex Questions were before the session at Kanpur Presided over by poetess of India. A Novel feature of the congress was the handing over of the charge by Gandhi the outgoing President to Sarojini Devi, the incoming One.

Sarojini Devi took charge with a few choice words. Her presidential Address was perhaps the shortest address delivered from the congress rostrum, while of course it was the sweetest ever delivered. She emphasised unity, - unity between the parties and unity between India and Indians abroad. She referred to the National Demand as put forth from the Assembly, and pleaded for the oblation of fear. "In the battle for Liberty fear is the one unforgivable treachery, and despair the one unforgivable Sin". Her address, therefore, was an expression of courage and hope. The Kanpur Congress had an easy time, except for certain labour demonstrations and small troubles from certain delegates which were brought under control by sturdier men like Jawahar⁶.

The annual session of Kanpur, Motilal Nehru moved the adoption of the following directives to the party: "If by the end of February 1926, the government do not give any satisfactory reply to the demands for the constitutional reforms set forth in the resolution passed by the Assembly on 18 Feb. 1924, the party will no longer continue to work in the present Legislatures.

In accordance with the mandate of the Kanpur Congress the Swaraj Party walked out of the Legislative Assembly on March 8, 1926. The Kanpur Congress witnessed a tug-of-war between the rival ideologies within the Swaraj Party⁷.

The Swaraj Party functioned as a party within the congress. Having done its work inside and outside the legislatures, it went back to the congress within a few years. Its activities started from 1923, after the Gaya Congress to 1928, the year when the Simon Commission showed its activity. In India Pandit Motilal Nehru and C.R. Das showed their courage in dealing with the numerous matters concerning the life of the nation. C.R. Das was the main driving force in the role of the opposition and under his able stewardship, the party functioned as a stable organization. C.R. Das organizing capabilities were magnificent. In fact, in 1925 he went to the council direct, in his short period, Das 'became an awful portent of danger and a lion in the path of the Indian bureaucracy. To achieve his aim, he set up a formidable opposition in liaison with the independent Muslim members by resorting to a pact with them. This is commonly known as the Bengal pact and people could know of this only when the elections were over. Swarajists at the session of the Trade Union congress, discussed about labour which represents 98 percent of the

⁶. P. Sitaramyia, History of the congress, Pg. 78.

⁷. Mande, B.R., Motilal Nehru, Pg. 150-51



population of India, when it consider that Labour also includes the peasants. They need organization. Das, Motilal, Annie Besant, Lajpat Rai and Madan Mohan Malviya, they all began feeling that if the leadership of the congress failed to bring workers and peasants to its fold, they might move towards independent class organizations and resort to non-violent class struggle. If the congress fails to do its duty it may expect to find organizations set up in the country by labourers and peasants, dissociated from the cause of Swaraj⁸.

After the suspension of Non-co-operation movement Bengal leader C.R. Das and Allahabad leader Motilal Nehru declared the weaknesses of Non-co-operation movement for the Indian nationalism. It was first novel experiment of its kind in a series of freedom struggle launched under the inspiring guidance of M.Gandhi. It showed the way that how Indians were capable to struggle for freedom. The people were becoming politically conscious and were beginning to join in the demand for freedom. Then it brought the national awakening based on well-defined multi-dimensional constructive programmes.

Some leaders were very much unhappy with the performance of the Swaraj Party. They criticized that the Swaraj Party is not a position to lead the masses in the struggle.

Swarajists Economic policy and their championship of the private property had greatly disillusioned, besides the reconciliation of the Swarajists and the No-changers at the Belgaum Congress and condemnation of the cult of violence by Das at the Faridpur Conference had shattered all hopes of the Royists (M.N. Roy's Party). In the Legislative council Swaraj party could however get the salt tax and Railway fare reduced. The excise duty on cotton was repealed. It fought successfully for the restoration of civil and political liberties of the people in various ways for the release of political prisoners and the repeal of repressive laws. Thus the supreme motive of the Swarajists was to see that the anti-national measures could not be adopted there. Das clarified the aim of the party in unequivocal terms in the Bengal Legislative council in 1925. The work of the Swaraj party led as they were with tact and firmness was creditable and Swarajist achieved whatever could be achieved by their tactics under the constitution. The element of constructive work was greatly fostered by the efforts of the members of Swaraj party.

An official member of the U.P. called the technique of walk in and walk out policy of electros as peripatetic patriotism. And during the 1926 elections, some of the Swarajists found as C.Y. Chitamani assessed, that "the guilt was off the ginger Bread".

Infact, the Swarajists had withdrawn altogether from the Legislature during the year 1926, as they had discredaed Dyarchy and also wrecked it. During the year under review, their opposition to Dyarchy in the form of their numerous obstructive tactics, scored a brilliant success in Bengal, wherein the

⁸ The Tribune, 7 November 1924.



third term consequently the results of elections held in 1926 were not favourable to the Swaraj Party. With the diminished strength, the Responsivists could have merger of Swaraj Party with the congress. In fact Gandhi had withdrawn temporarily from the active political arena in favour of social uplift work and economic organization in the shape of the constructive work. Later on, the Swarajists split into two factions-the Swarajists who did not favour the acceptance of office, and the Responsivists who favoured Co-operation with the Government in their acceptance of ministerial appointments, of the legislature, the then Governor felt obliged to dissolve it⁹.

The general tone of the Swarajists went down. Individuals here and there began to slip away to the other side, some Swarajists become ministers, some became Executive councilors in the provinces later. A number formed a separate group calling themselves 'Responsivists' or 'Responsive Cooperators', a name originally used by Lokamanya Tilak. The rise and development of the Responsivist Party gave a set up to the Swaraj Party¹⁰. Tilakites therefore did not see eye to eye with the programme of obstruction inside the legislatures sponsored by the Swaraj party. In this way two groups nearer to each other diverted its attention towards Hindu-Muslim unity in various regions of the country. Swarajists demanded strong bonds of unity amongst the two communities. The sudden death of C.R. Das in 1925 was a serious setback to the functioning of the party. Motilal Nehru was left alone to bear the whole burden of guiding the programme of the Party. As a mark of protest at various legislative issues, the members of the party adopted the policy of walk-ing out. This kind of behaviour became a regular feature which ceased dissolution of the Legislature. The success of Swaraj Party was admitted by the members of the Simon Commission in their Report, which placed as the Swaraj Party only really well organised and disciplined party with a definite programme. Only in Bengal and the Central provinces did they, even temporarily, achieve their initial of making dyarchy unworkable, and in the provinces they have tended every-where, in varying degrees, to be- transformed into an opposition of a more constitutional kind and, have not infrequently played a useful part as keen and vigilant critics. The merger of nationalist groups became a glaring phenomenon on account of the Nehru Report drafted and submitted in 1928, the programme of political agitation decided upon at the historic Lahore Congress session, the launching of the civil disobedience movement soon after the Dandi March, last but not the least, the political atmosphere engendered by convening the Round Table Conference. In fact after the Calcutta Congress, it was not feasible for the Swaraj Party to maintain its separate entity and carry on its independent political programme which was now converted into the attainment of 'Purna Swaraj' for India.

⁹ Home Political Records, 1920-30, National Archives of India, New Delhi

¹⁰ Ray, P.C., Life and Times of C.R. Das and his Times, Madras, 1929