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Surat Congress in the face of Leadership Conflict

Nilendu Biswas

Assistant Professor of History,
Asannagar Madan Mohan Tarkalankar College,
Nadia, Asannagar (West Bengal)

Narattam Biswas

SACT,
Asannagar Madan Mohan Tarkalankar College,
Nadia, Asannagar (West Bengal)

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Abstract:

The Surat Congress of 1907 is particularly important in the political history of India. Just as there is controversy over the history of the founding of the National Congress in 1885, there is also controversy over the history of the Surat Congress. The fast-paced politicians of contemporary India at this time became active in establishing their dominance. In establishing their dominance, they did not even hesitate to throw mud at each other. The then leaders of Bengal were also involved in this bitter politics. Starting from Surendranath, the 'crownless king' of Bengal, Bipinchandra, Arvind and others did not show the slightest slack in establishing their dominance. And in doing so, the Surat session of the National Congress became stigmatized. But in response to the Surat session, India's national liberation struggle later became more dynamic, leading the way for a dedicated Bengali youth community on the altar of patriotism. My main objective in this research paper is to highlight the participation of Bengali leaders in the Surat Congress and their psychological aspects.

Keywords: National Congress, Arvind, Tilak, Bipinchandra, Surendranath, Surat Congress

Introduction:

Surat Congress (1907) has become famous in the political history of India as well as in the history of the National Congress mainly for the division of the Congress. But the activities of the National Congress have gone through various ups and downs from its inception to its development. With the emergence of various leaders, the thoughts, ideologies and functions of the National Congress have been conducted in different directions. The policy of political begging of the early leaders did not seem acceptable to many. This created a kind of discontent among the Congress leaders. This dissatisfaction took on extreme proportions in the Surat Congress. The manner in which

the leaders of the National Congress started throwing mud at each other during the Surat Congress session divided the National Congress into two different ideological groups. On one side was the moderate group led by Surendranath Bandyopadhyay. On the other hand, there was an extremist group led by Arvind Ghosh against the moderates. Regardless of the differences in ideological or political methods, the Surat Congress became a special means of expressing the power of the Bengalis in contemporary Bengal and Indian politics.

Just as there was a debate about who would be nominated as the President of the National Congress, there was also a debate over who would be the main authority in contemporary politics. For this debate, in 1907 the National Congress put an end to two decades of petition policy and established the ideology of extremism. Though ideological disputes have been simmering within the Congress for several years now. In the immediate aftermath of which the rise of extremist parties was well noticed during the session of the National Congress in Calcutta. The extremists of Bengal have accepted Bal Gangadhar Tilak as the national leader and Arvind Ghosh had a special role in this.¹ However, the politics of separation between moderates and extremists has not yet taken a very strong form. Lala Lajpat Roy himself acted as mediator when there was a disagreement among the members at the Calcutta session (1906). But in the end Lajpat Roy also had to admit that his advice was rejected by the Bengali extremists.²

Needless to say, in the new format of the conflict between the moderates and the extremists in the Congress, the center of power began to fall into the hands of the Bengalis. Lala Lajpat Roy is in the extreme south of the new party. Again Bipinchandra Pal moved a bit elsewhere after a feud with Arvind supporters over homegrown robberies and terrorist violence. On the contrary, he said, "In this critical situation in India, no one will think of resorting to such illegal and violent means to achieve political independence or solve it by insanity."³ Needless to say, Tilak was in a dilemma as a result of such activities of the Bengali leaders. He would then be heard to adopt the 'Sinfim' method, sometimes he would become vocal in support of a non-violent revolution.⁴ But Arvind was certainly the leftist of the extremists. Not only did he take over the management of 'Bandemataram' from Bipinchandra, he also had a close relationship with 'Jugantar'. 'Jugantar' was not one of the mouthpieces of the Bengal revolutionaries. 'Jugantar' first debuted in March 1906 and Barindra Kumar Ghosh was its chief patron and advisor.

Thus a bitter attitude had already arisen among the leaders of the National Congress, the final manifestation of which was in the Surat Congress. In this Surat session we get to see Arvind in a different mood. The ultimate example of the fact that Bengalis are one of the enemies of Bengalis was seen in the Surat Congress. Because Surendranath Banerjee not only accused Arvind of creating disunity in the Bengal Congress, he also implicated Arvind in Sir Andrew Fraser's conspiracy to assassinate him. Arvind also retaliated by alleging that Surendranath had created terror among the

extremists with the help of the district police. The situation became bitterer as the Left planned to nominate Rashbehari Ghosh as President and shifted the Congress session from Nagpur to Surat. Although Arvinda poured water on this plan. Instead, the extremists intended to make Lajpat Roy president of the Surat Congress session. In this incident, Surendranath Gopalakrishna requested Gokhale to resign from the post of president.

Needless to say, Lajpat Roy was in a dilemma in this situation, it was not possible for him to step on two boats at the same time. Because the man did not hesitate to argue with Governor Minto for his release, his plea and the war between the two sides made Lajpat extremely uneasy. In such a situation, Lajpat Roy said, "Directly or indirectly, he will not allow himself to be the cause of a rift in the national camp."⁵ Arvind opined that Lajpat Roy's refusal to be an extremist candidate was a "big mistake". From then on, the extremists also became determined to make Tilak president.

