The demand for Home Rule was first made by Rai Bahadur Kristo Das Pal who roused attention to the need of Home Rule in India in 1874, even before the launching of the Indian National Congress. He said in his article in *Hindu Patriot*: "Our attention..., should .... be directed to Home Rule of India."¹ He pointed out that Canada had a Parliament. The small
and little advanced colonies as Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, New South Wales, New Zealand, St, Christopher's Island and Barbados had elected councils. In this context, he argued, "British India has a fair claim to similar representation. If taxation and representation go hand in hand in all British Colonies, why should this principle be ignored in British India... Home Rule for India ought to be our cry, and it ought to be based upon the same constitutional basis that is recognized in the colonies."²

In 1876, Surendrandath Bannerji and Ananda Mohan Bose, in Calcutta, took the first step towards the regaining of Self-Government with the object of achieving representative Government. Surendranath Banerjee considered Self-Government the order of nature. In 1915, he declared the same at the annual session of the Indian National Congress. He said: "We want self-government and why? Because we want to be a nation. We want self-government for the highest ends of national and moral regeneration for uplifting our people."³ Mr. Banerjee requested the Indians to work for self-government for the sake of humanity.

References about the idea of Home Rule in the early history of the Congress are very few. But even then, it seems that Home Rule or Self-Government for India had been the main idea of the Congress.
from the very beginning. In December 1887, A.O. Hume wrote a private letter to Dadabhai Naoroji: "Though we do not aim at any such radical separation—even in a pretty distant future—as do the Irish—after all our efforts are directed towards Home Rule for India." In 1895, Tilak published a scheme for Home Rule and later presented a memorandum on Home Rule, to the British, His plan received no attention in India because the political thinking was less advanced at that time.

In 1906 Gandhi in his booklet in Gujarathi, *Hind Swaraj or Home Rule*, said: "Real home-rule is self-rule or self-control. The way to it is passive resistance: that is soul - force or love force. In order to exert this force Swadeshi in every sense is necessary." In 1906, after a heated discussion the Congress passed the resolution on Swadeshi and boycott. The Congress also declared Swaraj or self-Government, as in the colonies, the main aim of the Indians. In April 1906, when the Congress resolved to have its written constitution, it was clearly declared as the very first article, "that the objects of the Indian National Congress are the attainment by the people of India of a system of Government similar to that enjoyed by the self-governing members of the British Empire and a participation by them in the
rights and responsibilities of the Empire on equal terms with those members." 

In the same year, Dababhai Naoroji declared Swaraj or Self-Government, the target of the Congress. He delivered the following message at the Congress Session held at Calcutta in 19-6: "Self-government is the only and chief remedy. In Self-government lie our hope, strength and greatness.... I do not know what good fortune may be in store for me during the short period that may be left to me and if I can leave a word of affection and devotion for my country and countrymen I say: Be united, persevere and achieve self-government, so that the millions now perishing by poverty, famine and plague, and the scores of millions that are starving on scanty subsistence may be saved and India may once more occupy her proud position of yore among the greatest and civilized nations of the west." 

Later, in one of his lectures, he recalled his 1906 speech at Calcutta and wished to see Home Rule in India before his death. He wanted a strong, steady, continued agitation, to be begun at once, not cruel or harsh, nor provocative, but tempting to all freedom loving people of England. 

According to Dadabhai, the only remedy for the economic evil lay in the achievement of Swaraj. In 1906 at the annual session of the
Congress W.C. Bannerjee asked the Government to broaden the base foundation of the Government and to give proper lawful share in it. Later he declared in simple language his ambition to obtain the same facilities of national life that existed in Great Britain itself.

Later, Rash Behari Ghose also declared the same idea that the Indians wanted to be sons of the Empire, not in mere name but in reality. In 1907, after the Congress split, the leaders declared the same idea as their main aim. In June 1907, *Modern Review* published an article entitled 'Home Rule for India' after 1907, the Congress leaders began to practice this idea seriously. In 1913 the Muslim League also declared suitable Self-Government as the aim of the Muslims.

**Birthpangs of the Home Rule League:**

The foundation of a Home Rule for India League was discussed in 1915, and many Indian papers published the following communique in September.

