



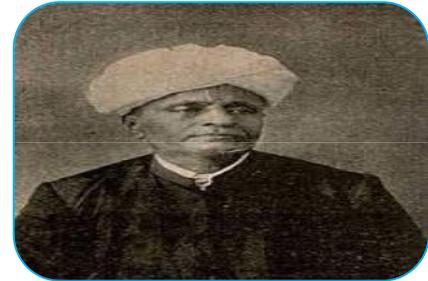
OPPOSITION OF KASTURIRANGA IYENGAR AND *THE HINDU* TO THE MADRAS CONGRESS SESSION OF 1908

J. Rajendran

**Ph. D. Part Time Research Scholar in History,
Department of History (Autonomous), Presidency College, Chennai.**

ABSTRACT:

The whole country knew that during 1908 the Madras Presidency was also in a state of turmoil with its government crackdown in full swing. The severity of the government's punishments of V.O. Chidambaram Pillai, Subrahmanya Siva and other patriots had undesirable results. It was mainly due to the prosecutions brought against these patriots for alleged sedition and the extraordinary sentences handed down on them that the Madras Mahajana Sabha decided to cancel the Madras Provincial Conference that year. Some moderate leaders of the Madras Presidency aspired to hold the Congress session at Madras while some others opposed it. At this juncture, the All India Congress Committee appealed V. Krishnaswamy Iyer to organize the Madras Congress Session of 1908. In this context, Kasturiranga Iyengar and his newspaper, *The Hindu* strongly criticized V. Krishnaswamy Iyer and his attempt to organize the Madras Congress Session of 1908. The domination of the Mylapore Group in the Madras Politics was a main reason for the opposition of Kasturiranga Iyengar and his Egmore Group.



KEY WORDS: Kasturiranga Iyengar, V. Krishnaswamy Iyer, Madras, *The Hindu*, C. Vijayaraghavachariar, T.M.Nair.

INTRODUCTION

The decision to annul the Madras Provincial Congress session caused much pain to many moderate leaders who stressed the great need at that time for the leaders of Indian thought and statesmanship to unite and deliberate on serious aspects of the political situation in the country. Mudholkar, for example, asked whether these conferences were held for fun or to discuss matters of great importance. Eventually he said he was there just a contingency in which he would treat with equanimity the Sabha's decision to leave the Provincial Conference and that would be if it had agreed to hold the Congress of 1908.¹ To add to the unhappiness caused by the many prosecutions and convictions, there was no symptom whatsoever of the much-discussed materialization of the Morley reforms. These had prompted the nationalists in the Madras Presidency to believe that this was an improper time to hold Congress. The fact that Morley had done nothing to stop Lawley's repressive policy had reinforced this sentiment. However, it would be absurd to deny that the opposition was primarily personal. The main target of the attack was Krishnaswamy Iyer. The latter demonstrated the virulence of the opposition to holding a Congress in Madras only the previous year, when he acceded to the request of the Bombay leaders to hold the 1907 session in Madras as Nagpur had withdrawn. Therefore, the proposal had to be discarded. If, despite this, Krishnaswamy Iyer accepted a similar

request shortly after all the fuss, that only indicates Krishnaswamy Iyer's unwavering confidence in Madras's ability to host Congress at all costs. Being a person who would work honestly and tirelessly and who possessed determination and organizational skills to a great extent, it was said that Krishnaswamy Iyer was able to do. If opponents, many of whom were seasoned politicians, had reservations about this great man's ability to run the show, they were wrong. The fact was that they were inflamed with anger and in their considered opinion, the moderates particularly Krishnaswamy Iyer and his minions in Madras, had aroused their anger. And therefore something must be done to thwart Krishnaswamy Iyer's attempt to hold the Congress in Madras.

