

ROLE OF GEORGE JOSEPH IN THE FREEDOM STRUGGLE

A.Jesu Amala Kavitha.,
Assistant Professor of History.,
Arignar Anna College.,
Aralvaymozhi.629301
Kanyakumari District

ABSTRACT

George Joseph (1887-1938) played an important role in shaping the policies of Congress during the first quarter of the 20th century. Even though he had played a major role in the course of the National movement in India, Joseph is unknown to the present generation. The rational thinking led to religious and social reforms and it awakened dormant nationalism and patriotism among the people of India. There were remarkable changes in religious, social and political ideas. George Joseph's first meeting with Gandhi took place on 22nd March 1919 in Madras. Gandhi was delivering a speech regarding the conducting of the hartal. On that day a group of people was called for a meeting with Gandhiji. George Joseph was one among them. Others were C.Rajagopalachari, Sarojini Naidu and T.Satyamurti. George Joseph drew much inspiration from Gandhi during his meeting with him. This meeting brought out crucial changes in the life of Barrister George Joseph. Joseph's enthusiasm and spirit for national freedom created a strong impression among some of the national leaders like Motilal Nehru. He pointed out the importance of boycotting government schools and colleges. Thus, the ultimate aim of all programmes and policies was the achievement of freedom. In his opinion, freedom was the highest political goal. Only freedom can enable the people to have equality before the law. He again opinioned that freedom was a precious thing and it was the duty of the citizens to keep it safe. He never hesitated to express his views against the action of the government. Ineffective political programmes also influenced his decision to leave the national organization. Towards the close of 1934, he returned to the Congress and within three years he became a member of the Indian Legislative Assembly. Despite his ill health, he proved himself to be a good debater and a great parliamentarian who fought restlessly for the people whom he represented. While he was just over 50, George Joseph passed away on the 5th of March 1938.

KEY WORDS

George Joseph – National movement - Social reforms - Rational thinking - Political ideas – Enthusiasm - National organization - Legislative Assembly – Parliamentarian - Home Rule - Indian National Congress - Non-co-operation.

Introduction:

The formation of the Indian National Congress made various changes in the political history of India. Western-educated Keralites like Barrister G.P.Pillai and Sir C.Sankaran Nair actively participated in the activities of the Congress. George Joseph (1887-1938) played an important role in shaping the policies of Congress during the first quarter of the 20th century. Even though he had played a major role in the course of the National movement in India, Joseph is unknown to the present generation. Born to C.I. Joseph and Saramma, in a middle-class Syrian Christian family of Chengannur on the 5th of June 1887, George Joseph had his early education in Adoor, Alleppy and Kottayam. In 1905, he went to England where he passed the Bar – at Law from the Middle Temple, London. Side by side with his activities for Home Rule, George Joseph also wrote articles on all important issues in dailies and journals, both English and Malayalam. He was a believer in modernization.

National Awakening:

The rational thinking led to religious and social reforms and it awakened dormant nationalism and patriotism among the people of India. There were remarkable changes in religious, social and political ideas. Bengal had been passed from the medieval to the modern age. A similar transformation took place in other parts of India and these changes can be attributed to the introduction of western education. The establishment of the Hindu College in Calcutta in 1817 gave a stimulus to English education in Bengal. Several schools and colleges were founded in different parts of India. It created an English educated class, and the formation of three universities of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras in 1857 enhanced the number of English educated Indians. Western education challenged the traditional accounts, beliefs and customs. The third phase of the Indian National Movement starts in the year 1916 when Mahatma Gandhi entered the political field. This phase is known as the Gandhian Era where Gandhi recognized the role of the Indian masses in the Indian national struggle for freedom. This period witnessed the active participation of different sections of people from various parts of India. On his return to India Gandhi founded the Satyagraha Ashram on the banks of the Sabarmathi river near Ahmedabad. He introduced a new method of political agitation based on non-violence. This new technique of political agitation seems to be very new to the Indian masses. They provided wholehearted support to the new method of political agitation introduced by Gandhiji. Gandhiji's idea of non-violence or ahimsa was taken from Hindu, Jain and Buddhist traditions but infused with new meaning which contains the characters of both love and struggle. After coming back to

India, Gandhiji began to take an active part in the freedom movement in India and his active participation made the Indian National Congress a mass organization. Both Hindus and Muslims responded to Gandhiji's call for non-violent satyagrahas.

