CHAPTER IX
The Age of Mahatma Gandhi
D. P. SINHA

1. Emergence of Gandhi: A New Phase of Freedom Struggle

With the appearance of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi on Indian political scene a new phase began in India’s struggle for freedom. The National Movement as led by the early Indian National Congress was dominated by the Moderates. But the dominance of the Moderates was short-lived. The inadequacy of the Morley-Minto Reforms had demonstrated the inefficacy of the policy of ‘Mendicancy’. The great days of the Moderates were drawing to a close. The death of Pherozeshah Mehta in 1915 and of Gokhale in 1916 created a vacuum which could not be filled. Tilak was back in the political arena and a new force in the person of Mrs. Annie Besant caused considerable ripples on the almost placid surface of Indian politics. It was at this stage that Gandhi returned from South Africa (1915) with a new concept of political strategy which he had used with great effect there. The halo of glory acquired in South Africa ensured him a warm welcome and Gokhale immediately took a great liking for him.

Gandhi’s style of politics was quite different from that of the Moderates. Highly successful professionals with sound English education—many of them having been educated in England—and belonging to the affluent upper strata of society, the Moderates were deeply influenced by British political tradition from which they drew their inspiration. They were essentially an urban elite and they never made any attempt to reach out to the masses, the vast majority of whom lived in the rural areas. Their appeal was thus limited as was their ambition which was to establish a kind of junior partnership with the rulers. The politics they practised was of the drawing room type and they carefully avoided saying or doing anything which might offend the government.

Gandhi on the other hand practically by-passed the urban elite and established contact with the masses, particularly of the countryside. Himself a Barrister-at-Law with English training
he none the less drew inspiration from the traditions of his own country. He was also greatly influenced by Tolstoy and Thoreau while the Bhagawat Gita was his constant companion. Gandhi realised that the masses were as yet untouched by politics, their politics being confined to "bread and salt". So, "we must share their sorrows, understand their difficulties and anticipate their wants...with the pariahs we must be pariahs...we must identify ourselves with the villagers who toil under the sun...Then and not till then shall we truly represent the masses; and they will respond to every call".¹

Gandhi believed that the ideal of Swaraj was self-rule and not merely the end of foreign rule. This self-rule was to be achieved through passive resistance and soul force. Nothing worthwhile could be achieved thorough violence and end should not be used to justify the means, nor could morals be subordinated to politics. In contrast to the Moderate leaders Gandhi preached that the country and its leaders must go through suffering and sacrifice before freedom could be attained. He envisaged that "every village would be a republic or panchayat having full powers. Therefore every village has to be self-contained and capable of managing its own affairs even to the extent of defending itself against the whole world."² India was to be a federation of such villages. Stressing his point he observed: "you cannot build non-violence on factory civilization, but it can be built on self-sustained villages."

Actually conscious of the dire poverty of his countrymen Gandhi believed in Khadi as the only remedy. "To a people famishing and idle", he observed, "the only acceptable form in which God can dare appear is food as wages...Hunger is the argument that is driving India to the spinning wheel". "My work should be," he emphasized, "to organise the production of hand-spun cloth, and to find means for the disposal of the Khadi thus produced". He considered it "a sin to wear foreign garments" and wanted to consign them "to flames to purify myself and henceforth to rest content with the rough Khadi made by my neighbours."³

To one whose Utopia was a federation of village republics Western political institutions could have no attraction. He envisaged a system in which everyone is his own ruler. "He rules himself in such a manner that he is never a hindrance to
The Santals fought with more fire in their hearts than in their weapons.
August 1856.

Indian cavalry attacking a British Infantry Squad in the Battle of Kanpur.
15 July, 1857.
The Way of Freedom lies through the gallows. Execution of participants in the Great Revolt of 1857-59.

Vasudeo Balvant Phadke, 1879

Aurobindo Ghose, 1883
THE LION'S BURDEN.

[Under the leadership and guidance of Sir Phurushotham Mehta, the Twentieth Session of the Indian National Congress in Bombay bids fair to become a grand success.]

[Hindi Punch, Dec., 1905]

The Lion's Burden, Hindi Punch, 1905
Map illustrating the Partition of Bengal in 1905 by Curzon.

Proclamation.

Bande Mataram

Whereas the circumstances have been so framed as to effectuate the Partition of Bengal in spite of the universal protest of the Indian people, we here in pledge and proclaim that we as a people shall do everything in our power to counteract the evil effects of the dismemberment of our Province and to maintain the integrity of our race. To help us God.

Dated the First day of November in the year Nineteen Hundred and Five.

Pledge "to maintain the integrity of our race."
Madame Cama with India's National Flag at the Stuttgart Conference, 1907

Khudiram Bose whose execution on 11 August 1908 opened up a portentous phase in the nation's struggle for liberation
Why should patriots, whose motive is to render service to the country, be dubbed anarchists? The band does not appear to be mean-minded, but far-sighted in their aims and unbending in their determination. They have placed before them the noblest ideal of independence and they did what they deemed to be their duty to achieve it! It is clear that though their brains were on fire, their hearts were strong and holy. Their souls were not stained with guilt of the ordinary murderers or dacoits.

Swarajya, May 16, 1908
Chittaranjan Das, Bar-at-Law to the defence of the undertrials in the Alipore Case.
SACRED AND INSPIRING MEMORY OF

MADAN LAL DHINGRA
WHO DIED FOR HIS COUNTRY
AUGUST 17TH 1909

I AM PROUD TO
TO LAY DOWN MY
LIFE FOR
MY COUNTRY.

I admit that the other day I attacked the British Parliament because of the inhuman treatment and deportations of patriotic Indian youths.

In this attempt I have consulted none but my own conscience, I have conspired with none but my own duty.

I believe that a nation held down by foreign bayonets is in a perpetual state of war. Since open battle is rendered impossible to a disarmed race I attacked by surprise, since guns were denied to me I drew forth my pistol and fired.

As a Hindoo I feel that wrong to my country is an injury to God. Her cause is the cause of Shri Ram. Her service is the service of Shri Krishna. Poor in wealth and intellect a country, myself has nothing else to offer to the Mother but his own life and so I have sacrificed the same on her altar.

The only lesson required in India at present is to learn how to die and the only way to teach it is by dying ourselves. Therefore I die and glory in my Martyrdom.

This war will continue between India and England so long as Hindoo and English races last (if this present unnatural relation does not cease).

My only prayer to God is that I may be reborn in the same Mother and I may rejoin in the same sacred Cause till the Cause is successful and She stands free for the good of Humanity and in the glory of God.

MADAN LAL DHINGRA

Statement of Madan Lal Dhingra, 17 August, 1909.
Sewa Singh of the Ghade party: on the eve of his execution described the rope about to be put round his neck as 'a rosary of God's name' (San Francisco Chronicle, 12 January, 1915)

Bagha Jatin, fatally wounded at the Chas-khand armed encounter (9 September 1915) died on the next day to live in the fond memory of his country-men.
Mahendra Pratap who headed the Provisional Free Government of India in Kabul on 4 December 1915.

"BLACK SUNDAY"

GREAT POPULAR DEMONSTRATION AGAINST THE BLACK ACT.

Bombay Chronicle, 4 April 1919

The following is the Programme of the demonstrations which have been arranged for SUNDAY NEXT:

SUNDAY 8TH APRIL 1919:

SEA BATH 7 a.m. - 8 a.m. CHOWPATTY

PROCESSION 8.15 - 10 a.m.:

Chowpatty Sea Face - Girgaum Back Road
Sandhurst Bridge - C P Tank Road
Sandhurst Road - Madhav Baug.

3.30 - LADIES' MEETING, CHINA BAUG.

Mrs. Jayakar presiding
Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, Mahatma Gandhi; Speaker

8.30 - MASS MEETING, FRENCH BRIDGE.

If you value your freedom you will join.

Peoples' protest against the Black Act, Bombay Chronicle, 4 April 1919.
Gandhi at the Ahmedabad session of the Congress in December 1921 when Non-Cooperation Movement was at its height.

Ashfaqullah one of the main actors in the Kakori drama smilingly courted death on 19 December, 1927.
The Congress Session of 1928 held in Calcutta saw the rift between Gandhi and Subhas Chandra.
Title page of 'Benti', the fearless organ of youthful militant nationalists.

Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose as Supreme Commander of the I.N.A.

Gandhi picks up the forbidden Salt,
6, April 1930
The Valiant Trio carried the battle to the citadel of power, 8 December, 1930.
Bhagat Singh of the Hindusthan Socialist Republican Party sacrificed his life at the gallows on 23 March 1931.

Chandra Sekhar Azad, a hero of hundred fights who died with 5 bullets extracted from his body, 27 February 1931.

Hem Chandra Ghosh (Barda) under whom youthful revolutionaries opened a renewed offensive on several fronts with spectacular success in the thirties.

