



## History, Historicity, Heritage of Belgaum congress & Mahatma Gandhi

Lingaraju, Assistant Professor in History, Government College (Autonomous), Mandya District, Karnataka State

### ***Abstract***

*Gandhi chaired only one All India Congress Session which was held in Belgaum then belonging to Bombay Karnataka region. This session achieved historical importance as Belgaum gained all India Socio-political recognition. As a direct impact of this session several important socio- religious reforms followed . The movement towards Harijan upliftment, mass education, Women literacy etc soon followed . Khadi was introduced as a livery of freedom. Several leaders of the un unified Karnataka became aware of the national political agenda & started to involve themselves in Mass movements led by Mahatma Gandhi .This paper collaborates these events & examines the impact of Gandhian visit to this place.*

***Key words:*** Belgaum, Congress, Exhibition, Harijan, Session, social impact, solidarity, upliftment

### **Introduction**

The Belgaum Congress session of 1924 was a momentous event and the enthusiasm of the people of Bombay Karnataka region was reflected. It was the 39<sup>th</sup> session. It was held from December 26<sup>th</sup> -27<sup>th</sup>. It was the only Congress session in which Mahatma Gandhi presided. Gandhi arrived in this city 6 days previous to the session because he was to coordinate friendship between two warring factions inside the congress such as changers & no changers. The local people of Belgaum were elated by the session hosting & they named the venue as 'Vijayanagara', commemorating the mighty empire of Vijayanagara.

They installed an impressive Gopura 70 feet height resembling the raja Gopuras of Vijayanagara temples. This session had several historical events to date.

### **Belgaum Congress session HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

1. On February 5th 1924, Mahatma Gandhiji was released from prison because he had an operation for appendicitis
2. The Hindu-Muslim cooperation for which he had strived so zealously had nearly vanished.
3. With the abolition of Khilafat in Turkey, no encouragement was left for preponderance of the Indian



- Muslims to collaborate & work together with the Hindus.
4. The Muslim League eclipsed during the Khilafat agitation found a breathing space once again. Thus with the passage of time the incongruity between the Hindus and the Muslims began to appear and communal riots occurred at regular intervals. To compensate for the sins of his erring countrymen, Gandhiji undertook a fast of 21 days from September 18 to October 8. This was his desperate effort to solve the communal tangle.
  5. The Council entry programme of the Swarajists was not welcomed by Gandhiji. But, it was impossible for anybody to bring back the masses to an active non-cooperation and therefore as sort of compromise was reached.
  6. The Congressmen were given freedom to decide for themselves either to work for the Council entry or to carry on the constructive work outside the Council.

#### **Venue the Belgaum Congress session**

The venue of the session was named Vijayanagara in memory of the great empire. The entrance gate was designed like the *Gopura* of the Virupaksha temple at Hampi.

#### **The Volunteer Camps**

The volunteer s camps were a special arrangement. Huts for volunteers and the delegates were built with Khadi cloth and it was tied up with bamboo roofs.

Mahatma Gandhi was taken in a procession to the Congress camp. All efforts were made to represent the culture ethnicity and portentous history of erstwhile Karnataka region at the session.

#### **The Arrangements**

The arrangements for food water topped the list. For the supply of water round the clock, a tank, named Pampa Sarovara was constructed. It was built with a rough granite it had 10 arches for water to be drawn & sluiced to end user points cost ine nearly 4 thousand rupees & the water pipelines were given connection for water connectivity which cost 9 thousand rupees.

#### **The Kitchen**

To feed the delegates, a huge kitchen was set up and thousands of lanterns and petromax lights were brought from Bombay. Volunteers of Hindustan Seva Dal, trained by N.S.Hardikar were looking after the arrangements and attending the comforts of the delegates & other visitors

#### **The Arrival of Leaders**

When Mahatma Gandhi along with the Ali brothers, Sarojini Naidu, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and a host of leaders arrived at Belgaum, they were welcomed by a mammoth crowd led by Gangadharrao Deshpande, the Chairman of the Reception Committee.

#### **The Singing of Vande Mataram**

The Session began with the invocation song 'Vande Mataram' sung by Paluskar. This was followed by two songs in



Kannada by a choral group. Great stalwarts of music like Veene Seshanna gave their recital and Huyilagola Narayana Rao sung the Kannada anthem '*Udayavagali namma cheluva Kannadanadu*' at the session.

#### **The Presidential Address**

In his presidential address Mahatma Gandhi addressed several national issues such as banning of foreign goods, encouraging spinning and weaving of Khadi, working towards eradication of untouchability and other issues. "I am convinced that Swaraj cannot come so long as the tens of millions of our brothers and sisters do not take to the charkha, do not spin, do not make khadi and wear it.