For many months conversations in India and correspondence with England were going on. The discussions held in 1914 with some English politicians and sympathizers with India in England marked the beginning.
It was decided to start a Home Rule League with 'Home Rule for India' as its only object, as auxiliary to the National Congress here and the British Committee in England. "Its general aim will be to educate the people and give to the demand of the Congress for self-government, the strength of a nation, which has realized itself and which through its national organization, has voiced its claim for years, only to see it rejected. The promoters of the movement emphasis the fact that there is no wish for separation from the empire but only a determination to manage their own affairs. The League is to consist of two divisions, one in India and the other in England, the latter educating the British Democracy in relation to India, the work of the British Congress Committee, useful and sacrificing as it is, not reaching the British masses in whom power lies."\textsuperscript{10}

The name of Mrs.Besant did not appear in any place of this communique. But it was obvious that she prepared this scheme. The publication of the communique was followed by a lecture series of Mrs.Besant on Home rule that covered all over India. In order to discuss her idea of Home Rule, she invited the leading Hindu and Muslim leaders to meet her in Bombay, before the Congress Session, and wanted the Congress to sponsor the League. She expressed her political goal in these
words: "In political reform we aim at the building up of complete self-government from village councils... to a national parliament equal in its powers to the legislative bodies of the self-governing colonies." She used the words "Home Rule in Indian politics" for the first time, in *New India* dated 14 September 1915.\(^{11}\) On 25 September 1915, *New India* carried a formal announcement about the Home Rule League and published the aims, objects and draft constitution of the Home Rule League. She also announced that Dadabhai Naoroji had agreed to be President of the League and that Sir Subramanya Iyer and Sir William Wedderbum had agreed to become Presidents of the Madras and London branches of the League respectively.\(^{12}\) Sir S.Subrahmanya Iyer was so favourable to Mrs.Besant that she requested the members of the Legislative Council to follow the example of "this saintly and venerated old man".\(^{13}\) These three men were past Congress Presidents. It clearly showed that there was no rivalry between the Congress and the Home Rule League. Only the Bombay moderates were against her in the beginning. But B.G. Tilak and the Congressmen from other places gave frail support to the idea of the League, In a meeting in the same month, Wadia condemned the promises given by Great Britain to India as 'scraps of paper'. In September 1915, Mrs.Besant delivered two lectures in Bombay on The submerged classes
in India and England' and 'India after the war'. Considering these two lectures offensive, the Bombay Government sent a letter to the Government of Madras to warn Mrs. Besant.

The practical reason of the need for legislation, the ruined economic condition of the country and the historical justification for the grant of Self-Government to India were the grounds on which Mrs. Besant seconded the resolution on Self-Government in the Congress in 1916. On the basis of these reasons she supported the resolution and requested the Government to give full representation in the Legislative Councils, as a step towards Self-Government, to India. Many prominent leaders like Sir Ibrahim Rahmatulla and Mrs. Sarojini Naidu supported this resolution. "We are going to politics' she said, "not with a view to be materialized ourselves, but to purify and spiritualise public life, and so long as we keep this aim in view, the day is not far when in our own lifetime we shall see our motherland free." She considered Home Rule essential, mainly for two reasons. In one of her articles, she explained that it was the birthright of every nation, and that India's most important interests were made subservient to the interests of the British Empire, without her consent, while her resources were not utilized for her greater needs. Mrs. Besant even called all those who had faith in her to
participate in politics to secure India's freedom at the earliest possible date, and received support from Baptista, Sir Dinshaw Petit, Muzrul Haque, J.B. Petit and Tilak. Baptista even called her the Simon-de-Montfort who guided them all to victory.\textsuperscript{15} Bepin Chandra Pal declared: "It is the first article of the Congress, it is the first article of the Indian Nationality; it is the first article of every self-respecting Nation, every civilized Nation in humanity. It is the first article of every man and woman who feels within himself or herself the call of the Divine. It is the first article of every Yogi, of every Gnani, and of every Baktha, because self-government is the path and foundation, not only of the life temporal but also of the life spiritual."\textsuperscript{16}

In the article entitled 'Rally Round the Standard of Freedom', she firmly declared: "Liberty is our birthright as much as it is yours, and we will have it."\textsuperscript{17} In her opinion, the struggle for Freedom was righteous and holy and she requested the Indians to struggle for freedom till they were free. In her book \textit{Shall India Live or Die?}, she made it clear that when she used the term Home Rule, she meant the management of India by British, instead of by India, as a Dependency. To Mrs.Besant, the demand for Home Rule was not a cry of mere self-interest but was an aim to restore the old Panchayat system of government and to hand over
the affairs into its hands with real power. In her opinion "if a people are
to be free, and to feel the value of their freedom, it must enter into their
own lives, improve and beautify them."\(^18\)

She decided to launch the Home Rule movement in 1915, and her
policy was to 'transpose the picture' and 'get Self-Government'. She
expected that changes that all had been asking for would follow as a
matter of course.\(^19\) In the beginning, to start the Home Rule League,
Besant desired the helping hand of Gandhi, which he refused, because at
that time he was in favour of the Government policies. Mrs. Besant
persuaded Gandhi by telling him she knew the British very well. Unless
the Indians prepared the ground, the British Government would forget all
about India's help in the War. Gandhi did not pay attention to this idea.
But later events showed who was right and who was wrong. Though
Gandhi did not extend his help in starting the Home Rule movement, he
later accepted Besant's movement as 'brilliant' and remarked: "the Home
Rule League has done so well to awaken the consciousness of the people
that I wish a branch of the League could be started in every village in
India."\(^20\) He was so much attracted by the movement that he lent his full
support to it and even presided over its meetings and addressed its
followers.
Response of the Newspapers