Satyaranjan Bakshi, the revolutionary wizard, was a trusted lieutenant of Barda Hemchandra Ghosh and a counsel and associate of Subhas Chandra.
Pritilata Waddedar died at her own hands after a bold raid on the European Club, Pahartali in the wake of the Chittagong Rising, 24 September 1932.

Rashbehari Bose hands over to Netaji the leadership of the I. N. A., 4 July 1943.
his neighbours. In the ideal State, therefore, there is no political power because there is no State. But the ideal is never fully realized in life...Hence that government is the best government which governs the least."4

Before entering politics, Gandhi, following Gokhale's advice toured the country extensively to get acquainted with the actual state of affairs. In India it was a period of rapid changes. The pious declaration of war aims by the allies had aroused great expectations. The Extremists had been taken back into the Congress. In 1916 the Congress and the Muslim League had made a pact for common action and this Lucknow Pact paved the way for a scheme of reform sponsored jointly by the League and the Congress. It accepted the communal electorate laying down the percentage of seats for the Muslims in the legislatures. With the communal hurdle out of the way the freedom movement was ready for a great move forward. It had already become active with the foundation of the Home Rule League by Mrs. Annie Basant who with her Irish background and the resources of the Theosophical Society at her disposal inaugurated a movement on the Irish model. With her deep love for Indian culture and her indomitable energy she threw herself into the movement for achieving self-government for India within the Empire. Branches of her organization were established all over India. Tilak also entered the field with his own Home Rule Movement but his activities were mainly confined to Maharashtra and the Central Provinces. Politics of a new type thus started.

The British Government realized that some constitutional advance was inevitable. When the war took a turn for the worse, an announcement was made on 20 August, 1917 that British policy aimed at the "progressive realization of responsible government in India as an integral part of the British Empire". Although hedged in with conditions, this indicated a complete change of British policy and Montagu, the Secretary of State, himself came to India to study the situation and make necessary recommendations. But events in Europe were moving faster. The Liberal Revolution of March 1917 which toppled the centuries-old Czarist autocracy in Russia and the subsequent Bolshevik Revolution of November had aroused new hopes among the dispossessed, the down-trodden and the unprivileged.
Gandhi’s entry into Indian politics was slow and by stages. His first essay of any note was in Champaran where the ryots were being compelled by Indigo planters to plant 3/20th of their best lands with indigo. This together with the arbitrary fixation of prices, illegal exactions and extortions by the planters and their employees had created an explosive situation. Undeterred by external order and even arrest Gandhi carried on his investigation and movement until the government appointed a committee of enquiry with Gandhi as one of its members. Its recommendations were mainly given effect to and the worst evils of Indigo cultivation which had been the bane of India’s rural life were greatly mitigated. Gandhi’s achievement at Champaran brought him in the frontline of Indian leaders. The first serious blow had been struck at elitist politics and the first step had been taken to bring the rural masses within the orbit of national struggle.

Gandhi’s next clash with the government was at Kheda in Gujarat which was considered politically a backward area. In 1918 failure of crop, difficulty in the movement of necessary goods and rising prices had compelled the peasants to demand suspension of land revenue assessment for the year. When petitions and prayers failed Gandhi advised the patidars to resort to Satyagraha. The initial enthusiasm of the movement soon began to ebb due to government repression, some of the leaders even being sent to jail. In the words of Gandhi, “the main thing was to rid the agriculturists of their fear by making them realize that the officials were not the masters but the servants of the people”. Gandhi was looking for some graceful way of terminating the struggle when it was announced that if the well-to-do patidars paid up their dues the poorer ones would be granted remission.

A recent writer observes that Gandhi’s movement “showed its true colour as a very powerful weapon because it was so simple, and so versatile. Kaira (or Kheda) hammered home the lesson of Champaran that Satyagraha could be used in virtually any situation or conflict, by literate and illiterate. It was a weapon for all seasons, and in Gandhi’s hands directed by his personal ideology, it gave him the edge over conventional poli-
ticians with their techniques of petitions, public speeches and debates, which were more suitable for the educated."5

Gandhi's next movement was at Ahmedabad in support of textile mill workers. The war boom had led to a phenomenal expansion of India's textile industry and workers had to be recruited form all over the country. To retain them in the wake of an epidemic of plague the mill-owners had offered them a plague bonus. When this was discontinued trouble started and Gandhi advised resort to non-violent strike. To revive the flagging zeal of the striking workers Gandhi went on a fast and this has its effect. The mill-owners came to a settlement with the workers on mutually acceptable terms. This was the first occasion when Gandhi used fasting as a weapon to achieve his objects.

As yet Gandhi was working on the periphery of Indian politics but he had become a Mahatma and Champaran, Kheda and Ahmedabad were dress-rehearsals for his entry into all-India politics. It was the Rowlatt Act which authorized the Government to try seditious cases in camera and without a jury, to demand security from suspects, to fix their places of residence, to require abstention from certain activities and to arrest and imprison persons in non-penal custody that brought the Mahatma into the centre of national politics.

Passed with the help of the official majority the Act demonstrated the hollowness of the government's good intentions and also the hopeless inadequacy of the type of politics that the Moderates indulged in; and after their protests had failed they settled down once again to cooperate with the Government to get a share of the loaves and fishes that the reforms seemed to offer.

Gandhi, however, decided that Satyagraha was the only remedy left. Since he had no organization of his own he had to rely mainly on the Home Rulers. He established a Satyagraha Sabha for disobeying the repressive laws. Many of the old established leaders like D. E. Wacha, Sarendranath Banerjea, Tej Bahadur Sapru, Srinivasa Shastri and others looked askance and not a few were opposed.

Gandhi's Satyagaraha started with a nation-wide hartal on 6 April, 1918. The next step was civil disobedience which led to violence in some places when the government restricted the area of Gandhi's activities. The storm centre was the Punjab
which had been greatly agitated over some of the activities of the Lt. Governor Sir Michael O'Dwyer. The Khilafat propaganda had made a deep impression and the last straw was provided by the arrest of Dr. Satya Pal and Saifuddin Kitchlew. The climax came when General Dwyer delighted himself by slaughtering several hundred innocent people and seriously wounding over a thousand at Jallianwala Bagh by ordering his troops to open fire without warning on an unarmed crowd which had assembled to hold a peaceful protest meeting. As if this was not enough, the government ordered public flogging, made people to crawl where two British women had been assaulted and imposed many other humiliating punishments. To crown them all, the Punjab was placed under martial law. The eruption of violence led Gandhi to suspend civil disobedience movement but the tragedy of Jallianwala Bagh continued to rankle in Indian mind while government repression continued unabated.

The Government ultimately appointed a commission of enquiry under Lord Hunter but the Congress boycotted it appointing a committee of its own with Gandhi as one of its members. The tragedy was too gruesome to be explained away by the Hunter Committee but it tried to play down the inhuman conduct of Dwyer and his troops. Dwyer was, nevertheless, relieved of his command but in England he was hailed as a hero who had saved the empire and was presented with a purse of £26,000 collected through public subscription. The Congress Committee, however, succeeded in acquainting the public with the horrors perpetrated.

Meanwhile the proposals embodied in the Montagu-Chelmsford Report had caused a sharp division in Congress ranks. A special session of the Congress held at Calcutta in 1918 declared the proposals "disappointing and unsatisfactory" and demanded Provincial Autonomy with some responsibility at the centre and fiscal independence. The Moderates realizing that they would be in a minority did not attend the session but held one of their own later in the year and next year established the National Liberal Federation. They had ceased to count for much in Indian politics and would have been out of depth in the politics of the mass age. Nevertheless, they were men of undoubted patriotism and comprised some of the best political
brains of the country. But they were prisoners of their own limitations which they failed to surmount.

Shortly after, at Amritsar Congress in 1919 Gandhi against the opposition of men like C.R. Das, Hasrat Mohani and others carried a resolution with the help of Jinnah, Malaviya and Sitaramayya thanking Montagu for the reforms and promising to work it although they were disappointing. Tilak, still one of the dominant figures in Indian politics, took a middle path offering responsive cooperation in working what was useful in the reforms and rejecting what was useless and harmful.

3. A New Approach in Politics, New Consciousness Among the Common Men

But forces other than political were at work making the scene more complex. Rapid industrial development which led to the growth of a considerable working class and the rising cost of living were contributing to a new approach to politics and a new consciousness among the common men. The establishment of the Communist International in 1919 had its impact on the Indian revolutionaries many of whom were active abroad. The All-India Trade Union Congress first met at Bombay being inaugurated by Swami Shraddhananda and presided over by Lala Lajpat Rai. A new type of political action by a new leadership was the need of the time.