Joseph's Entry into Freedom Movement:

Gandhiji soon became the leader of Hindus, Muslims and all other communities. He started using weapons based on nonviolence against the British. Gandhi started a peaceful political movement to expel the imperialist powers from Indian soil. George Joseph had deep faith in the non-violent and constitutional methods followed and propagated by Gandhiji. As a member of the Congress Working Committee and All India Congress Committee, Joseph shaped the decisions of Congress considerably. His articles, editorials, and notes in various national newspapers influenced the thought of Indians so much that they became more and more conscious of their just rights and privileges. Long before Gandhiji became very active, he consulted Barrister G.P Pillai for expert advice as to the methods to be adopted against the British. At this time George Joseph entered into the scenario of the Indian freedom movement. The arrival of Gandhiji to the forefront of the Indian political field occupies crucial importance in the history of India. Gandhiji gave a new shape and vigour to the national struggle of India. His views and new ideas gave a great impetus to many Indians both educated and uneducated. George Joseph had a great fascination with politics from his younger days. But he started his political career with the formation of the Home Rule Movement in India. The Home Rule leaders wanted to make awareness in the minds of the common people about the importance of the pact. George Joseph became an ardent supporter of the demand for self-government. In Madurai, George Joseph started a campaign to secure the support of the people towards the Lucknow pact. George Joseph had a key role in organizing this movement in Madurai. As per an order issued by the British government on 7th June 1917, Mrs. Annie Besant and other leaders of the Home Rule League were banned from visiting urban centers like Madras and Madurai. The British government also prohibited students from attending any Home Rule League agitation. George Joseph condemned all such actions of the government through various meetings held in Madurai. On 25th June 1917, a meeting was organized by the members of the Home Rule League including George Joseph in Madurai, in which he made an eloquent speech demanding the release of Annie Besant. Madurai became a major center of the Home Rule Movement and consequent agitations. Another meeting was held in Madurai in February 1918, in which George Joseph

commented that for achieving Home Rule, people should agitate within India and he also recommended sending representatives to England for demanding the self-government in India.

Home Rule Agitation:

The Home Rule agitation had distanced the moderates from the political field. The Congress session held in Calcutta in 1917, made Mrs. Annie Besant its President. It was considered a great triumph for the Home Rule Movement and its ardent supporters as well as followers. George Joseph could contribute his enormous support to promote the Home Rule Movement in Madurai and adjacent regions. By this time the Indian National Congress had been completely identified with Home Rule. By 1919, the political situation in India was subjected to several changes. The first World war came to an end. The Allied Powers became victorious. Even though Indians were expecting some substantial reforms after the war, it did not bring any change, which resulted in more disappointment and discomfort. Granting of self-government was never fulfilled. The situation got worse than before. The introduction of the Rowlatt bill brought the country into turmoil, which made Gandhiji call upon a nationwide hartal on 6th April 1919. The period, after the first world war, witnessed the assumption of Gandhiji into the forefront of Indian politics. Gandhiji soon emerged as a political hero. Gradually he took the leadership of the nationalist movement and the methods and programmes introduced by Gandhi were completely in contrast with the methods of the moderates and the extremists. Gandhiji's political programmes were based on satyagraha and non-violence. The undisputed leadership of Gandhi inaugurated a new era in the history of the freedom movement of India. He brought the Indian masses into the main field of the political movement. After Gandhiji entered into the freedom struggle it became a total mass struggle. The same thing happened with Indian National Congress also. It was an urban-based organization surrounded by the educated middle class but by Gandhian ascendancy, people from different strata of the society actively joined the Indian National Congress.