#### **The Sub Sessions**

A number of session were also held at Belgaum on the occasion like the

1. All-India Khilafat Conference,
2. All-India Hindu Mahasabha Conference,
3. All-India Non-Brahmin Conference,
4. All-India Social Conference
5. The first Karnataka Unification conference it was chaired by Sri Siddappa kambali

Karnataka people reacted positively & confidently to the call given by Mahatma Gandhi & oriented towards for constructive several social & community oriented programmes The spread of Khadi and village industries was taken up all over Karnataka. The Khadi Movement worked with the twin

objectives of shaking the British economy on the one hand and boosting the Indian economy on the other. The movement, in the characteristic Gandhian mode, was completely non-violent in approach. (Rahul Ramagundam Gandhi's Khadi : A History of Contention and Conciliation, Orient Longman, 2008, xiv, 298 p,1-12). It was at the time of the Nagpur session (1920) that the Indian National Congress decided to encourage "Khadi". The first Khadi Production Centre was established at Katiawad, Gujarat. There was a sporadic khadi movement in Princely Mysore as well. The enthusiastic people undertook setting up of khadi.

The Khadi Movement worked with the twin objectives of shaking the British economy on the one hand and boosting the Indian economy on the other. The movement, in the characteristic Gandhian mode, was completely non-violent in approach. Gandhi wrote. Swaraj (self-rule) without Swadeshi (country made goods) is a lifeless corpse and if Swadeshi is the soul of Swaraj, Khadi is the essence of Swadeshi. Therefore Khadi became not only a symbol of revolution and resistance but part of an Indian identity. ( M.K. Gandhi ; Village Swaraj ; Pub. Navajan ; Ahmedabad; Page 3-14.)

#### **The Impact on Society**

It was at the time of the Nagpur session (1920) that the Indian National Congress decided to encourage "Khadi". The first Khadi Production Centre was established at Katiawad, Gujarat.



**Impact on Harijan Movement:**

The organizations for Harijan welfare were set up in many places of the state. The lower rungs of society were included in the programs and there was a wide participation in the Congress lead Movements. Between 1922 and 1925 national leaders like C.Rajagopalachari, C.R.Das, Lala Lajpat Rai, S.Srinivasa Iyengar, Pattabhi Seetharamiah, Jamnadas Mehta, Konda Venkatappiah and others toured all over Karnataka and kept the national spirit alive. The flame of freedom struggle was also kept alive by a host of Congressmen of Karnataka like N.S.Hardikar, Srinivas Rao Kaujalgi, Gangadharrao Deshpande, Kadapa Raghavendra Rao, R.R.Diwakar, Krishna Rao Mudvedkar and others. The Khadi Movement worked with the twin objectives of shaking the British economy on the one hand and boosting the Indian economy on the other. The movement, in the characteristic Gandhian mode, was completely non-violent in approach. The lower rungs of society were included in the programs and there was a wide participation in the Congress lead Movements. Between 1922 and 1925 national leaders like C.Rajagopalachari, C.R.Das, Lala Lajpat Rai, S.Srinivasa Iyengar, Pattabhi Seetharamiah, Jamnadas Mehta, Konda Venkatappiah and others toured all over Karnataka and kept the national spirit alive. Mahatma Gandhi used to refer to Khadi as "The livery of freedom". ( Kumarappa ,B. Gandhiji's Autobiography, Pub. Navajan , Ahmedabad Ch. XVI, Page 272-5.).

The leaders

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5. R.R.Diwakar,
6. Krishna Rao Mudvedkar and others.

The authorities in Princely state of Mysore understood the value of spinning and weaving Khadi in the scheme of rural development and often cooperated with the Congress workers in the extension of Khadi industries and other village industries sponsored by the Congress. The Diwan of Mysore, Albion Banerjee not only permitted the Department of Industries to send exhibits to the Congress exhibition at Belgaum in 1924, but also gave a donation for the expenses. It led to the Setting up of All India Spinners Association (AISA) / Akhil Bharateeya Charkha Sangha in 1935. Many small political events were inspired by this session.

All this helped Swarajists to come back to congress fold.

**Conclusion:**

Thus the visit of Mahatma Gandhi & his presiding of Congress All Indian Congress session of 1924 in Belgaum heralded as a enormous march towards promotion of the peasant consciousness. Even though there were some loopholes in the post Congress Session programs still there



was a expansion of the fortitude among people of this region who started participating in Congress lead Movements on a greater scale. . The Salt Satyagraha of Ankola, Sirsi , Siddapura & Mangalore were inspired by this session. There was an awareness towards mass involvement which precipitated huge association of Indian in the fight against colonialism. Thus Belgaum congress acted as a catalyst in firing the flames of Nationality in Princely Mysore which was hitherto not involved in any such political movements. There was an awakening towards unification of Karnataka as well.

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