The country was at the cross-roads when the Khilafat movement assumed importance. The Sultan of Turkey by virtue of his being the ruler of the largest Muslim state was looked upon as the Khalifah by Muslims all over the world and his defeat in the War and the treatment he was receiving at the hands of the Allies were causing considerable concern and resentment among Indian Muslims and there was a movement for the preservation of his temporal authority which was gravely threatened. Muslim politics in India was also for some time past undergoing a change. With the expansion of Western education and the growth of a professional class among them the leadership was gradually passing out of the hands of the feudal and conservative elements and this had been demonstrated at the time of the Lucknow Pact. The new class of Muslim politicians were less obsessed with communal rancour and less prepared
to toe the government line. At first the Khilafat movement was under the control of moderate Muslims but Gandhi’s alliance with Abdul Bari of Farangi Mahal and the establishment of the All-India Khilafat Conference gave the movement a new turn. The adherence of the Ali brothers Maulana Shaukat Ali and Maulana Mohammad Ali to the cause as two of Gandhi’s most trusted lieutenants changed the character of the movement.

Although certain sections of the Muslims were reluctant to associate the Hindus with their movement the responsible section realized the value of Gandhi’s help particularly as Hindu support would strengthen their cause. The Satyagraha Sabha and the Home Rule organizations cooperated with the Khilafat Day. It was also decided to boycott the victory celebrations. In a meeting on 23 November, 1919 Gandhi for the first time envisaged the total withdrawal of cooperation from the government. But he was opposed to boycott of British goods which he felt meant economic injury and as such was opposed to the principles of Satyagraha. The Muslim merchants of Bombay were also not enamoured of boycott as it would ruin their business.

In November 1919 Gandhi was elected President of the Khilafat Conference. On 7 March, 1920 he produced his plan of action. 19 March was to be observed as Khilafat Day with a hartal and if this failed, non-cooperation would be resorted to. But there was to be no violence and no boycott of British goods and no mixing up of other issues with Khilafat. Although not enamoured of non-violence the Muslim leaders accepted the Gandhian creed in order to enlist Hindu support. But many Hindu leaders, particularly Srinivasa Shastri were apprehensive of Gandhi’s alliance with the Muslims. But Gandhi, however, knew what he was doing. To him this was “an opportunity of uniting Hindus and Mohammedans as would not arise in a hundred years”. The move was apparently a success as Akram Khan, Fazlul Haq and Abul Kalam Azad went touring Bengal preaching Hindu-Muslim unity. The same—thing was done by the Ulemas and Maulanas of Deoband School all over northern India. But many of the Muslim leaders felt that if they resigned their assignments they would be filled up by the Hindus who would buy up the properties which might be sold as a result of the no-tax campaign.
Among the Congress leaders Sapru, Annie Besant, Motilal Nehru and Malaviya considered non-cooperation neither necessary nor practicable. But Gandhi was the decisive force. To the Muslims he was the only guarantee of Hindu support. To the Congress Muslim support could be obtained only through him. The dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire by the post-war settlement had destroyed whatever influence the moderate Muslims had. The Congress also was a different body. The Moderates with their number greatly reduced had refused to attend the special session of the Congress held at Bombay in 1918 and had subsequently formed their own organization, the National Liberal Federation with Surendranath Banerjea as President. It was a moribund organization from the very start. The Moderates had failed to see the writing on the wall. Their defection was more than counter-balanced by the adherence of the masses to the Gandhi-dominated Congress.

4. The First Phase of Mass Movement—Non-cooperation

The twin issues of the Punjab and Khilafat provided Gandhi with the platform he needed for joint action. The movement started on 1 August, 1920. On that very day Tilak died depriving the country of one of its noblest leaders and one of the toughest fighters for freedom. But the old guard was still strong. Pandit Motilal Nehru was opposed to the boycott of election to the Council. He wanted to contest the election and then refuse to sit in the Council. Annie Besant was for cooperation with the government in everything constructive and to use “every scrap of power that the Reform Act gives” to hasten Home Rule. Gandhi’s chief opposition came from the elitist politicians of the Presidencies who were out of depth in the politics of the masses and felt their leadership threatened by Gandhi.

In the special session of the Congress held at Calcutta in September, 1920 under the presidency of Lajpat Rai, Gandhi on the suggestion of Vijayaraghavachariar, C. R. Das and Motilal Nehru agreed to incorporate the demand for Swaraj and include the boycott of foreign goods in the Resolution. The session was a triumph for Gandhi in spite of the opposition of Jinnah, Annie Besant and Bipin Chandra Pal. His chief acquisition was
the adherence of Motilal Nehru. Some modern writers have tried to ascribe this and the subsequent adherence of C. R. Das to their concern for maintaining their position. But this is a gross injustice to those who gave up their highly lucrative career at the Bar, gave away what they had earned and even donated their palatial residences to the nation, sacrificed the cosiness of a highly Western style of life and voluntarily accepted the hardship and privations even of prison life for their dedication to the freedom of their mother country. Those leaders who accepted Gandhi's leadership had the vision to see that if freedom was to be achieved it could be done only if the masses could be involved in the struggle and if freedom was to mean anything it should be for the poor and the down-trodden as well—to whom our leaders had so far paid hardly any attention at all. They also realised that in the age of election, the elective process was sure to expand in future, the participation of the common man was essential and to win their cooperation a charismatic leader like Gandhi was indispensable. As a very recent writer has put it so succinctly, "The Mahatma understood the country as few individuals ever have, which explains why he was able to dominate it so completely. India essentially lives in the villages and in its religions. Hence to grapple with it one had to talk in an idiom that the vast majority understood".

The Government moved very cautiously, as Chelmsford wrote to Montagu, "it seems to me, we have to sit still and take care that we do not make any mistake through which we should drive the moderates away from us and into the arms of the extremists". The government was also averse to act against Gandhi "except in direst extremity" as he was looked upon by Hindus and Mohammedans as a "semi-divine person".

The Nagpur Congress (1920) started with a sharp tussle regarding the Congress creed. Jinnah, Pal and Malaviya wanted to retain British connection while the Extremists led by the Ali brothers demanded complete independence. "At last a compromise was reached and the creed read, "The object of the Indian National Congress is the attainment of Swarajya by the people of India by all legitimate and peaceful means". It was also decided to organize down to village level a band of national workers and establish a Tilak Memorial Swaraj Fund to finance
the new organization. C.R. Das who had held out against Gandhi now came to terms with him. The constitution of the Congress was also changed. It was to have a Working Committee of 15 in place of a loose and ineffective All-India Congress Committee whose strength was fixed at 350. There were to be Provincial Committees going down to the village level and constituted on linguistic basis. On Gandhi's insistence the number of delegates was fixed in proportion to the population of the Province concerned. This helped to reduce the undue importance of the Presidencies and gave other areas their due. The Congress thus became a well-knit, mass-based democratic organization with a new vitality.

Das himself moved the non-cooperation resolution which was to embrace resignation from councils, renunciation of practice by lawyers, surrender of titles, national education and boycott of foreign goods. The intensity of the non-cooperation movement took the government by surprise. In some places local grievances mingled up with the movement, e.g., in U.P. the Kishan Sabha started a movement against the exploitation of the landlords. In the Punjab the Sikhs began agitation for the control and reform of their shrines. The Government decided to wait upon events. But the hartal organized by the Congress volunteers in Bombay on the occasion of the visit of the Prince of Wales led to the banning of volunteer organization. Apprehending similar incident during the Prince's visit to Calcutta, the Viceroy Lord Reading offered to lift the ban on the volunteers, release all those imprisoned and to call a Round Table Conference to discuss the future constitution of India if the Congress agreed to call off the movement immediately. But Gandhi insisted that the Ali brothers who were in jail on a charge of treason should be released and the date of the conference be fixed. So negotiations fell through. C.R. Das was furious with Gandhi. The deadline of Swaraj within a year was drawing to a close and the end of the struggle was not in sight. So the acceptance of the offer would not only have been a face saving affair but it would also have boosted the morale of the people and brought down the prestige of the Government. Nehru thought that the Government's real object was somehow to tide over the period of the Prince's visit. The experience of the Round Table Conference held subsequently confirms
this. Also any discussion to be worthwhile needed the presence of Mohammed Ali.

Gandhi himself was reluctant to go further than non-co-operation. But his Khilafat allies were insistant and on 5 November, 1921 the Congress Working Committee decided on civil disobedience and Bardoli was selected as the place to start the movement. Funds for the movements began to pour in from merchants and mill-owners. But the rapid spread of non-co-operation movement and the mingling of other issues like local grievances lessened the control of central leadership and opened up possibilities of violence. The Government, although it spared Gandhi, clamped his followers in jail in large numbers. Even leaders like C. R. Das were not spared. Violence broke out soon. In Malabar the Moplahs, the poor Mohammedan cultivators, rose against the government and plundered and murdered landlords who were mostly Hindus. This gave the Government the opportunity to round up the leaders like C. R. Das, the Nehrus, Lajpat Rai and others. In February 1922 the massacre of 22 policemen at Chauri Chaura made Gandhi to call off the movement. This emboldened the government to arrest Gandhi and to sentence him to six years’ imprisonment. According to Jawaharlal Nehru, “The suspension of civil resistance...was certainly not due to Chauri Chaura alone...That was only the last straw...At that time the movement was going to pieces. All organization and discipline was disappearing; almost all the good men were in prison.” Again, there is little doubt that if the movement had continued there would have been growing sporadic violence in many places. This would have been crushed by the government in a bloody manner and a reign of terror established which would have thoroughly demoralised the people.”

