SWADESHI MOVEMENT IN INDIA: WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO MAHARASHTRA

MISS. MESHRAM PRADHYA PRABHU*

*Doctoral Research Scholar,
Department of History,
School of Social Sciences,
University of Hyderabad,
Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh, India.

ABSTRACT

Swadeshi movement was one of the major events in the History of Indian Freedom Movement. It was started in 1905 as an agitation against the partition of Bengal and it spread to other parts of the country including Maharashtra. The Slogans of Swaraj, the concepts of boycott, National Education and the spirit of Swadeshi were spread from Bengal to Maharashtra along with other regions.

The main objective of the present paper is to study the Swadeshi movement in India with special reference to Maharashtra. The primary sources such as Kesari and Subodh Patrika news papers and the secondary sources such as published books and articles are utilized for the present study. The study highlights the role of Maharashtra in Swadeshi movement and finds that though the use of Swadeshi brought in 1905, it was used for the first time in Maharashtra in 1716 during the period of Peshwa by Goudpad Charya in Nasik and the Swadeshi initiative was started in Maharashtra by Shankar Shashtri Gokhale and Bhau Wadekar, the residents of Poona, in 1846. The celebrations of Ganapati utsav, Sivaji festivals were one of the important moves in the history of the freedom movement in Maharashtra.

KEYWORDS: Boycott, Kesari, Maharashtra, National Education, Partition of Bengal, Swadeshi Movement.

INTRODUCTION

Swadeshi movement was one of the major significant events in the History of Freedom Movement in India. It was started in 1905 as an agitation against the partition of Bengal. The presidency of Bengal was the most populous province in British India. It included not only the western and eastern parts, but also Bihar, Assam and most part of Orissa. In regarding to population distribution of this huge administrative unit, the eastern part of Bengal was dominated by the Muslim population whereas the western part was by the Hindus. In the central part of Bengal the two communities balanced each other. As the Bengal presidency as an administrative unit was increasing in size as a result of conquest and annexations, it was thought difficult to administer. Therefore, the idea of reorganizing Bengal presidency had been an issue that came for discussions among the British officials. The discussions of the partition of Bengal had been carried out since the time of the Orissa famine of 1866. In this direction, Assam was separated from Bengal in 1874. The proposal to transform Chittagong division to Assam came out in 1892 and in 1896 again the proposal to transform the districts of Dacca and Mymensingh, so that the Assam could become a Lieutenant Governor’s
province. But both these proposal did not materialize. Up to this point, the considerations of the official regarding the partition of Bengal were only administrative.

But things began to change by the time of Lord Curzon. He planned a programme first in 1903, which proposed to transfer the Chittagong division, Dacca, Mymensingh districts to Assam and Chota Nagpur to the Central Provinces; Bengal would receive in return Sambalpur and the feudatory states from Central Provinces etc. However, the final scheme of partition of Bengal was brought out in July 19, 1905, with some modifications over the previous plan. As for this plan, a new province of Eastern Bengal and Assam was constituted with all districts of Chittangong, Dacca and Rajshahi divisions as well as Tippera, Malda and Assam. The motive behind this plan of partition was beyond the administrative grounds. If it was on administrative grounds, Curzon would have accepted several other logical ways of partition like linguistic division. But, he was intended for further weakening the Congress which was little to show for its existence in 1903 (John R. McLane, 1977) and dividing the articulated Bengali community which had controlled the Congress so as to weaken the growing nationalism.

OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The main objective of the present paper is to study the Swadeshi movement in India with special reference to Maharashtra. The primary sources such as Kesari and Subodh newspapers and the secondary sources such as published books and articles are utilized for the present study.