There were strong protests from unexpected circles against the holding of the 1908 session in Madras. Serious differences had emerged between the proponents of political reform themselves. *The Hindu* had given itself wholeheartedly to the opposition movement. This shocked many National Congress leaders who had always admired its ability, knowledge, judgment and sobriety.² The paper strongly believed that when the country was still in an unsettled frame of mind and the reforms were still under consideration, the Congress should not be held that year and definitely not at Madras. It pointed out that many persons, whose names were found at the Reception Committee, did not belong to the Madras Congress Committee. It also made a blatant statement that congress committee members lacked the capacity, intellectual integrity and accurate discernment of men and things that were absolutely necessary to manage the work of Congress before and during the session.³ That sentiment was expressed by T.M. Nair in his letter to *The Hindu*, in which he wrote that Madras has no leaders who had appreciable control over the public, whose personality could be considered to exert restrictive influence in case of problems.⁴ This statement showed a deep distrust on Krishnaswamy Iyer. T.M.Nair made two more complaints. One was that good causes suffered in the Presidency owing to the absence of support they deserved at the hands of its popular leaders. The failure of the Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company at Tuticorin, the languor of the proposed National College of Coimbatore, the attitude of indifference expressed towards the proposal to establish educational institutions in the northern districts of the Presidency and the tepid support given to veteran publicist G. Subrahmania Iyer at the time of his trial, all of this was attributed to the indifferent attitude of influential political leaders. This accusation was well founded in all. The other charge was that the Presidency had systematically denied the opportunity to send a delegate to England to inform the British public about Indian affairs. He made no trivial remarks when he said that in England there were men of public spirit from every province of India except Madras. Although the claim was indisputable, it went against his own claim that Madras did not have a capable leader. But Nair's fear, as well as that of others, was dispelled by the spectacular success of the Congress of Madras under the leadership of Krishnaswamy Iyer. It proved to the hilt that there was no lack of intellectual, organizational and leadership qualities on the part of the leaders of the Madras Presidency.

Claiming that *The Hindu's* opposition was personal despicable. Srinivasa Sastri noted that he never thought that Kasturiranga Iyengar could go down to such a shallow depth.⁵ On another occasion he wrote that the young Madras had taken up arms against this Congress and its organizers. Everywhere there was nothing but abuse and lack of charity. It was mostly because of *The Hindu*.⁶ Anandacharlu also joined the ranks of those who deprecated the holding of the Congress in Madras. He was one of the signatories of the protest presented to the Provincial Congress Committee of Madras. In all, sixty-seven prominent city and mofussil representatives signed the protest that holding the Congress in Madras in December 1908 would be inappropriate and that, instead of serving the national cause, it would seriously hamper it. On 29th September 1908, the protest was published in all the Madras newspapers. Subsequently, the organizers of the Congress established a small subcommittee to send an appropriate response to the protest signatories.⁷ But it did not have an immediate effect as they did not give up so easily. For example, Krishnan Nair and his colleagues in Calicut, who were in communication with C. Vijayaraghavachariar and Kasturiranga Iyengar were firmly convinced that the Congress would not be held, under any circumstances, in Madras. They had a strong feeling that Tilak was not being treated properly in Surat.⁸ The accounts of mofussil opinion in the Madras Presidency on the prospects of the Madras Congress was also far from reassuring. Many had strong doubts that the

four Calcutta resolutions would be brought before the Subjects Committee of the Madras Congress. Indeed, the prevailing question in the minds of many congress leaders was whether the Madras session would respect the departure that Congress had made from the Banaras session. At Benaras in 1905, for the first time, the Congress introduced the new boycott weapon into its principles on the grounds that Bengal suffered from grave political injustice. The moderates' objection to the boycott programme was that it had become a 'bomb' culture.

Among other things, what worried many prominent men was that the Bengali youth base, which in previous years had flocked to a distant Congress to animate things, refrained from participating in the Madras Congress, which it judged with the anarchist trial, the arrest of Aurobindo and many other adverse events that had dampened their ardour. Many thought that most of them, having become aggressive, would look for an opportunity to show their contempt for moderates with detachment.⁹ There was general agreement among these men that Bengal had to be handled with care in view of the cruel misfortune it had endured.

The strong opposition to the holding of the Congress in Madras certainly did not bother the Provincial Congress Committee in organizing the Congress. This was possible mainly thanks to the help and collaboration continuously provided to an immeasurable extent by V.S. Srinivasa Sastri and his Servants of the Indian Society. The work of the Congress proceeded steadily and, in addition to the District Committees, formed in all parts of the Presidency, Taluk and Subdivision Committees were also established in some places.

During his tour of the province with Chintamani, Srinivasa Sastri discovered while in Salem that C. Rajagopalachari, then an emerging member of the bar association, had allied himself with C. Vijayaraghavachariar. The two main points that Salem supporters raised with the two visiting leaders, among many others, were: (1) abandon the idea of the convention, (be) to let them know the fate of the four resolutions which, it was feared, Congress might drop.