The government seems to have apprehended something much worse. A confidential Government Note of May, 1921 says that Gandhi’s movement was meant to “save India from Bolshevism—and even a worse fate.” This perhaps partly explains their hesitancy to take any firm action against Gandhi at the early stage.

It would be a mistake to look upon the failure of the movement as a complete defeat for Gandhi’s policy. It was not. For the first time in history the whole of India had been galvanized
into action and the message of the Congress had reached even the remotest villages. Indian nationalism had come of age and the ground had been prepared and the stage made ready for the renewal of the struggle when the need would come. Gandhi had raised nationalism to the pedestal of a national religion.

5. Enter the Swarajists

However, the suspension of the movement created resentment and despair among the Congress leaders. The enthusiasm of the people could not be allowed to subside and there being no other alternative in sight, C. R. Das, Motilal Nehru, V. J. Patel, Ajmal Khan and others wanted to contest the forthcoming elections and carry the struggle inside the legislatures. Their move was defeated at the Gaya Congress in 1922 but Motilal Nehru announced the formation of the Swaraj Party while Das resigned as President of the Congress. However, the special session at Delhi in 1923 permitted the Congressmen to participate at the election but the Congress as an organization was not to be a party to it.

A reaction to Gandhian policy also took place in Bombay under S. A. Dange, the working class leader, but a similar attempt in Bengal by the Workers and Peasants Party could not make much headway due to the absence of any influential indigenous capitalist class and because the leadership was in petty bourgeois hands.

The Indian political scene was becoming increasingly dark. Communalism was once again raising its ugly head. There were serious riots in Multan and Amritsar. The Punjab ministry, particularly Fazli Hussain, was openly communal. It seems Fazli Hussain was aiming at winning for the Muslims a dominant position in north-western India. The Unionist Party of Punjabi Muslim landed interest with a sprinkling of Hindus and Sikhs of similar persuasion was his tool. The activities of Hindu money-lenders provided them with a readily available weapon to excite the Muslim masses particularly the impoverished and indebted peasantry. Sectarian movements like Tanzeem and Taghlib only increased the tension. The Congress attempt to reach out to the masses in the rural areas unnerved the elitist Muslim politicians particularly of communal hue, who, to pre-
serve their importance, did not hesitate to excite and exploit communal passion which became their stock in trade in politics.

The conservative Muslims formed the All-India Muslim Conference in 1918. They repudiated colonial self-government. But this body soon faded out. Hindu reaction to this rising tide of communalism was represented by the Hindu Mahasabha. But in the Congress camp there were leaders far-sighted enough to see the need of communal harmony. Das tried his best to forge a unity with the Muslim leaders and his pact with them showed his political acumen although he had to concede to them their pound of flesh. In fact, throughout the freedom struggle the Muslim leaders made their cooperation conditional on the amount of concession that the Congress was prepared to make. This, however, could not be said of the nationalist Muslims whose patriotism was never in question. Das's pact with the Muslims, known as the Bengal Pact, conceded to them representation in Council according to their number through separate electorates. In local self-government bodies the proportion was to be 60:40 in each district according to the numerical strength of the two communities. In the services the Muslims were to have 55 p.c. of those recruited and until this quota was complete they were to have 85 p.c. of the jobs. Music was to be prohibited before mosques while Muslim right to slaughter cows was to be preserved. It was an one-sided concession at the expense of the Hindus, but for the success of the Swarajist policy this was necessary.

Alliance with the Muslims was necessary if the Swarajists were to play any effective role in the legislatures. Although from 1919 to 1924 the Muslim League was in reality an adjunct of the Congress it held a separate meeting in the latter year when they demanded "full-fledged Dominion responsible government" of the parliamentary type subject to six basic principles four of which dealt with minority safeguards. It also demanded a federation of existing provinces with full and complete provincial autonomy, the functions of the central government being confined to matters of general and common concern only. There was to be no territorial redistribution which might affect the Muslim majority in the Punjab, Bengal and the North-Western Provinces.

The Swarajists did remarkably well in the elections and in
Bengal and the C. P. almost brought the administration to a standstill. In 1924 the Central Assembly demanded the convening of a Round Table Conference to draw up a constitution for India as a self-governing Dominion. The Government appointed a committee under Sir Alexander Muddiman to try out the possibilities of rule making to improve the administration. The European members reported that the constitution had worked well and suggested only some minor changes in the rules and procedure. The minority Indian members dissented.

Meanwhile Gandhi had been released but he kept himself studiously aloof from politics, devoting himself to the propagation of Khadi for which he organized the All-India Spinners' Association. This Association spread its tentacles all over the country carrying the message of the Congress to the people which proved to be very helpful when the next phase of the struggle came.

The Government's repressive policy had all the time continued unabated. Large number of Congressmen had been arrested under Regulation III of 1918 and the Bengal Government was given sweeping powers by ordinance. As all these failed to dampen the national feeling the Government opened negotiations with Das. But the sudden death of Das in 1925 brought the negotiations to an end. Although the mantle of leadership fell on Motilal Nehru the Swarajists were greatly weakened. The success of Swarajist policy depended on close cooperation with the Muslims and in this Bengal was the key area. But bereft of Das's leadership there was no one who could hold together the disparate forces and communalism was already rampant. To consolidate their position the Muslim leaders exploited religious passion which they identified with economic grievances to wean away the Muslim masses from any possible support for the Congress. In Bengal most of the landlords were Hindus while a large section of the tenants were Muslims. Similarly in the Punjab and Sind the bankers and richer classes were Hindus and debtors were mostly Muslim agriculturists. Hence communal passions could easily be aroused. The Bengal Pact of Das and similar one in the U. P. under Motilal's leadership were put under severe strain. They had been unpopular with certain section of Hindus who loathed the idea of enlisting Muslim support at the expenses of the interests of their own
community and did not hesitate to exploit Hindu feelings particularly during Municipal elections. Jawaharlal Nehru put the position very succinctly. "It is nevertheless extraordinary", he writes, "how the bourgeois classes, both among the Hindus and the Muslims, succeeded, in the sacred name of religion, in getting a measure of mass sympathy and support for programmes and demands which had absolutely nothing to do with the masses, or even the lower middle class". But there was a difference between the two. "Muslim communal leaders said the most amazing things and seemed to care not at all for Indian nationalism and Indian freedom," while "Hindu communal leaders, though always speaking apparently in the name of nationalism, had little to do with it in practice, and incapable of any real action, sought to humble themselves before the Government and did that too in vain." The Congress Muslim rapprochement, always tenuous, came to an end with the abolition of the Khalifate by Kemal and the All-India Muslim League was revived which became increasingly sectarian and reactionary.

In 1925 M. R. Jayakar and N. C. Kelkar formed the Responsiveist Party which advocated only discriminate opposition to government. It was opposed to the pro-Muslim attitude of the Congress and the Swarajists on the ground that by cooperating with the government the Muslims were consolidating their position while Congress policy was proving detrimental to Hindu interests. Soon after Lajpat Rai and Madan Mohan Malaviya formed the Independent Party. In the election of 1926 the Nationalists who contested in the name of the Congress improved their position but the Muslim seats went mostly to communalists. In Bengal the Congress was further weakened by internal dissension. The future Netaji was a strong contender for the mantle of Das under whom he had proved his mettle. A young man who had abandoned the glamour of Indian Civil Service and had voluntarily undergone the hardships of prison life, he had become the hero of the younger generation and was to play an important part in the achievement of India's freedom.

The Indian politics was in doldrums when it was activated by the sudden announcement of Baldwin's Conservative Government with the arch conservative Lord Birkenhead as Secretary of State for India that the Statutory Commission of enquiry
would be appointed two years ahead of the scheduled time. This step was due to the apprehension that if the Labour Party won the next General Election they would make far-reaching concession to India. But the all British membership of the Commission was resented by all shades of political opinion who decided to boycott it.