Many newspapers welcomed the idea of Mrs.Besant to start a Home Rule League for India. The Swadesamitran and Sasilekha welcomed the idea. Sampad Abhyudaya wrote that Mrs.Besant wished to help the people to realise the benefits of this system and thereby earn their gratitude. This paper had no doubt believed that if all people should ask for Home Rule with one voice, there could be no doubt that the British Government would grant it. Manorama expected the League to achieve success, if its works were carried on loyally and without much noise. Mr.Dadabhai Nauroji being its president, the paper held out no fear of its aims and acts being misunderstood.

But certain other papers criticized her new idea. The Indian Patriot predicted division of the country into two sections, one that follows Mrs.Besant's scheme and the other who do not seem to turn on the question of pace. Bhagyodayam pointed out that the formation of the Home Rule League might affect the Congress negatively, and that it was better to reform and improve the Congress and to establish its branches in every part of the country. The New Reformer, another native paper, feared that a movement set up to humiliate the Government at a time when the Empire was engaged neck deep in a world war does not
show loyalty which like love expects no reward. Andhrapatrika advised Mrs. Besant to strengthen the Congress by settling the differences prevailing among the Congress leaders first. In its opinion, it was unnecessary to have another all India Association with the same ideals as those of the Congress.

Mrs. Besant mooted on 25 September 1915 the idea of starting a Home Rule League and decided to call an All-India Conference on 25 December 1915. In her invitation to the Indian leaders seeking their help for the establishment of the League, she indicated that her aim was to form an organization for the education of the people of India and Great Britain, on the necessity of Self-Government for India. In this meeting presided over by Surendranath Banerji, she requested the Indian leaders to approve her idea, choose the name of her organization, formulate its basic rules, and to elect its all-India officers. When her idea was thrown open to discussion. Narayana Chandravarkar requested them to decide the issue first in the Congress meeting. Many of the representatives accepted this opinion and after heated discussions, they accepted the suggestion of Pandit Madan Mohan Malvaviya to postpone the debate. He said that there would be a meeting of the Congress Committee the next day, where they would get a chance to discuss the idea with the
Congress leaders. He also urged to stop the formation of the League until the Congress leaders had decided on that point. After his speech, the meeting was adjourned to meet two days after.

In the Subject Committee of the Congress, the leaders discussed the plan and passed a resolution urging continuous political propaganda and demanding further measures of reform towards the attainment of Self-Government. This decision of the Congress gave a fatal blow to Mrs.Besant's idea. Now, many Indian leaders thought that since the Congress had decided to do what the League was to propose, it was best to give the chance to the Congress organization.

In the adjourned meeting, Mrs.Besant said that senior members of the Congress Committee and the Muslim League would guide her. In this meeting Mazharul Haque said that he and his Maslim friends were in favour of forming the new League. C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer brought an amendment to postpone the formation of the League till the Congress and the Muslim League made their report. Many leaders like Jehangir Petit, Dr. Gour and Rasal opposed this amendment. After a heated discussion, Mrs.Besant accepted the amendment, and it was put to vote. About thirty
representatives of the Hindus and Muslims voted against it. Thus the first attempt of Besant to start her movement failed miserably.

Mrs. Besant, a woman with a powerful personality, tried to spread the idea of Home Rule to every nook and corner of India. While she was in England, from 1908 to 1913, the Home Rule movement of Redmond in Ireland attracted her. She closely watched the progress of the Irish nationalist movement during the War. President Wilson who was sympathetic towards the Irish question tried to solve this problem. This interest in the solution of the Irish question greatly impressed Mrs. Besant, and it is believed to have inspired her idea of starting a similar movement in India. In one of her speeches, she said that she used the term Home Rule League for the sake of democracy because Home Rule had been the cry of democracy within the empire. In demanding Home rule she was also inspired by the history of the freedom struggle of the British. On another occasion, she spoke that Indians admired England because of the sympathy she had shown for the oppressed countries of Europe. She was also influenced by the writings of Milton, Burke, Shelly and Mill.
In December 1915, she attended the Bombay Congress, where she moved the following resolution: "Considering the age-old civilization of India and considering the advance that has taken place in the country in education and public life, may it please Him Majesty, the King of England, to declare that it is the intention of the Government to grant Home Rule to India."  