ANTI-PARTITION AGITATION AND THE SWADESHI MOVEMENT IN BENGAL

At first, the plan was opposed by the Moderates when the plan had been in the process of making. The Moderates opposed the plan through deploying moderate methods such as press campaign, meetings, petitions and conferences at the Calcutta Town Hall in March 1904. Scores of petitions were sent to the British government. However, their efforts went in vain and the partition was ultimately set in. The day of the partition of Bengal was observed by the Moderates as a day of mourning. The ceremony of Rakshabandhan was followed all over the Bengal. Hundreds of protest meetings were held, where people crowded to hear speeches by Surendranath Banerjea and other leaders.

As their traditional techniques of petitioning had failed in stopping the partition, the Moderates went beyond their conventional political methods. Thus, Surendranath Banerjea gave a call for the boycott of British goods and institutions at a meeting in Calcutta 1905. A formal boycott resolution was passed on August 7 at Calcutta Town Hall in 1905, which marked the beginning of Swadeshi Movement. It was for the first time that the Moderates went beyond the literate sections; they also participated in national educational movement as well as in labourer’s strikes. Their goal was to achieve annulment of partition through deploying these unconventional methods. However, despite their shift away from their conventional methods, their philosophy remained same.

The annual conference of the Indian National Congress (INC) was held at Banaras in 1905 and the call for Swadeshi was formally adopted under G. K. Gokhale. Here interesting thing was that being a moderate, Gokhale supported the Swadeshi and boycott movement for Bengal. In other words the Swadeshi Movement for Moderates was to be confined to Bengal
only and they did not want to make it a national movement. But, the militant nationalists led by Tilak, Bepin Chandra Pal, Lala Lajpat Rai and Aurobindo Ghosh advocated to extend the movement to the rest of India and to carry it beyond the programme of just Swadeshi and boycott to a full-fledged political mass struggle. Their aim was Swaraj and the abrogation of partition had taken a back seat. Though the Extremists goal was Swaraj it had different meaning with different leaders. For Tilak Swaraj meant Indian control over administration, but not a total severance of relations with Great Britain. Whereas Bepin Chandra Pal believed that no self-government is possible under British paramountcy; so for him Swaraj was complete autonomy, absolutely free of British control. It meant an absolute political independence for Aurobindo Ghosh (Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, 2004). Thus, their goal of Swaraj had to be gained through more radical ways than that of the Moderates. Therefore the Extremists followed the method which was called as a passive resistance. It meant opposition to colonial rule through violation of unjust laws, boycott of the British goods and institutions and development of their alternatives – Swadeshi, and national education.

SWADESHI MOVEMENT IN BENGAL - TWO TRENDS

The Swadeshi movement in Bengal had two trends. First trend was the ‘constructive Swadeshi’. The movement during this phase was not political. It gave more emphasis to constructive programme which were taken as self-strengthening movement and therefore prepared the ground for the subsequent political agitation. In their way of self-strengthening programme, the importance was given to Hindu religion revivalism as it was thought a ground for imagining India as a nation. As a part of constructive programme, national schools as well as the indigenous industries were established.

The other trend of Swadeshi movement in Bengal was political extremism. This trend was led by political extremists like Aurobindo Ghosh and Bepin Chandra Pal. They were critical of the non-political constructive programme and argued that the political freedom of India could be the pre-condition for the regeneration of national life. Therefore achieving complete independence or Swaraj became their goal. The programme at this stage was passive resistance. This programme needed the mass to be mobilized for the movement. For the same purpose the religion was used as a tool. The organization of samitis was another way which was used for the mass mobilization. Through samitis the programs like physical training, propagation of the Swadeshi message were carried out.

The bureaucracy was determined to suppress the Swadeshi, boycott movement in Bengal. The Barisal conference showed the coercive techniques in the utter ruthlessness. The conference was held on April 14, 1906, where the procession led by Surendranath Banerjee, Motilal Ghose, and Bhupendranath Babu was attacked by the police for the cry of the ‘Vande Matram’. Kesari the Marathi news paper welcomed the move of the Bengal leaders who had agitated for obtaining the rights and shouted the slogan of ‘Vande Matram’ (Kesari, May 15, 1906).