Jinnah and Mohammed Ali, once more back in the mainstream of Indian politics, wanted a joint session of the Congress and the League. But this fell through due to the opposition of the Muslim leaders of the Punjab, who were already preparing to break away from All-India politics and establish their hold over the North-Western region of the country. This is quite clear from what Sir Malcolm Hailey wrote to Sir Arthur Hirtzel, Permanent Secretary at the India Office. According to him they wanted "a Federation of their own" embracing "the Punjab, part of the U.P., the North-West Frontier, Baluchistan and Sind" and ultimately including Afghanistan and even Persia.9

However, once the placid surface of Indian politics was disturbed events moved swiftly. At the annual session at Madras in 1927 the Congress adopted a resolution, though vague, and subsequently differently interpreted, declaring "Complete Independence" as the goal of India. A much more constructive step was the decision to convene an All Parties Conference for drawing up a constitution acceptable to all the parties. The Independence Resolution was the logical outcome of the growth of youth power within Congress which was further demonstrated by the appointment of Subhas Chandra Bose, Jawaharlal Nehru and Suhail Qureishi as the General Secretaries.

6. Towards Renewed Struggle: First Phase of the Civil Disobedience Movement

The period also saw the rapid growth of labour movement and large scale labour unrest to counter which the Government instituted the Meerut Conspiracy Case. But unfortunately our leaders failed to capitalize on the working class upsurge. However, a dress-rehearsal for the coming struggle was taking place at Bardoli where the peasants were putting up a heroic non-violent no-tax campaign under the leadership of Vallabhbhai Patel. A student organisation, the Students Federation, also came into existence. There were strikes of railway workers at
Kharagpur, at Tata Iron and Steel Works, East India Railway workshop at Liluah, Oil and Petroleum works at Budge Budge and in jute mills.

The All-Parties Conference under the chairmanship of Motilal Nehru in its report recommended a constitution on the model of the Self-governing Dominions. The constitution was to contain a Declaration of Rights ensuring fullest liberty of conscience and religion. North-West Frontier Province was to become a full-fledged province. Sind was to be separated from Bombay and a separate Kannada-speaking province was to be created as well. The Committee was against separate communal electorates as this violated the essential principle of responsible government and prevented better understanding between different communities. Instead, they suggested joint electorates with reservation of seats for the Muslims who, however, were not to have any seats reserved where they were in a majority. They could also contest general seats as well but were to have no weightage. The report also broke new ground by bringing the Indian States within the purview of Indian politics. They could join the Indian Federation with all their rights and privileges guaranteed but would have to modify their system of government and administration. Already in 1927 the States Peoples Conference had been formed with the object of attaining responsible government in the States.

The recommendation ran into difficulty almost from the beginning. Jawaharlal was not willing to support the Dominion Status formula. The Congress Working Committee generally approved the Report but declared its firm adherence to Complete Independence. The two wings of the Muslim League joined together to oppose the report. The All-India Muslim Conference met on 1 January, 1929 under the chairmanship of the Agha Khan and demanded a federal system with complete autonomy and residuary power for the constituent units, separate electorates, weightage where in a minority and due share in the central and provincial cabinets, as well as in the Civil Service and all statutory bodies. They further demanded protection and promotion of Muslim education, language, religious and charitable institutions. No constitution was to be acceptable unless it was in conformity with these principles. Jinnah still a nationalist now joined the communalists and came forward with his 14 points.
The Sikhs also put forward extreme demands.

Subhas Chandra Bose, the most practical of Indian politicians, thought the whole exercise a mistake. "The party that fights", he wrote, "should not...look to any other party to produce the constitution for which it alone is fighting." Nevertheless, the Nehru Report was a fitting reply to Birkenhead's taunt that Indian Nationalism was unconstructive, "it also embodied the frankest attempt yet made by Indians to face squarely the problems created by communalism."

Nationalism feeds on grievances and there was no dearth of them. The boycott of the all-white Simon Commission had provided an issue for demonstrations all over India and it was during one such demonstration that Lajpat Rai had been beaten up by the police which led to his death. The non-implementation of the Skeen Committee recommendations regarding Indianization of the army and the fixing of Sterling-Rupee ratio at 1 Sh. 6d. to the rupee instead of 1 Sh. 4d. as demanded by the Congress added to the grievances.

At the Calcutta session of the Congress in 1928 there was a tussle between the left-wingers who stood for Complete Independence and those who were prepared to settle for Dominion Status. Through Gandhi's personal intervention it was resolved that if the British Government accepted the Nehru constitution by 31 December, 1929 the Congress would be satisfied. Otherwise a non-violent non-cooperation movement will be resorted to. Gandhi was now once again in the forefront of Indian politics. He not only wanted to prevent any split in Congress ranks but also to curb the excessive zeal of the young left-wingers whose potential he realized which he was eager to harness for the national struggle.

The year 1929 was a momentous one. At Lahore Police Inspector Saunders, believed to be responsible for the fatal attack on Lajpat Rai, was murdered. Bhagat Singh and Batu Keswar Dutta threw bombs in the Assembly when in session. The government rounded up the suspects and instituted the Lahore Conspiracy Case.

The year also witnessed unprecedented awakening among the students. Student and Youth organizations spread all over the country culminating at the end of the year in the All-India Congress of Students at Lahore with Madan Mohan Malaviya as
president. Student agitation was difficult to contain but to prevent the working class getting out of hand and going left the British Government appointed the Whitley Commission on Labour. But with their memory of past British policy the Labour leaders were not taken in and most of them boycotted the Commission. The Government then to deal with labour unrest arrested 33 prominent labour leaders charging them with conspiracy to deprive the King-Emperor of the sovereignty of India and of establishing a Soviet type of Government with the help of the Communist International. This was the notorious Meerut Conspiracy Case.

The advent of the Labour Party to power in England indicated a slight change in British policy. With their authorization the Viceroy Lord Irwin made an announcement on 31 October, 1929 that "...the natural issue of India's constitutional progress...is the attainment of Dominion Status" and that a Round Table Conference would be convened after the publication of the Simon Commission Report. A conference of Indian leaders welcomed the declaration and expressed the hope that the Round Table Conference would "not discuss when Dominion Status is to be established but to frame a scheme of Dominion constitution for India". It was also declared that the success of the conference would depend on the predominant representation of the Congress. This created furore in the Conservative camp and Ramsay Macdonald, under pressure, asked the Viceroy to issue a statement that British policy towards India remained unchanged. Meanwhile time was running out. Negotiations between Gandhi and the Viceroy drew a blank. In this atmosphere the fateful session of the Congress met at Lahore when on the last day of the year at the stroke of mid-night the flag of India's Independence was unfurled on the bank of the Ravi. The die had been cast and the Congress had reached the point of no return.

How Independence would be achieved remained anybody's guess, but Gandhi who once again dominated the Congress was thinking of civil disobedience which alone, he thought, "could save the country from impending lawlessness and secret crime which will not listen to speeches, resolutions or conferences, but believe only in direct action". The first step was the observance of 26 January, 1930 as the Independence Day when the Con-
gress Pledge was taken all over the country with unprecedented enthusiasm. Realising that the suspension of the movement in 1922 had created misgivings Gandhi declared, "civil disobedience once begun this time cannot be stopped and must not be stopped so long there is a single civil resister left free or alive".

7. Dandi March and Aftermath

Gandhi to whom the Congress had delegated sole authority to plan and lead the struggle decided to start in a humble way by violating the Salt Law from which the movement was to gather momentum. He commenced his historic march to Dandi with 78 Ashramites after serving due notice on the Government which did not take the matter seriously while the Anglo-Indian Press looked upon it as a joke. But the country watched with tense expectation as Gandhi trudged his way slowly to the sea and the political temper of the country rose. When on 6 April after a purificatory bath Gandhi collected the first pinch of illegal salt, the country, as if by magic, spontaneously joined the movement. The other items of the programme were also taken up. Large meetings in defiance of Government orders were held where extracts from banned literature were read; educational institutions were picketed as also excise shops, foreign goods, particularly British textiles were boycotted. One of the striking features of the movement was the participation of women, even of most orthodox and aristocratic families. Congress members resigned from the legislatures and later even the Independent Party members under Malaviya left the Assembly. Government-confferred titles and honours were given up and many lawyers gave up their practice to join the national movement.

The Government, taken aback by the intensity of the movement, reacted swiftly and sharply. Within a few weeks Gandhi, the Nehrus and other prominent leaders were thrown into prison; mass arrests of Congressmen began and very soon, according to official figures, 60,000 were put behind the prison bars. The actual figures were much higher. Police brutalities became a regular feature. They had no compunction to use their lathis indiscriminately on men, women and even children whose only crime was their love for the mother country. In Bengal the
worst sufferers were the people of Midnapore who in despair took to terrorism in reprisal. In Gujarat the peasants who had started a no-tax campaign had to flee from home in many areas to escape from police brutality. The U.P. also had a similar fate. Other parts of India also did not escape lightly.