Srinivasa Sastri had prepared on the four resolutions examining the validity of the accusations made against the moderates, which had been defined as an 'illegal and illegitimate body'. Sastri had abundantly quoted passages from Macaulay's *History of England*, belonging to the period (1629-1640) in which England did not have a parliament and therefore a convention had to be established. This paper was printed in many magazines and the president of the Madras Congress relied on that paper generously in his speech.¹⁰

Since this type of activity of touring the province to promote Congress interests was not carried out in the other provinces, the executive committee decided on a bold plan to delegate the faithful among the senior leaders to go to other provinces to help with the work of the organizing committees at least in the most important venues and induce congressmen to participate in large numbers in the next session in Madras. Consequently, it was decided that Srinivasa Sastri would go to Bengal and Devadhar and Natesh Rao to Bombay, the central provinces and Berar.¹¹ To some extent, these measures by the organizers helped to eliminate the misconceptions of the objectors. Because there had been a gradual disappearance of the opposition with a sizeable number of objectors agreeing to drop their objections and work together to make the Madras session a success. Many districts, initially lukewarm about the proposal to form congress district committees, eventually established the committees and sent delegates to the Congress. Anandacharlu also withdrew his opposition and joined the Congress Committee, which gave it an accession of force. The reason he gave for his withdrawal was that he was unaware of one or two factors when he signed the protest. He did not specify those factors. Before his entering Congress Committee, Krishnaswamy Iyer along with Daji Abaji Khare, Joint Secretary of the Congress Committee and Samarth, Secretary of the Bombay Provincial Congress Committee, had an interview with Anandacharlu. Commenting on this interview with Krishnaswamy Iyer, *The Hindu* wrote concisely that it was sudden arrival, selected consultations and hasty departure.¹² Unfortunately, Anandacharlu died before this Congress took place.

Even in late October 1908, when the Madras Congress was a certainty, there were problems in some quarters. The Salem Congress Sabha, for example, issued an argumentative resolution of prodigious length predicting only misfortunes for the country 'if anything but a united Congress were to

be held'.¹³ The motive behind this move was obviously to create anti- sentiment against Madras Congress. *The Hindu* devoted a page to Congressl controversy that should have been closed.¹⁴ Wacha and Khare, General Secretary of Congress, telegraphed their refusal to submit the four Calcutta resolutions to the Subjects Committee, although the general feeling was that they should have been allowed to be submitted to the committee so that amendments could be proposed to them.¹⁵ At a private tea party at the home of P.R. Sundara Iyer, attended by some 40 prominent members of Congress, it was decided to oppose the boycott resolution of the four, failing in an attempt to limit it to Bengal and British goods. It was also decided that the constitution would not be presented to Congress for acceptance.¹⁶

However, long before December 1908, things cleared up and the opposition to holding the Congress in Madras subsided. A contributing factor to this was the publication, in November 1908, of Morley's long-awaited Dispatch of Reform, which alleviated an otherwise tense situation. But Congress was faced with another problem that arose when Gokhale, who attached the utmost importance to the 1908 Congress of Madras, urged the choice of Pherozeshah Mehta as president. He was so adamant on this point that he said Mehta must be forced to accept the presidenship under any circumstances. In one of his letters to Krishnaswamy Iyer, Gokhale wrote that it was of utmost importance that at the Congress of Madras, where a large number of serious constitutionalists were expected, the presidential chair should be occupied by the most eminent constitutionalist, Pherozeshah Mehta.¹⁷ This embarrassed even his closest associates. They knew this would cause a lot of misunderstanding as the non-election of Rash Behari Ghose, whose name had already been proposed, would further harm the already offended Bengalis.¹⁸ Making Pherozeshah Mehta president would create a storm not only in Bengal but elsewhere as well. Interested parties stressed that the number of men loyal to the Allahabad constitution was not large and that even the few, who were loyal, would denounce the Madras Committee and stay away from Congress if Ghose's appointment was shelved. His name had already been proposed by more than one and Ghose made no attempt to reject it. So ignore it be unfair and reckless. Ghose, being a prominent advocate of academic achievement and profound culture and a thorough constitutionalist, would deliver a speech that contains nothing of a questionable nature.¹⁹