Lord Sinha called the people who wanted complete freedom, 'impatient idealists'. Mrs. Besant criticized him and, in protest, conducted a private meeting at the same venue. She submitted her plan to start a Home Rule League with the aim of attaining full freedom. At a time when many Indians feared to use the very term 'Home Rule', as it recalled the violent Home Rule Movement of Ireland, Mr. Besant dared to use it. She tried to give practical effect to the scheme without the help of the Congress. Some Government officials, who disliked her activities, requested the Government to take action against her immediately. But Sir C. Sankaran Nair and some other officials requested Lord Hardinge not to interfere with her at that stage.

Mrs. Besant, who attended the proceedings of the Muslim League in 1915, requested Muslims to add strength to a united demand to the
British Government for Home Rule. Mazharul Haque spoke that they were entirely in favour of forming a Home Rule League. The same year found her presiding over the United Provinces Provincial Conference and the Bihar Students Conference.

The public received the first intimation about the Home Rule League in an interview that Mrs.Besant gave to a representative of the Associated Press of India, at Bombay. In this interview she made it clear that India had every right to ask for Self-Government and that India would ask for it not as a reward for the help rendered during the War but as a matter of right. On 25 September 1915, New India announced the formal inauguration of the Home Rule League in the words, "with Home Rule for India as its only object, as an auxiliary to the National Congress in India and its British committee in England, the special function of the committee being to educate the English democracy in relation to India and to take up the work that Charles Bradlaugh began and which was pre-maturely struck out of his hands by death." Mrs.Besant's articles in favour of Self-Government in the Home Rule Section covering three pages in her paper New India, from 5 January 1916, touched all shades of opinion and were a definite propaganda for Home Rule.
Mrs. Besant held that there were more than 280 reasons for demanding Home Rule. But, it fine, she summed them up in just one clause: "Because we cannot get things done without it." The main cause was the reactionary policy of the Government. Mrs. Besant considered that the Arms Act, the Seditious Meetings Act, the Defence of India Act 1915, the Newspapers Act 1908, the Press Act 1010 and the revival of the Deportation Resolutions were the things that paved the way for the demand for Home Rule. The inhuman treatment of the Indians as outcastes by the British, especially in other countries, was another important cause. The disabilities of the Indians in Canada, Australia and the United States were due to this degradation. She criticized the Government for destroying the ancient economic system, and pointed out that the imposition of modern political economy by the British in India contributed only famines and poverty.

Lord Curzon's partition of Bengal made a movement for Home Rule in India inevitable. Mrs. Besant argued that India's contribution to the World War should be rewarded with some political progress. The Russian Revolution and the idea of the formation of the League of Nation by President Wilson gave added momentum to the demand for Home Rule.
Though the idea of self-government on colonial model was incorporated in the Indian National Congress constitution in 1908, the Congress had failed to define the term Home Rule, and vagueness remained on the quantum of the Indian share in the administration of the country. Lord Harding's Dispatch of 25 August 1911 suggested autonomy in the provinces or provincial Home Rule as a solution to Indian political problem, and the demand for provincial autonomy became the cherished goal of the Indian political leaders for a while.  

Anglo Indian leaders like J.C. Cotton in 1913 also upheld the idea of Home Rule. Annie Besant, who had the opportunity to witness the Irish movement for Home Rule, could see in the backdrop of the war, a golden chance to demand Home Rule as a birthright.  

But the demand should come from India. The Indian National Congress, the largest single organization to jump into the fray, was found to be shirking from taking the actual plunge. In this predicament, Mrs. Besant mobilized her Theosophical Society and formed the Home Rule League to enable the Congress to advance its claim to Self-government.  

On the other hand, the British who contained that a country which cannot defend itself, cannot claim self-government, schemed a policy of containment. In this event when the nation is showing lethargy to rise to the occasion, Annie Besant threw
herself into the vortex by making self-government the core issue. The emergence of Mrs.Besant in this political scenario was decisive. Neither a moderate nor an extremist, she served as a bridge between the two. To her, the moderates were 'yesterdays' and the extremists were 'tomorrows'. This equation prompted others to call her a moderate extremist.

END NOTES

2. Ibid., p.603.
3. Ibid., p.58.
7. Ibid., p.p. 7-8,
11. D.V.Tahmankar, Lokamanya Tilak, Father of Indian Unrest and Maker of Modern India, Great Britain, 1956, p.236.
17. Ibid., p.39.
19. Annie Besant, Shall India Live or Die. Madras, 1925, p. 111.
20. Ibid., p.99.
25. 'NewIndia', 15 June, Madras, 1917, p. 129.
27. S.N. Banerjee, A Nation in Making ; Being the Reminiscences of Fifty Years of Public Life, Calcutta, 1925, p.363.
32. Ibid.,p.198.
34. Ibid.,p,197.