In Peshawar to disperse a peaceful procession armoured cars were used. The casualties inflicted infuriated the people to suppress whom troops opened fire, but the crowd stood their ground. The only redeeming feature of this barbaric incident was the refusal of Gharwali soldiers to fire on unarmed men for which they received heavy sentences. At the other extreme of the country at Chittagong a band of revolutionaries led by Surya Sen raided the Armoury and carried on guerilla warfare until most of them were killed.

Attempts were soon made to find out the basis of a compromise between the Congress and the Government. The first one taken on the initiative of an English journalist George Slocumbe by Sapru and Jayakar drew a blank due to the intransigence of the Viceroy. With all leaders in prison the Government was in no mood to relent. The publication of the Simon Commission Report on 20 June, 1930 further stiffened the Government's attitude.

The Report caused widespread disappointment among Indians. The Government of India while generally approving the provincial part of the Report suggested a kind of dualism at the centre whereby the Governor-General would be allowed to appoint both officials and party leaders to his council. A convention was to be established that except with regard to certain subjects like Defence, External Affairs, etc., the Government would be normally responsive to the wishes of the non-official members. Gradually there would be fewer officials and more party leaders in his Council, the latter being ultimately responsible to the legislature. Fazli Hussain, now a member of the Executive Council, tried to persuade the Government to recommend Muslim majority in the Punjab Council and also to reduce the functions of the Central Government by transferring most of them to the provinces. But in view of the likelihood of most of the provinces falling under Congress control the Government was not prepared to take the risk.

The Simon Commission never made any attempt to assess
fully the meaning of Indian nationalism and the forces which sustained it. It never mentioned the words—Dominion Status. It was in this atmosphere that the First Round Table Conference met in London on 12 November, 1930. There were 89 members, 16 representing the British Political Parties, 57 from British India hand picked by the Viceroy and 16 from the States. Congress, the only party that mattered, remained unrepresented. Federation of India was generally accepted even by the Princes. Mohammed Ali accepted majority rule at the centre. The idea of federation was a clever move planned beforehand to introduce reactionary elements to counter nationalist forces. The Princes were agreeable because they needed Government support to protect their interests in the face of growing popular demands. There were plenty of platitudes and the Conference ended without achieving any thing. But at the closing speech the Prime Minister announced that responsible government at the centre would be given if federation and safeguards were accepted. Subhas Chandra Bose pertinently wrote, “Liberal politicians never stopped to inquire what would remain of responsibility after safeguards and federation had been conceded.” To make matters worse the anti-nationalist Muslim members declared that they would accept responsible government only if the communal demands were decided to their satisfaction. Nehru was bitter, “It became clearer to us than it had been before how, under the deceptive cover of nationalism, conflicting economic interests were at work, and how those with vested interests were trying to preserve them for future in the name of this very nationalism...They wanted the British to remain in India as a deciding factor, to preserve the existing social structure and the existing vested interests”.

But the Government had realised that without the participation of the Congress no conference would succeed. Moreover, the situation in India was far from satisfactory. No-tax campaigns in Bombay Presidency and the U.P., resurgence of terrorism and the sullen attitude of the frontier tribes boded evil for the future. Irwin was a man of sympathy and understanding and after the conclusion of the Conference released the leaders. Negotiations for a compromise between the Congress and the Government started with Sapru and Jayakar once again acting as mediators. Motilal was averse to any settlement but
he was a dying man, his health having been completely shattered by the hardships of prison life.

However, after prolonged negotiations the Gandhi-Irwin Pact was signed on 4 March, 1931 by the terms of which the Congress was to suspend the Civil Disobedience Movement, participate in the next Round Table Conference and was not to press for enquiry into police excesses. The Government in return was to release all Congressmen who had not been convicted for violent crimes, to permit picketing of shops selling foreign cloth, liquor and opium, to return confiscated property which had not yet been sold. The Government also agreed to permit people living near the sea coast to manufacture salt and withdraw the ordinances.

Although the Pact was resented by the younger generation, the older Congressmen were already showing signs of tiredness. Even Jawaharlal felt “It was not an easy matter for any of us to send our comrades back to gaol, or to be instrumental in keeping many thousands there.” Subhas, however, felt, “With better bargaining... one could have extracted more from the Government, because they were really anxious for a settlement... The Delhi Pact was a great help to the Government. It gave them time to inquire more deeply into the tactics of the Congress and thereafter to perfect their machinery for dealing with that body in future.”

Although a moral booster the Pact was an empty victory. Government officials continued their repression with police excesses and even Calcutta’s Mayor, Subhas Chandra Bose was sentenced to six months’ imprisonment, for leading a procession.

The Karachi Congress in 1931 met under the shadow of the executions of Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru which Gandhi’s best efforts failed to prevent. This was a pointer to the increasingly hardening attitude of the Government. In contrast the softening attitude of the Congress was demonstrated by the acceptance of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact, although the goal of Purna Swaraj was reiterated. But the Congress broke new grounds by adopting a resolution on Fundamental Rights and Economic policy which laid down in clear terms its political, social and economic programmes. The Congress had awakened the masses and their interests and well-being were to be protected and promoted.
The Working Committee made a mistake in nominating Gandhi as its sole representative to the Round Table Conference. In the words of Bosc, who saw more clearly than others, "with all kinds of non-descricts, funkeys and self-appointed leaders arrayed against him like a solid phalanx, he would be at a great disadvantage. Moreover, he would have nobody at his side to back him up in the fight that he would have with reactionary Moslem leaders". Nehru, however, thought otherwise. To him the centre of political gravity was in India and whatever happened here was bound to have repercussions in London. The situation in India was critical and Congress could not spare their leaders. The Working Committee had little faith in the outcome of the Conference. It was, however, decided that if by any chance there was initial agreement on fundamentals the members would immediately proceed to London.\(^{12}\)

Although Lord Irwin was genuinely anxious for a peaceful settlement of India's constitutional problem,\(^{13}\) sinister forces were at work to undermine it. These forces were encouraged by the impending departure of the Viceroy, whose successor Lord Willingdon was known to be a tough person with no sympathy for Indian aspirations.\(^{14}\) With his arrival the officials paid scant regard to the terms of the Pact. Peasants had no end of difficulty in getting back their confiscated lands particularly in Gujarat. In Bengal imprisonment without trial continued on the plea of the existence of revolutionary movement. The situation became so tense that Gandhi's participation in the Round Table Conference was for sometime in doubt. But the difficulty was somehow overcome through pressure put on the Viceroy by the Home Government.

The Conference met on 8 September, 1932. By this time the English background had completely changed. The Labour Government ill at ease in the absence of a clear majority had given place to a Conservative dominated National Government with Ramsay Macdonald as its nominal Prime Minister. It was, therefore, quite obvious that nothing much could be expected from the Conference. To make the situation worse the economic depression had hit Britain particularly hard and her textile industry withering under the impact of swadeshi was not likely to make them friendly to India. On the other hand, the Statute of Westminster passed the year before had greatly aroused
Indian expectations.

The British Government had no intention of appreciably loosening its hold on India and Sir Samuel Hoare, the Secretary of State for India, told Gandhi as much. But Gandhi had not given up hope and he was not in an uncompromising mood. In fact he was prepared to go a long way. In his very first speech he said "Time was when I prided myself on being called a British subject. I have ceased for many years to call myself a British subject; I would rather be called a rebel than a subject. But I have now aspired—and I still aspire to be a citizen, not in the Empire, but in a Commonwealth, in a partnership if possible, if God wills it, an indissoluble partnership but not a partnership superimposed upon one nation by another."

The British policy was to get the Conference bogged down to minor issues which would create controversy among the Indian delegates, among whom there were plenty of persons only too willing to play Britain's imperial game. Gradually Gandhi began to see through the game. To make matters impossible for him the Government summoned the Minorities Committee thus by-passing the main issue for which the Conference had been convened. Many of the communal demands put forward were a bar to freedom and democracy. Even then Gandhi was prepared to accept all of them if the Muslims joined him on the issue of independence. But the offer was spurned thus demonstrating the true role of the so-called delegates. Gandhi also tried to get the Minorities Committee adjourned but to no effect. In a bitter mood he announced the failure of his endeavour: "It is with deep sorrow and deeper humiliation that I have to announce the failure on my part to secure an agreed solution of the communal problem...Causes of failure were inherent in the composition of the Indian delegation. We are almost all not elected representatives of the parties or groups we are presumed to represent—we are here by nomination of the Government. Nor are those whose presence was absolutely necessary for an agreed solution to be found here."

While the Conference was going on the Government of India was making preparations for the struggle when Gandhi would return empty-handed. Government's attitude was further stiffened by individual cases of murder in Bengal such as that of Colonel Simpson, Inspector-General of Prisons in Calcutta
Secretariat, of Peddie the District Magistrate of Midnapore. These were reprisals for the horrible atrocities of the police. In Hijli Detention Camp—actually a concentration camp—the police beat up the prisoners and fired indiscriminately killing two and seriously injuring many. In Chittagong in retaliation for the murder of a police officer hooligans were let loose. In Dacca the police resorted to indescribable atrocities and indiscriminate arrests after an unsuccessful attempt on the life of the District Magistrate. The Government was repeating the Black and Tan method. The ordinary laws of the land were by-passed and the government ruled by ordinances.

