

Badruddin Tyabji and the Growth of Indian Nationalism in the late 19th Century

Dr Vedpal Rana
Associate Professor,
Department of History,
Swami Shraddhanand
College, University of Delhi

Abstract:

Badruddin Tyabji is a name that all students to modern history of India are accustomed with, though very few are aware of his contribution to the Indian National Congress in its formative years. The research paper “A Study of the Role of Badruddin Tyabji in the Formative Years of Indian National Congress” attempts to probe the role that Tyabji played in the formation of Indian National Congress. The paper looks at the ways Badruddin presided over the Sessions of Congress and how he led to its development. An attempt has been made to look at his contribution critically to understand his role vis-à-vis the Muslim sensibilities.

Keywords:

Aloofness of the Muslim community, Badruddin Tyabji, Bombay Presidency Association, Sir Syed, The Anjuman-e-Islam, The formative years Indian National Congress,

India started developing national consciousness in the middle of the 19th century. This consciousness became stronger and stronger with time. Notably, English educated Indians started thinking in terms of nation and liberty etc. The culmination of these trends was the establishment of the Indian National Congress. It is, however, argued that the Muslims remained aloof of the Congress.

The revolt of 1857 forced the British to do something very pertinent to prolong their rule in India. In the revolt, both the Hindus and the Muslims fought together with the British. The British started to create a divide between these two major communities of India. They began to lure prominent Muslims. This was when English educated people were looking for government posts and representation in the limited legislative positions. The British created statistics to show that the Hindus were far ahead of the Muslims in education, leading to their superior position compared to the Muslims. This propaganda of the British was instrumental in keeping the Muslims with finger crossed. Led by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, they started terming the Indian National Congress as a Hindu organisation. But People like Badruddin Tayabji were exceptions. Badruddin, from the core of his heart, was a true nationalist. He gave strong resistance to the propaganda done by the British and some Muslim leaders. He not only was active in political life but even became the President of the Indian National Congress. His political ideas and endurance were marvellous.

Badruddin Tyabji started showing interest in municipal affairs. The issues of municipal politics were connected with the functioning of Arthur J. Crawford. His autocratic functioning and absence of any check on the authority of municipal commissioners had resulted in extravagant expenditure and ineffective administration. Badruddin supported the movement wholeheartedly for reforming the administration of the corporation. (Messelos: p.31)

To a great extent, this reform movement was responsible for the introduction of the elective principle in 1872. A controlling body called the standing committee was also created. In 1882, Badruddin was nominated to the Bombay Legislative council. The Legislative Council attempted to provide for “close contact between the government and the governed.” It is important to note that the authority of the legislative council was minimal. Badruddin in the Legislative council consistently pleaded for the extension of local self-government as it would

stimulate the public spirit and educate people in political education¹.

The guiding principle of Badruddin's political activities inside and outside the Legislative Council was that Indians should be treated fairly; Indian interests should not be neglected. They must have a say in the running of the administration. His opposition to the abolition of cotton duties, Vernacular Press Act (1878), support to Local government and Gilbert Bill (1883) would bear this out.

The Indianization of the Civil Service question, establishment of democratic institutions, principle of election, racial harmony, educated Indian's share in the administration etc., were identified by Badruddin as outstanding political questions of his time and dominated all the regional and national organisations of the Indian leaders. The Indian National Congress was the logical culmination of these aspirations and expectations of the newly emerging professional.

The Bombay Presidency Association was established in January 1885. The initiative was taken by Badruddin, Pherozeshah Mehta and K. T. Telang. Such a national organisation was felt because the Bombay Association, founded in 1852, was no longer active.

Badruddin hoped that the Association must enjoy the respect of the people and confidence of the government. He said, "It will be a strong bulwark of your national rights and liberty, while at the same time serving as a guide, a friendly guide to the rulers of this country. ... our popular rights it may at the same time add strength and security to the Empire".

The moderate attitude and loyalty approach determined the nature of work that the Association undertook. It submitted petitions and protested for the public good.

Badrudin and his colleague in the Bombay Presidency Association had realised that it would be adequate and better if the attention of British electorates were drawn towards the Indian affairs. It was also felt that the British Parliament should have some members to work and articulate the Indian problems sympathetically there.

Badrudin was one of the founders of the Bombay Presidency Association. The formation and the leadership pattern of the Bombay Presidency Association marks a new epoch in Bombay politics and Indian political activity and national organisation.

The Indian National Congress, founded in December 1885, continued to a great extent the legacy of the Bombay Presidency Association in terms of leadership, policies and programme. This explains why the early Indian National Congress was under the sway of Bombay based politicians. It is significant to note that between 1885 and 1907 Bombay Presidency provided nine of the twenty-three Congress Presidents, eight of whom were only from Bombay city. During the same time, Congress met six times in the Bombay Presidency, more than in any other region.