From the fact that Ghose's election was approved, it was clear that Gokhale had subsequently abandoned his proposal. Finally, the session of the Congress was held in Madras from 28th to 30th December 1908. With very little time available, the Congress Committee was unable to organize an industrial exhibition together with the session of the Congress. Rash Behari Ghose was the president. It was considered the 23rd Congress. The chairman of the reception committee was K. Krishnaswamy Rao, who was the chairman of the Twelfth Madras Provincial Congress held at Ranipet. The General Secretaries were Wacha and D.A. Khare. VS Srinivasa Sastri was the captain of the Congress Corps and his lieutenant was Purushothama Iyer. The number of delegates attending the session was 562. Among the delegates from Madras was Ryrü Nambiar, L.A. Govindaraghava Iyer, V. Masilamani Pillai, A.S. Balasubrahmanya Iyer and Subba Rao. Although the number of delegates was small, the session was very lively and enthusiastic, with many congress veterans in attendance.

The pandal for Congress was purposively built at Elphinstone Grounds on Mount Road. Two triumphal arches were erected outside. The main entrance was flanked by the two artistic towers with turrets on each wing. The interior, completely covered in white, was tastefully decorated. Krishnaswamy Iyer was extraordinarily lucky to get help from the government himself. The Madras Government under Lawley gave him all the help he needed to build tents. All government stores were made available to Krishnaswamy Iyer.²⁰

To conclude, amidst strong opposition, the Madras Congress Session was held in 1908. In this context, the Mylapore and Egmore Groups took different stand. G.K. Gokhale and V.Krishnaswamy Iyer were in favour of the Congress session at Madras in 1908. The leaders who admired B.G. Tilak like Kasturiranga Iyengar and his newspaper strongly protested the session because of the prosecutions against the swadeshi leaders like V.O.Chidambaram and Subramania Siva. As the Congress was dominated by the Moderates, their decision had a final ruling. When, the opposition loosened its tone, the Moderates under the stalwarts of the Madras Congress like V.Krishnaswami Iyer and V.Srinivasa

Sastri organized the Session of 1908 successfully. The credit of the session went to V.Krishnaswami Iyer. Saroja Sundararajan, a renowned historian of the Nationalist Movement of Tamil Nadu called the Madras Congress as ' Krishnaswamy Iyer Congress'

END NOTES

1. Mudholkar to V.Krishnaswamy Iyer , 14 August 1908, Private Papers of V.Krishnaswamy Iyer
2. Mudholkar to V.Krishnaswamy Iyer, 8 October 1908., Private Papers of V.Krishnaswamy Iyer
3. *The Hindu*, 8 October 1908.
4. *Ibid*.
5. V.S. Srinivasa Sastri (V.S.S. Sastri) to Natesh Rao, 13 October 1908, Private Papers of V.Srinivasa Sastri.
6. V.S.S. Sastri to Baba Saheb, 22 December 1908, Private Papers of V.Srinivasa Sastri.
7. *The Hindu*, 30 September 1908.
8. C.Y. Chintamani to Krishnaswamy Iyer, 27 September 1908, Private Papers of Krishnaswamy Iyer.
9. *The Hindu*, 14 October 1908.
10. Sastri, Srinivasa, V., *Pherozeshah Metha*, Madras : MLJ Press, 1945, p. 118.
11. V.S.S. Sastri to Natesh Rao, 23 October 1908, Private Papers of V.Srinivasa Sastri.
12. *The Hindu*, 6 October 1908.
13. V.S.S. Sastri to Vamana Rao, 9 November 1908, Private Papers of V.Srinivasa Sastri.
14. *The Hindu*, 16 November 1908.
15. V.S.S. Sastri to Vamana Rao, 17 November 1908, Private Papers of V.Srinivasa Sastri.
16. *Ibid*.
17. *Pherozeshah Mehta*, *op. cit.*, p. 55.
18. C.Y. Chintamani to V.K. Iyer, 8 October 1908, Private Papers of V.Krishnaswamy Iyer
19. Mudholkar to V.K. Iyer, 14 October 1908, Private Papers of V.Krishnaswamy Iyer
20. Letter from Government of Madras, 8 October 1908.



J. Rajendran

Ph. D. Part Time Research Scholar in History, Department of History (Autonomous), Presidency College, Chennai.