In the N.W.F. Province the Khudai Khidmatgars, better known as the Red Shirts, were declared an illegal organization although they had carried on their activities in a peaceful manner. Their leader Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan, a staunch Gandhite and known as Frontier Gandhi and his brother Dr. Khan Shahib were arrested with other leaders and large number of followers, and troops were sent to terrorise people even in remote villages. In the U. P. the no-tax campaign had been suspended in terms of the Delhi Pact but as the peasants were not yet in a position to pay, the Provincial Congress tried to negotiate with the Government, but the latter demanded immediate payment which resulted in a resumption of no-tax campaign, The Government issued an Ordinance to suppress the movement and Nehru was arrested with Sherwani.

Gandhi on his return was still in a conciliatory mood and wired to the Viceroy seeking an interview to sort out matters. But the latter was in no mood to oblige him. The Working Committee still offered cooperation if the Viceroy reconsidered his decision, “granted adequate relief... in respect of the Ordinances and its recent acts” and if “a free scope is left to the Congress in any future negotiations to prosecute the Congress claim for Complete Independence, and administration of the country is carried with popular representatives pending the attainment of such Independence”. In the absence of a satisfactory response the Congress would take it that the Government regarded the Delhi Pact as a nullity and call upon the people to resume Civil Disobedience. Gandhi still hoping for conciliation simultaneously telegraphed to the Viceroy to grant him an interview without preconditions offering to postpone the
operation of the resolution and even hoped that it might be given up. But Willingdon was adamant. The Government wanted an excuse for a showdown for which it had been preparing using the truce as a breather. The Pact had never been accepted by the Government in good faith and officials had felt humiliated. The main object of the Government in concluding the Pact had been to lend credibility and respectability to the Conference and to put Gandhi in rather difficult position and discredit him. This Machiavellian policy had succeeded.

The Government was fully prepared to meet the situation but the Congress was not. The absence of Gandhi in England had been a major handicap and a feeling of complacency seemed to have taken hold of the Congress which had taken the Pact as a major achievement and had hoped that the Government would be in a conciliatory mood. But why Gandhi, a master strategist and a formidable tactician, hustled into the renewal of the struggle seems difficult to explain, particularly when on previous occasions he had carefully planned the campaign and chosen his own ground to commence it. It may be that during his absence the younger leaders always eager for firm action and radical in their views had gained the upper hand and Gandhi wanted to restrain their over-exuberance by going some way with them and his participation was essential if the non-violent character of the movement was to be assured. In Bengal, always in the forefront of national struggle, the Provincial Congress had already urged the revival of the Civil Disobedience Movement.

8. The Second Civil Disobedience Movement

Nevertheless, the movement started spontaneously and in the first two months not less than 33,000 courted imprisonment. Taken aback by the intensity of the struggle the Government resorted to the use of force. Other repressive measures well thought out beforehand were applied. Congress was declared an illegal body; its funds and offices were seized; meetings and processions were prohibited; nationalist literature was banned; properties were confiscated for non-payment of taxes and revenue, nationalist press was gagged and closing of shops during strikes was made punishable. According to government figures
66,646 Congressmen were put into prison by mid-April, although according to Madan Mohan Malaviya, then President of the Congress, the number exceeded 80,000. Whipping of political prisoners was resorted to in Karachi and Haripur jails and in Rajshahi they were put in iron chains. Firing on demonstrations was not infrequent, and on Government's own admission there were 17 such cases in Bengal, 7 in the U. P., 3 in Bihar, and 1 each in Madras and the North-West Frontier Province. In Bombay firing claimed 34 lives while 91 were injured.

Repression and police excesses horrified even leaders of moderate persuasion. Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru felt frustrated at the thought that the bitterness thus engendered would destroy all possibilities of launching the All-India Federation, and since a settlement with the Congress would have to be made the process should be started early. But the Government was adamant. Srinivasa Shastri also graphically described to the British Prime Minister the horrors perpetrated by the police under Ordnance Raj. But the local officials on whom the Government relied for information played them down. The Government hoped that the greater the frustration generated by continuing agitation the more would be the number of collaborators with whose help the reforms could be given a solid start.

But the delay in the coming of reforms did seriously worry the Viceroy Lord Willingdon who feared that this would alienate the allies of the British Government. Against the wishes of the Secretary of State Sir Samuel Hoare, he insisted that Provincial Autonomy should come first and Federation could wait, otherwise the position of the Congress would be strengthened and All-India politicians would cast in their lot with that body.

In the midst of all these Gandhi started his fast unto death in jail on 20 September, 1932 in protest against Ramsay Macdonald's Communal Award which provided for separate electorates for Depressed Classes in addition to their eligibility to contest General seats, which were meant for Hindus. Macdonald, however, announced that he would accept any compromise that might be arrived at between the communities concerned before the introduction of the India Bill. After intense activity among Indian leaders a compromise formula was arrived at by which the Depressed Classes were to have seats reserved for them in the Provincial legislatures on the basis of common
electorates. At first there was a great deal of jubilation because the Mahatma's life had been saved and also because the disintegration of the Hindu community for political purposes had been averted. But when the first flush of enthusiasm was over and the full implications of the Agreement realised, the enthusiasm greatly abated. The Poona Pact as it came to be known had given the Depressed Classes 148 seats in place of 71 given by the Award. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar who had raised the cry for separate electorates for his community at the Round Table Conference had now driven a hard bargain at the expense of the caste Hindus mainly in Bengal, who also got a raw deal from the Award. Against the opposition of Sir Samuel Hoare, the British Government on the insistence of the Viceroy who was under pressure from Fazli Hussain, gave a larger proportion of seats to the Muslims of Bengal although the Governor of Bengal, Sir John Anderson had recommended otherwise.

One important outcome of the fast was the nation-wide concern for the removal of untouchability. The attempt, however, to permit temple entry by all castes through legislation failed due to governmental opposition.

Having entrapped the Congress and outwitted Gandhi at the Second Round Table Conference the Government was in no mood to have a third Round Table Conference, and formed a Consultative Committee instead to keep in close touch with Indian political leaders. But some of the most prominent members resigned from it to pressurise the Government. Ultimately, a small Conference of 46 members met on 17 September, 1932. None of the major Princes was there. The Congress already a banned body was conspicuous by absence. Even the British Labour Party refused to participate. By this time the Indian States had lost interest in Federation and were clearly marking time.

The Government's decision was announced in the White Paper of March 1933. The scantiness of the reforms proposed and the policy of repression followed made the proposals unacceptable to all nationally minded Indians. According to Congress estimate about 1,20,000 men, women and children had been clamped into prison during the 15 months of the movement and although the government had expected to crush it within 6 weeks it was still going strong. But the end came
suddenly and unexpectedly. Always unpredictable to foes and followers alike Gandhi, in prison, suddenly decided to go on a three weeks' fast to bring about a change of heart among his countrymen about the condition of the untouchables. The Government, took this opportunity to release him and Gandhi suspended the movement temporarily and appealed for the repeal of the ordinances and the release of civil disobedience prisoners. But the Government, now in full control of the situation, was in no mood to oblige him. How different the situation was from 1930! Grave doubts about Gandhi's policy were voiced by leaders like V. J. Patel and Subhas Chandra Bose both of whom were in Europe on health ground. Some leaders in India even advocated returning to Swarajist policy. However, at a conference of important Congressmen at Poona it was decided that Gandhi should seek another interview with the Viceroy to sort out differences and if this failed individual civil disobedience would be undertaken. As was to be expected the Viceroy refused to see Gandhi and when the latter with a few followers started civil disobedience they found themselves in prison. This time Gandhi was denied those facilities which he had been allowed in prison on previous occasions. So he again threatened to go on hunger strike and was released. Then in an inexplicable move, on Gandhi's insistence, M. S. Ancy, the Acting President of the Congress issued an order dissolving the organization.

The civil disobedience was dead as Dodo and the Congress appeared to be down and out. At this juncture Bidhan Chandra Roy and M.A. Ansari called a conference of Congressmen at Delhi where it was decided to revive the Swarajya Party. In a subsequent conference at Ranchi Gandhi supported this move. In the All-India Congress Committee meeting at Patna later in the year Gandhi sponsored the idea of Congressmen entering the legislatures and it was decided to set up a Parliamentary Board which would make a separate Swarajya Party unnecessary. The Committee further decided to call off the civil disobedience movement. The Government responded by lifting the ban on most Congress organizations.