Extremely close relations between Hume and Badruddin, mutual trust and admiration and active collaboration in the development and elucidation of the Congress programme and policies certainly throw sufficient light on Badruddin's interest and involvement in Congress politics 1885.

A few days before the first session of the Indian National Congress, a meeting of the Bombay Presidency Association was called. It was presided over by Badruddin. Due to his ill health and his absence from India, Badruddin could not attend the second Calcutta Session of the Congress. The third session was held at Maellas. There was a general desire among the

Congressman that Badruddin should preside over this session. Hume, in his lecture, wrote, “Lucknow, Allahabad, Benaras and Behar committees were firm on this point. The entire Madras Committee and the Bengal leaders were also unanimous. The same was the case with the whole of the Congress Standing Committee. Badruddin agreed to preside over the session.

The Presidential Address delivered by Badruddin may be regarded as an important landmark in Congress policy and programme evolution. It was a clear manifestation of his politics and political thought.

Badruddin thanked them for electing him President of the august assembly like the Indian National Congress. He said, “I have had the honour of witnessing great public meetings both in Bombay and elsewhere, but it is quite a novel sensation for me to appear before a meeting of this description a meeting composed not merely of the representatives of any one city or even of one province, but of the whole of the vast continent of India – representing not any one class or interest, but all classes and all interests of the almost innumerable different communities that constitute the people of India.”

Referring to the charge that Muslims were keeping aloof from the Congress, Badruddin said, “... This is only partially true and applies to one particular part of India and is moreover due to certain special local and temporary causes ... I do not consider that there is anything whatever in the position or relations of the different communities of India Which should induce the leaders of any one community to stand aloof from the others in their efforts to obtain the general reforms, those great general rights, which are for the common benefit of us all and which, I feel assured, have only to be earnestly and unanimously pressed upon the government to be granted to us.” He further said, “peculiar social, moral, educational and even political difficulties of any great Indian community should not come in the way of working shoulder to

shoulder with the member of other creeds for the common benefit of all.”

Badruddin characterised the Congress as a national body representing not only the educated Indians but also the gentry of the aristocracy, not only of birth and wealth but of intellect, education and position. He refuted the charge that the educated Indians were disloyal to the British government. He described them as genuinely loyal and devoted friends of the British Empire. The educated Indians were in a better position to appreciate the blessing – good roads, railways, telegraph and post offices, schools, colleges and universities, hospitals, good laws and impartial courts of justice – the right of a public meeting, the liberty of action and speech, and high education – of the civilised and enlightened British government.

Badruddin, in his Address, made pertinent comments about the nature of the relationship between the Indians and the Anglo-Indians. He said that all Europeans were not the enemies of India. Besides, their position is surrounded by complicated questions, not merely of political but of a social character, which tends more or less to keep the two communities asunder despite the best efforts of the leaders of Europeans no less than native society So long as our European friends come to this country as merely temporary residents, so long as they come here merely for trade, commerce or a profession, so long as they do not look upon India as a country in whose welfare they are permanently interested, it will be impossible for us to expect that the majority of the Europeans should fraternise with us upon all tremendous public questions.”

Badruddin said that Europeans should be induced to make India permanently. Their home meant retaining a significant amount of talent and ability. If this happened, then “All these great questions arising from jealousy of races and the rivalry for public employment would at once disappear. And when we speak of public property of India, because of the

draining away of vast sums of money from India to England, it has always seemed to me strange that so little thought should be bestowed upon the question of the poverty of our resources, caused by the drain of so many men of public, political and intellectual eminence from our shores every year.”

Badruddin elucidated his views about social reform and its relation to political activity. He said that social reform of necessity affected some particular part or some particular community in India. At the same time, the Congress organisation discussed only such questions as affecting India’s whole. He held that the social problems of different communities varied from one another, but the general political problems are identical.

Badruddin did not forget to touch upon the method of the method employed by Congress to influence the government. What he advocated in the first meeting of the Bombay Presidency Association (1885) – fearless advocacy and undaunted loyalty – was repented again in the Madras session: “Be moderate in your demands, just in your criticism, be accurate in your facts, be logical in compelling logic which found its way into the hearts and minds of his hearts, the words of wisdom which he then spoke might read with benefit and advantage by every Hindu, Mussalman and Parsi up to the present day. I think people cannot do better than peruse the wise and sagacious advice Mr Badruddin gave on that occasion.”

Not only the leaders of the Congress but the Indian newspaper also praised the Presidential Address delivered by Tyabji. In its editorial column, The Times of India wrote2, Few presidential addresses have equalled the one Mr Badruddin Tyabji delivered on that occasion in the lucid arrangement of facts and cogent reasoning. It acknowledged on all hands to be as a rhetorical effort of high order in the history of that movement.”