SWADESHI MOVEMENT IN MAHARASHTRA

The Swadeshi movement was not limited to the Bengal alone. It was spread to other parts of the country and many national leaders were taken an active part in the movement. Thus the waves of movement which were started in Bengal had touched the whole of India and the leaders from various parts of the country got involved into the movement; in Maharashtra,
Tilak took direct part, in Punjab it was Lala Lapat Rai and in South India it was Subramaniam Bharati were among the prominent leaders. The present part of the article focuses on the Swadeshi movement in Maharashtra.

Boycott was no longer a matter of interest to the Bengalis alone, it had became an issue of all-India importance and the Slogans of Swaraj, the concepts of Swadeshi, Boycott and National Education which were emerged during the anti-partition campaign and finally, the spirit of Swadeshi had spread from Bengal to Maharashtra along with other parts of country like Madras and other provinces. The Swadeshi Movement in Maharashtra should be looked at as was developing over the Swadeshi that was already there in Maharashtra. Therefore, it is informative to look at the history of the Swadeshi in the region before discussing the Swadeshi movement in Maharashtra.

The Swadeshi was used for the first time in 1716 during the period of Peshwa by Goudpad Charya in Nasik (Kesari, January 30, 1906). On this subject, Subodh Patrika opines that the Swadeshi initiative was started by Shankar Shashtri Gokhale and Bhau Wadekar, the residents of Poona, in 1846. Shankar Shashtri Gokhale was of the view that unless and until the educated people of India use the Swadeshi goods, indigenous industrial development will not take place. Because of the same purpose they started looms at their homes and weaved Swadeshi cloth. Gopal Hari Deshmukh (Gopal Hari Deshmukh was an Indian social activist in nineteenth century. He wrote hundred letters called Shatapatre in Prabhakar newspaper, to document Indian social scene. He was called as Lokhitwadi, one who strives for the people’s betterment) in the columns of the Prabhakar exhorted the people to use Swadeshi articles during 1849 (Bipan Chandra, 1966), however rough and coarse they might be. Later, the initiative was continued by the R. Joshi and R. B. Gavande in Poona in the year of 1871(Subodh Patrika, December 23, 1906). Ranade focused on creating public attention on Swadeshi through his lectures in 1872 and 1873 at Poona (N. G. Jog, 1962). In these lectures, he popularized ‘the idea of Swadeshi and preferring the goods produced in one’s own country even though they may prove to be dearer or less satisfactory than finer foreign product’ (Bipan Chandra, 1966). Swadeshi was kept alive by Ganesh Vasudev Joshi alias Sarvajanik Kaka (Ganesh Vasudev Joshi called Sarvajanik Kaka with affectionate humour and because of his great interest in public activities, was a social activist in Pune. He was a lawyer by profession) in Maharashtra by wearing the Khadi dhotis and shirt (Kesari, January 30, 1906). Moreover, he took a vow to use only Khadi spun and the cloth woven by him. (N. G. Jog, 1962).

Though, the Swadeshi Movement was supported by the Moderates in Maharashtra but they were not in favour of the boycott of goods. Gokhale, for instance, observed that Swadeshi Movement was both a patriotic and economic movement and that boycott was a political weapon which should be reserved only for the certain occasions (J. C. Johari, ed., 1993).

The Ganapatip is started in August 11, 1893 by Tilak for infusing sentiments of strength, cohesiveness and solidarity among the Hindus (Vishwanath Prasad Varma, 1978). He had transformed it into a public celebration where patriotic ideas could be spread. The couple of years later, the Shivaji festival was inaugurated in 1895 by Tilak at Raigad. It was started as a Maratha festival and later on assumed a national character (D. P. Karmarkar, 1956). The Ganapati festival was social in nature whereas the Shivaji festival had political overtones. The festivals’ actual purpose was to stimulate the spirits of the people by
transforming them into public performances as well as help to popularize the Indian National Congress.