Meeting with Gandhiji:

The entry of Mahatma Gandhi into the Indian political field changed the whole modus operandi of the Indian freedom struggle which brought drastic changes in the life of the Nehru. George Joseph's first meeting with Gandhi took place on 22nd March 1919 in Madras. Gandhi was delivering a speech regarding the conducting of the hartal. On that day a group of people was called for a meeting with Gandhiji. George Joseph was one among them. Others were C.Rajagopalachari, Sarojini Naidu and T.Satyamurti. George Joseph drew much inspiration from Gandhi during his meeting with him. This meeting brought out crucial

changes in the life of Barrister George Joseph. On the day of hartal, George Joseph provided active leadership to the programmes and activities in Madurai. He asked the people to boycott all work on that day and to take fast and do prayers. The people of Madurai took this direction seriously and provided their full support for the peaceful carrying out of the hartal, George Joseph and his associates spread the messages given by Gandhiji among the common masses. He stressed the importance of non-violence and self-restraint and the hartal day was more peaceful without any violent action. The hartal was peaceful at the national level also, except for a few acts of violence reported in some places, especially in Delhi, Bombay, Ahmedabad and some other major cities. People attacked English officers and kept on slaughtering the British officials. Dismayed over this Gandhi observed three-day-long fasting. He urged his followers to keep fasting for 24 hours. But Gandhi got depressed over the news that there had been more violence in remote villages too. He considered his entire satyagraha campaign as a Himalayan miscalculation.

Non-co-operation Movement:

The annual session of the Congress was held on 26th December 1920 at Nagpur. At this session, a final decision was taken regarding the non-co-operation movement. The Nagpur session was remarkable in the history of the Indian National Congress for having taken a crucial decision regarding the future of India. Around twenty thousand people attended the Nagpur session of the Indian National Congress. The non-co-operation movement had made a great impact on the people of South India also. The magnetic personality of Gandhi made a great stimulus upon South Indians. They could not be aloof from the main areas of freedom struggle. The political leaders of South India actively participated in this new form of struggle. They were all attracted to the personality of Gandhiji. Barrister George Joseph was one among them. National events like the Jallianwalla Bagh tragedy and Rowlatt Act had made a great fillip on the life of George Joseph. That aroused his hatred towards the British government. During this time George Joseph was immersed in Home Rule activities and he was getting very much attracted to the national movement. The inauguration of the non-co-operation movement on the Indian soil was a remarkable event in the life of Barrister George Joseph. The Satyagraha movement and its propagation of non-violence brought new thinking into the mind of George Joseph. He welcomed the call of Mahatma for boycotting British goods with a warm heart. He could not wait for a long time and he entered the political arena of India. He observed the political events which were taking place in India at that time. During this time George Joseph was having a lucrative legal practice but Mahatma's call pushed him into the mainstream of the national movement. He had to choose

between his growing legal practice and the national movement. Without much hesitation, he could choose the call of Gandhi.

Involve in Active Politics:

The western educated, western-styled barrister turned towards a Gandhian style and life habits. He renounced all his foreign possessions in particular the foreign cloth. He set fire to all his foreign clothes. The non-violent satyagraha movement had made a deep influence on the young barrister who jumped into active politics. For all his activities, George Joseph was lucky enough to have the enormous support of his wife Susan. She could put up with all decisions taken by her husband. She had accepted her husband's passion for western-style and manners earlier. She had done her best to adopt the western style of living as per the wishes of her husband. But now she could early assume her husband's strong desire for the national movement. Both together decided to leave all comforts in life. Putting behind everything in life, they set out for Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmedabad. There they-George Joseph and Susan Joseph started their actual political life from a total Gandhian perspective. After leaving Madurai, Joseph and their family reached Sabarmati Ashram (hermitage). They were attracted by the simple life there. At first, Gandhi founded the Satyagraha Ashram at Kochrab and later at Sabarmati. It was on the banks of the Sabarmati river, in the city of Ahmedabad. It was on the model of Tolstoy farm. The Ashram consisted of low, whitewashed huts in a group of fruit trees. The Ashram became a home for different people from various parts of India. People from all castes became the inmates of this Ashram, and caste was not a hindrance to entering it. The inmates needed to keep some vows in the Ashram like truth, nonviolence, anti untouchability, celibacy, non-stealing, non-possession, and self-control, etc. The Ashram had become a nerve center for the national movement and it was the boarding place for some active leaders of the national movement. They started their political career from here and George Joseph became one of the political leaders who started their political career at the feet of Gandhiji in Sabarmati.