While many were reluctant to accept Tilak's representation, it was also observed that the resolution adopted at the Calcutta session was not willing to accept a moderate leadership like Feroze Shah Mehta. Therefore, the moderates feared that the extremists would get a chance to rule if the session was held in Nagpur. It was out of this apprehension that the session of the National Congress in 1907 was shifted from Nagpur to Surat. Besides, the decision to make Rash Behari Ghosh president was finalized. Perhaps the extremist leaders would have accepted it, because the Bengali leaders in Calcutta were aware of it. They even agreed to come to the Calcutta session to discuss the Congress proposals. But the moderates did not feel the need to listen to this proposal. The inevitable response to which the Surat Congress session will be a scandalous chapter in the political history of India will be a scandalous chapter between the moderates and extremists.⁶

There is no doubt that this incident accelerated the history and movement of the National Congress. Although Lajpat Roy urged his members to adhere to the policy of slow-moving senior leaders from within the party, he valued the practical wisdom of the wise. But his request was not accepted by the young leaders. Tilak again advised the extremists to accept the ideology of the moderates from outside and occupy the Congress from within.⁷ On the other hand, extremist leader Arvind did not agree to any submission. He did not want to accept all these tricks and compromises. On the contrary, he did not see any injustice in the fall and division of the Congress in the Surat session. According to him, it was made possible by the will of God. Though Tilak thinks of opportunistic cooperation, Arvind should focus on establishing a revolutionary organization like the rival government. Moreover, for a long time it was not possible to realize the demands of the Indians through petitions from the shackles of subjugation, for which a new kind of approach was needed. From this point of view, there was nothing unreasonable in Arvind's demand.

Despite differences in ideology and outlook, Arvind did not abandon Bipinchandra's attempt to reconcile with the moderates at this time. But the manner in which Surendranath and the delegates

from Bombay and Uttar Pradesh behaved angered Arvind, as well as trying to change the activities and aims of the moderate reformist convention in Allahabad. He wanted to go along with the extremists, but Arvind no longer had confidence in the passive efforts of the moderates to establish autonomy. He said angrily “A nation cannot bargain with instant fortune, It is also impossible to buy freedom from the giver to buy something at the cheapest price in the market.”⁸ Arvinda felt that the nation's preparations were over with the departure of the old Congress. This is the beginning of a fierce conflict between the two opposing forces, and the initial impact of this conflict will be disorienting.

The unpleasant fact that passive resistance had completely failed to awaken the conscience of the English could no longer be covered up. So Arvind rightly realized that the success of the National Congress depended on terrorism. Such thinking led the British government to believe that Arvind was involved in the bombing of a garden house in Maniktala. There is even evidence of his involvement in the Alipore bombing case. When Arvind was taken to court on this charge, Arvind was released through the efforts of Chittaranjan Das, another son of Bengal. But it is particularly noteworthy that even though Arvind was acquitted, there is no doubt that he was one of the faces of the revolutionary movement in contemporary Bengal. Why only Bengali is his special predominance among the national leaders of India. Opposition to Surendranath in particular for ideological reasons pushed Arvind more towards national politics. Andrew Fraser and later Edward Baker collected various facts and documents to prove that Arvind was the undisputed leader of the Bengal revolutionaries.

It is not difficult to understand by analyzing the events of Surat Congress that the rise and development of Bengali nationalism hurt the ideology of non-Bengali leaders. But it was also observed in the Surat session that the opposition to moderate and extremist ideologies was not between Bengalis and non-Bengalis. Because there were Bengali leaders in both the parties of the Congress. The moderates nominated only one Bengali as president of the Surat session. The extremists wanted to make Lajpat Roy president against Rasbihari Ghosh. But for special reasons, Lajpat Roy refused to become president on behalf of the extremists. Arvinda, one of the extremist leaders, was furious at the incident. He took the key to extremist politics into his own hands, as well as engaging himself in armed movements. Everyone had a rough idea of what would happen to the Surat Congress. But due to ideological opposition, it was not possible for anyone to pay attention to him.

The Surat Congress has remained a scandalous chapter in the history of India. Not only had that, but the movement of the national movement also come to a standstill in response to the Surat Congress. Extensive repression began to suppress the extremists. Newspapers were banned and disciplinary action was taken against their editors. Tilak was convicted of the crime and sent to

Mandalay Jail for six years. Disappointed, Bipin Chandra Pal temporarily withdrew from politics. Lajpat Roy remained a silent spectator in Surat. And Arvind, the main leader of the extremist movement, was implicated in the case for being involved in a revolutionary conspiracy. Although he was acquitted in the case, his mentality changed drastically while he was in jail. In his own words: “When I went to jail, the whole country was chanting ‘Bandemataram’, revived in the hope of a nation, in the hope of millions of people who have just regained their dignity. When I got out of jail I was getting ears to hear that sound. But instead I got a strange silence. Silence has descended upon the land.”

The Surat Congress influenced the politics of Bengal more than it influenced the politics of India. Arvind's political philosophy was able to influence Bengali society considerably. Due to the stagnation of the National Congress and the lack of active leaders, the youth of Bengal considered extremism to be acceptable. But his nature was different, suicidal extremism. Shaheed Khudiram was the first revolutionary of this new type of extremism. At the same time, Prafulla Chaki, Binoy-Badal-Dinesh, Surya Sen wrote a new chapter in the history of Bengal and Indian liberation struggle-armed extremist movement.

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