The Swadeshi movement tried to bring the middle classes and the masses into political and economic action. The Swadeshi boycott movement was a mighty attempt at the vindication of the rights of the people to self-government, which used the various techniques of political agitation such as mass processions, public meetings, strikes, picketing, etc. The Swadeshi Movement became more popular in nature when the labourers were also encouraged to participate in the movement. Tilak spread the awareness about the Swadeshi Movement among the factory labourers. The main purpose of Swadeshi was to provide employment to the people, encourage the existing indigenous industries towards the prosperity and simultaneously work for the welfare of the people.

The Bombay mill owners took advantages of the profits instead of the British officials during the Swadeshi movement in Maharashtra. This could be observed from the profit that was made by the Bombay mill owners during Swadeshi Movement. It was estimated to have been Rs. 3.25 crores in 1906, as compared to a wage bill of Rs. 1.68 crores (Sumit Sarkar, 1983). Because of the movement the Bombay mill owners got the opportunity to produce and sell the articles in the market as well as hike the prices of the goods, when people started using Swadeshi goods. Thus, the industrialists became supporters of the movement but it was only for their self-interest that made them supporters.

It will not be exaggeration if stated that, Swadeshi Movement of Maharashtra as that stood next to the Bengal’s Swadeshi movement. Kesari the Marathi news paper supports this when it writes that if there is Swadeshi anywhere after Bengal, it is only in Maharashtra (Kesari, January 30, 1906). Tilak says, Maharashtra is much better in supporting the Swadeshi Movement as Maharashtrian women wear Lugad (Lugad’ is the wearing garment of Maharashtrian women,) and even men do not give any boost to foreign cloth by using them which helped to the Swadeshi movement.

The demand for National Education became an important part of the Swadeshi Movement. Its major objective was the establishment of a three-dimensional system of education-literary, scientific and technical combined-conducted on national lines and under national control for the realization of the national destiny. The Swadeshi Movement supported a movement for India's cultural autarchy which took shape in the National Council of Education or the N.C. E. which was something like a National University established by the greatest men of our country on 11 March, 1906. The National Council of Education was set up in Calcutta the Bengal National College and School (Aug, 1906) with Aurobindo Ghosh as the Principal and Satis Mukherjee as the Superintendent. Vernacular was adopted as the medium of instruction from the lowest to the highest stages, while English was retained as a compulsory second language as an instrument of world culture. Provisions were made for the study of Hindi and Marathi languages as well as Sanskrit, Pali and Persian as sources for the firsthand historical researches. The influence of the National Council outstripped the limits of Bengal and forged ahead in Bombay and Madras Presidencies and the province of Berar. Outside Bengal, B.G. Tilak and Lajpat Rai were the most outstanding advocates of National Education (Haridas Mukherjee).
CONCLUSIONS

The Swadeshi movement was suppressed by the British through repressive measures like imprisonment and deportation of many of the Swadeshi leaders. In Maharashtra leaders like Tilak, Shivaram Mahadev Paranjape was sent to imprisonment during the movement. To conclude, Maharashtra played an importance role in the Swadeshi movement. It was also important to observe that though the use of Swadeshi brought in 1905, the Swadeshi was used for the first time in Maharashtra in 1716 during the period of Peshwa by Goudpad Charya in Nasik (Kesari, January 30, 1906). According to Subodh Patrika, the Swadeshi initiative was started in Maharashtra by Shankar Shashtri Gokhale and Bhau Wadekar, the residents of Poona, in 1846. Tilak encouraged a boycott and had taken active part in the Swadeshi movement of Maharashtra. He spread the awareness about the Swadeshi Movement among the factory labourers. The Slogans of Swaraj, the concepts of Swadeshi, Boycott and National Education and the spirit of Swadeshi which were emerged during the anti-partition campaign were well propagated in Maharashtra. The celebrations of the festivals such as Ganapati utsav, Sivaji festival were one of the important moves in the history of the freedom movement in Maharashtra.

REFERENCES