

NCERT Notes: Home Rule Movement

NCERT notes on important topics for the UPSC civil services exam preparation. These notes will also be useful for other competitive exams like banking PO, SSC, state civil services exams and so on.

Between the years 1916 and 1918, the Indian independence movement witnessed the growth and spread of the home rule movement spearheaded by leaders like Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Annie Besant. The aim of the home rule movement was the attainment of home rule or a dominion status for India under the British Empire along the lines of countries like Canada and Australia. This movement was carried out through the two home rule leagues.

Background

- The Government of India Act 1909 was dissatisfactory to the aspirations of Indians.
- The Congress Party's split in 1907 and fiery leader Bal Gangadhar Tilak's imprisonment from 1908 to 1914 meant that there was a lull in the national movement.
- But Tilak's release and the advent of Annie Besant brought about a revival of the national movement.
- Annie Besant was an Irish socialist, writer and orator who supported the Irish and Indian home rule movements. She arrived in India in 1893.
- The leaders in India were divided on whether to support Britain in the war or not. Annie Besant, however, declared, "England's need is India's opportunity".
- Having returned from exile in Mandalay, Tilak understood the need for a revival of the nationalist movement in the country.
- He also understood the growing importance of the Congress Party in India's political scene. So, his first task was to get readmitted into the party. (The extremists led by Tilak had separated from the Congress).
- In the Congress session of December 1915, it was decided to let the extremists re-join the party largely due to Annie Besant's persuasion. Besant had also recognised the need for Congress approval and the active participation of the extremists in the national struggle.
- However, Besant and Tilak were not able to convince Congress to support their decision to set up home rule leagues.
- Besant managed to convince the Congress to pledge to educative propaganda and the establishing of local-level committees. It was also agreed upon that if these conditions were not satisfied by September 1916, she would be free to set up a home rule league.
- Accordingly, she set up her Home Rule League in September 1916.
- Tilak, however, was not bound by any such condition and so had set up his league in April 1916.

Foundation

- There were two home rule leagues launched.
- **Tilak** launched the **Indian Home Rule League** in April 1916 at Belgaum.

- **Annie Besant** launched the **Home Rule League** in September 1916 at Madras.
- They had the common objective of achieving self-government in India.
- There was an informal understanding between both the leagues wherein Tilak's league worked in Maharashtra (except Bombay), Karnataka, Berar and the Central Provinces. Besant's league worked in the rest of the country.
- Tilak's league had its headquarters in Delhi. It had 6 branches. Besant's league had 200 branches and was a looser organisation compared to Tilak's.
- The two leagues worked closely with one another. However, they did not merge to avoid friction between both the leaders.

Objectives

- To achieve self-government in India.
- To promote political education and discussion to set up agitation for self-government.
- To build confidence among Indians to speak against the government's suppression.
- To demand a larger political representation for Indians from the British government.
- To revive political activity in India while maintaining the principles of the Congress Party.

Activities

- The leagues organised demonstrations and agitations.
- There were public meetings in which the leaders gave fiery speeches.
- They were able to create a stir within the country and alarm the British to such an extent that Annie Besant was arrested in June 1917.
- This move by the British created a nation-wide protest and now even moderate leaders joined the league. Besant was released in September 1917.

Significance

- The Home Rule League functioned throughout the year as opposed to the Congress Party whose activities were confined to once a year.
- The movement was able to garner huge support from a lot of educated Indians. In 1917, the two leagues combined had around 40,000 members.
- Many members of the Congress and the Muslim League joined the league. Many prominent leaders like Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Joseph Baptista, G S Kharpade and Sir S Subramanya Iyer were among its members.
- The moderates, extremists and the Muslim League were briefly united through this movement.
- The movement was able to spread political consciousness to more regions in the country.
- This movement led to the Montague Declaration of 1917 in which it was declared that there would be more Indians in the government leading to the development of self-governing institutions ultimately realising *responsible governments* in India. This

Declaration (also known as August Declaration) implied that the **demand for home rule would no longer be considered seditious**. This was the biggest significance of the movement.

Failure and Decline

- The movement was not a mass movement. It was restricted to educated people and college students.
- The leagues did not find a lot of support among Muslims, Anglo-Indians and non-Brahmins from Southern India as they thought home rule would mean a rule of the upper caste Hindu majority.
- Many of the moderates were satisfied with the government's assurance of reforms (as precluded in the Montague Declaration). They did not take the movement further.
- Annie Besant kept oscillating between being satisfied with the government talk of reforms and pushing the home rule movement forward. She was not able to provide firm leadership to her followers. (Although ultimately she did call the reforms 'unworthy of Indian acceptance').
- In September 1918, Tilak went to England to pursue a libel case against Sir Ignatius Valentine Chirol, British journalist and author of the book 'Indian Unrest'. The book contained deprecatory comments and had called Tilak the 'Father of Indian Unrest.' (Tilak lost the case).
- Tilak's absence and Besant's inability to lead the people led to the movement's fizzing out.
- After the war, Mahatma Gandhi gained prominence as a leader of the masses and the Home Rule Leagues merged with the Congress Party in 1920.