Conclusion:

Joseph's enthusiasm and spirit for national freedom created a strong impression among some of the national leaders like Motilal Nehru. He pointed out the importance of boycotting government schools and colleges thus, the ultimate aim of all programmes and policies was the achievement of freedom. In his opinion, freedom was the highest political goal. Only freedom can enable the people to have equality before the law. He again opinioned that freedom was a precious thing and it was the duty of the citizens to keep it

safe. He added that the citizens should keep an infinite readiness to maintain their freedom. George Joseph took every opportunity to criticize the Government. The editorship of the Independent provided him with enough space to note down his remarks about the government. He never hesitated to express his views against the action of the government. Ineffective political programmes also influenced his decision to leave the national organization. Towards the close of 1934, he returned to the Congress and within three years he became a member of the Indian Legislative Assembly. Despite his ill health, he proved himself to be a good debater and a great parliamentarian who fought restlessly for the people whom he represented. While he was just over 50, George Joseph passed away on the 5th of March 1938.

REFERENCE

1. Azad, Maulana AbulKalam. *India Wins Freedom*, Madras, 1988.
2. Bhargava, Motilal., *Role of Press in the Freedom Movement*, New Delhi, 1987.
3. Chakrabarthi, B., *Mahatma Gandhi, A Historical Biography*, New Delhi, 2007
4. Chandra, Bipan., *India's Struggle for Independence*, New Delhi, 1988.
5. Desai, Mahadeva., *Epic of Travancore*, Ahmedabad. 1973.
6. Dodwell, H.H (ed). *A Cambridge Short History of India*, New Delhi, 1979.
7. Gandhi, M.K. *My Experiments with Truth*, Ahamadabad, 1927.
8. Ghosh, Chandra Suresh., *Freedom Movement in India (1857-1947)*, New Delhi, 1947
9. Heehs, Peter., *India's Freedom Struggle 1857-1947*, Delhi, 1988.
10. Joseph, George, *The life and times of a Kerala Christian Nationalist*, New Delhi, 2003.
11. Lovett, Verney., *A History of the Indian Nationalist Movement*, New Delhi, 1988.
12. Majumdar, R.C., *History of Freedom Movement in India*, Vol I-III, Kolkata, 1962.
13. Menon, A Sreedhara., *Political History of Modern Kerala*, Kottayam, 1987.
14. Menon, P.K. *The History of Freedom Movement in Kerala*, Thiruvananthapuram, 1972.
15. Misra, D. P. *India's March to Freedom*, New Delhi, 2001.
16. Namboodiripad, E. M. S. *A History of Indian Freedom Struggle*, TVM, 1986.
17. Sitaramayya Pattabhi., *The History of the Indian National Congress*, Bombay, 1935.
18. Sivagnanam, M.A.P.O, *History of Freedom Movement in Tamilnadu*, Tanjore, 1988.
19. Thomas, Maya. *Barrister George Joseph: A Memoir*, Calicut, 1987.
20. Thomas, O.M., *George Joseph' Under the Knife*. Thiruvananthapuram, 1927.
21. Thompson, Edward., *Rise and Fulfillment of British Rule in India*, Allahabad, 1973.