He said in concluding remarks, “I am afraid, I may appear to some of my friends as a tyrannical despot (voices, “no, no”), but I assure you that I acted on the principle that no resolution should be carried in this Congress unless it was a resolution that would commend itself to the judgment of all reasonable and thinking men.”¹ He further added, “I trust I may be able to be present at the next Congress at Allahabad.” Then referring to his ruling which restricted speeches to five minutes, and yet that speech should contain a considerable amount of matter.”³ This was received with loud and continued applause.

Many difficulties were anticipated, many were as a fact felt every moment during the session, and referring to these Salem Ramaswamy Mudaliar proposing a vote of thanks said, “This was in which the whole session has been brought to a satisfactory conclusion is quite a crown of glory to our president, for the success, we have achieved, has been mainly due to the ability, tact and good judgement and above all – good temper which our president has shown in discharging his duties.”

Referring to how Badruddin conducted the proceedings of the session, the Indian Patriot said, “The genial smile that played upon his lips added a charm to his word of command, and his inviting presence and gentleness of manner inspired enthusiasm and love in all who had to obey his command. He had an eminent degree, the qualities of a born leader of men. A fine presence, great talents and attainments, courage, wisdom, sincerity of manners, the gentleness of disposition and a capacity to love all without difference of race or colours. Such men pose no strive for bitterness but strengthen the feeling of love and brotherhood. They excite no jealousy, no opposition. They bring peace and goodwill to all and smoothens the rough experiences of life.” (22nd August 1906)

The great principle Badruddin introduced both in the subject committee and the

sessions was that Congress being a national institution, should not introduce such subjects for discussions that were objected to unanimously or nearly unanimously by any community. The report of the Congress expressed satisfaction that it was held “with one of the very ablest men in India, as President.”

Badruddin became a member of the Bombay Presidency Association as soon as he acquired a decent place for it when in 1885 first session of the Indian National Congress was held, Badruddin could not take part in it as he was abroad. His popularity was so high that he was made President of the 3rd Indian National Congress to be held at Madras in 1887.

Badruddin was being pressurised from all sides. To keep up defending the Congress against the attacks of Sir Syed, Beck and consolidating the ranks of the Congress another. But all this pained him grievously to find that dissent should have risen in the same organisation which he had fathered, the Anjuman-e-Islam.

The Anjuman, as usual, received an invitation to send delegates to the Allahabad session of the Indian National Congress. In a meeting of 27th July 1888, it was resolved unanimously to send its representatives. However, two members supporting the resolution suggested that a public meeting be held to secure more significant support. A meeting was therefore convened on 5th August 1888. However, on 2nd August and 4th August, other public meetings were called by these very gentlemen at which resolutions were passed urging Muslims to keep away from the Congress. In addition, the disorder was created at the Anjuman’s meeting on 5th August, and the anti-Congress Press publicised these disturbances.

After two chaotic and rowdy sessions of the Anjuman on 5th December 1888, it was a straight fight between the pro-Congress and anti-Congress factions.

Replying to a letter, Badruddin urged that it was “the duty of all of us to understand each other thoroughly ... and by mutual concessions to bring about a common course of action.” Upholding the Congress as an organisation of “educated people from all parts of India and representing all races and creeds” sought to discuss “only such questions as may be generally admitted to concern the whole of India.”

Acknowledged that Badruddin’s exit from the Congress widened the credibility gap between the Congress and the Muslims and thus paved the way for the success of the anti-Congress movement. His fade out left the Congress poor, but more impoverished still were the Congress Muslims who found themselves leaderless during their struggle against Sir Syed and Syed Ameer Ali.

It can be concluded that Badruddin Tayabji was able to put an excellent resistance to counter the views of his staunch political antagonists led by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan. They were not interested in allowing the Indian National Congress to flourish by terming it as a Hindu majority organisation. Sir Syed Ahmed Khan strategically tried to protect his community by giving warning them against joining politics. Badruddin vehemently directed all his energies to remove this tag of Hindu’s Congress. However, as evident from the above discussion, he was an only partially successful political manoeuvre. The Congress founders tried all means to woo Muslim membership, which, by and large, remained very limited and irregular. If one surveys the number of Muslim delegates to the various sessions of the Indian National Congress, he will find that the attitude of the Muslims was indifferent. Disinterestedness in this newly established political organisation shows that there were not many takers of the political ideas of Badruddin Tayabji. However, he delivered a presidential address at the Congress Session of Madras. He tried his best to persuade his fellow co-religionists to follow his example. He believed that any reform could only be achieved if all Indians, be they Muslims or

Hindus, joined hands. Still, he dared to challenge the mainstream thinking among the Muslims of India. According to him, they were influenced by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan. Badruddin tried to see common grounds between Muslims and Hindus and tried to bring both communities together for a common cause.

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