Gandhi's third movement also was an apparent failure and Willingdon on his return to England after his Viceroyalty boasted that the Congress had been successfully destroyed. How
hollow the claim was demonstrated in the general election held under the new reforms and in the immediately succeeding years—the crucial 40's of the present century—which sounded the death-knell of the British Empire in India.
CHAPTER X
THE REVOLUTIONARY ACTIVITIES
Second Phase
(1920s and 1930s)
SAILEN NIYOGI

1. A dire lesson for ‘Seditious Indians’

The 1920s opened with an atmosphere surcharged with sorrow and anger at the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre which occurred on 13 April, 1919. Michael O’Dwyer, Governor of Punjab had yet to overcome the nightmarish experience of the Ghadr Party activities during the war years. To this was added his chagrin at the current agitation by the people of the Punjab against the repressive Rowlatt Act, which trampled under feet the accepted principle of the Rule of Law. He was bent on teaching the “seditious Indians” a dire (Dwyer?) lesson.

According to a calculated plan General Dwyer, co-author of the massacre, ordered his soldiers to open fire on unarmed, defenceless crowd of men, women and children trapped inside the Bagh. They did not stop till their last round of ammunition was spent. As a result thousands lay dead, wounded or mutilated. Not content with that, like a champion ring-master with the whip in hand, O’Dwyer treated the people as a pack of circus animals and forced them to crawl through the city streets and salute any and every army officer passing by or undergo other acts of morbide torture.

Such black deeds of British rulers India could not forget or forgive. To escape from immediate wrath and resentment of Indians, Michael O’Dwyer fled to the safe sanctuary of his own country. As if to spite India a section of the public in England showered on O’Dwyer praises and a purse of twenty-six thousand pounds for having saved the empire by his action. What however was legitimately due to him from the Indian side O’Dwyer received at the hands of Saheed Udham Singh when on 13 March, 1940 at a packed meeting at the Caxton Hall in London Udham’s roaring pistol killed O’Dwyer. Udham Singh was hanged in Pentoville Prison in England on 12 June, 1940. This robust remonstrance against British aggression in India focussed world attention on India’s national aspirations and stirred international conscience even in the midst of overshadowing events
of World War II.

A wave of horror lashed the country as the knowledge of the Punjab happenings spread. The anti-British feeling among the people ran high. Poet Rabindranath Tagore renounced his knighthood in protest and declared:

The time has come when badges of honour make our shame glaring in their incongruous context of humiliation, and I, for my part, wish to stand shorn of all special distinctions by the side of my countrymen who, for their so called insignificance, are liable to suffer degradation not fit for human beings.

So universal was the resentment that the agitation against the Rowlatt Act drew Hindus and Muslims together. In the wake of it a new stream, known as the Khilafat Agitation, entered the nationalist movement. The politically conscious Muslims were aggrieved at the treatment meted out by Britain and her allies to the Ottoman Empire (Turkey). The Sultan of Turkey was regarded as the Caliph or the religious head of the Muslims all over the world and any dishonour to him was a sacrilege. The Khilafat Committee under brothers Shaukat Ali and Mohammad Ali launched a non-cooperation movement on 31 August, 1920. Gandhiji was the first to join it. But it was a marriage of convenience and of little consequence in the long run. There was hardly any common ground between the Khilafat, born of Pan Islamic dream, and the Congress, steeped in nationalist aspirations. The Khilafat bubble burst when Mustafa Kemal in November 1922 deprived the Sultan of his political powers, abolished the Caliphate, and declared Turkey a secular state.

The Turkish Revolution in another way profoundly influenced the Indian political scene. Mustafa Kemal (later called Ataturk) became an idol of the Indian freedom fighters inasmuch as he successfully resisted on the one hand sinister design of the allied powers to effect an arbitrary dismemberment of his country and on the other deposed the worthless Sultan to create a new Turkey of nationalists' dream.

Another great impetus to the national movement was given by the Russian Revolution on 7 November, 1917 when the mighty, despotic Czarist Government tumbled down before the power of the people. The Bolshevik Party led by V.I. Lenin
declared the formation of the first socialist state in the history of the world—the Soviet Union.

As a reinforcement to these stimulating events came the erosion of the white man’s prestige. During the war both sides carried on intense propaganda against each other exposing the opponent’s uncivilized colonial record. A climate was created very much favourable to the resurgence of nationalism in India.

2. *Resurgent Indian Nationalism*

A rather early response of the impact of these international happenings was witnessed in Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh. The Rumpa Revolt (1922-24) was similar to the Tai-Ping Rebellion of 1850s in China where a “population of paupers” provided the raw materials for rebellion. Sitaram Raju, an ascetic like his Chinese counterpart Hung Hisach’uan, believed that he was obeying the mandate of heaven. He collected a number of followers from the illiterate peasant families of the village and started an anti-British struggle. His arsenal consisted of outmoded guns, spears, bows and arrows. But with this he routed many times well-armed government forces. The rebels gathered their food and provisions by ransacking the government grain stores and snatching government supplies but refrained from harassing the people. Raju was finally shot dead and the movement crushed.

A wind of change was blowing in the country. The extremist of yesterday often tends to become the moderate of today. The leadership of Surendranath Banerjea, the uncrowned monarch of Indian nationalism, had been replaced by Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das. A rising barrister and a powerful orator, Chittaranjan first came into limelight when he accepted the brief to defend Sri Aurobindo in the Alipore Bomb Case (1908). Distinguished lawyers of those days would not touch political cases—Tilak could not get a lawyer to plead his case, either for love or for money. To whatever work he applied his hand Deshbandhu gave himself wholly to the cause, every particle of himself. His act of renunciation in giving up his lucrative legal practice at the call of Gandhiji and his final gift of all his properties, without reservation of a single acre for himself, to the nation made him a historic figure of eternal radiance. Even his worthy consort, Basanti Devi, who was a mother
figure of Bengal, gave herself whole-heartedly to the service of the country. Deshbandhu’s indictment of British rule in India produced his classic expression:

I do not think the God of humanity was crucified only once. Tyrants and oppressors have crucified humanity again and again.

With Gandhiji at the helm the Indian National Congress changed its basic character. It became an organisation of the masses for the masses, a fighting body in place of a club of arm-chair politicians. The revolutionaries, marking time in the wings, though differing from Gandhiji in his approach to the freedom struggle, had every respect for his dynamism and power of rousing the masses. Gandhiji on the eve of his Non-cooperation Movement addressed a special message to the revolutionary fraternity:

Had India sword, I would have asked her to draw it. But she had no sword—I ask her to adopt non-violent non-cooperation. I am out to destroy this Satanic Government. Please give me a chance.

The revolutionaries could not but respond and decided to withhold violent activities for one year. During this period they would make the most of their opportunity of mass contact by joining the Congress.

Non-violence never made a dent in the thinking process of Bengal, though she sent more people to jail during the Non-cooperation Movement than probably the rest of India put together. Fed by the pent up fury of the Indian people, the movement attained the dimensions of an upheaval. But the anticlimax was reached when Gandhiji called off the movement because the agitated demonstrators set a police chouki at Chauri Chaura on flame provoked by the brutalities committed by the constables. A pall of gloom and despondency descended on the country.

Though the Non-cooperation Movement launched by Gandhiji could not bring “Swaraj within a year”, the national awakening had been strengthened. The urge for freedom had now reached the remotest corners of the land. The two dreaded symbols of British imperialism in India were the red turban of the police and the red brick wall of the prisons. The defiant non-cooperation agitation which let loose police “Zoolum” on
mass of non-violent people and led to clapping of thousands of demonstrators inside prisons busted this fear psychosis. The brute strength of British power in India no longer frightened them. They had gained self-confidence and self-esteem which no defeats or retreats could shake.

The Swarajya Party of C. R. Das and Motilal Nehru was born as an answer to the need of the hour. The programme of the party was to enter the councils formed under the Government of India Act, 1919 not to work it but to wreck it from within. The Congress was divided between no-changers and pro-changers. The revolutionaries supported the Swarajya Party.

The Swarajists by winning the elections put up a vigorous propaganda show on the floors of the Central Assembly and provincial Councils. But with all their political acumen and manoeuvrings they failed to change the policies of the authoritative Government of India. Their work also failed to bring the masses or the middle class into active politics. The death of Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das in June 1925 was a grievous blow for the party and its importance faded away. The no-changers also failed to check the spreading political rot.

The Swarajists, however, succeeded in capturing power in the Calcutta Corporation which was made a bastion of nationalism under the leadership of Chittaranjan Das assisted by his first lieutenant Subhas Chandra Bose. Many revolutionaries were given berths here enabling them to serve in various capacities, principally as teachers in the Corporation primary schools. These schools in course of time became nurseries of budding nationalists. By passing the resolutions openly expressing sorrow and appreciation at the martyrdom of Jatin Das and Dinesh Gupta, the Calcutta Corporation turned a new leaf appearing as an “abettor of terrorism”, thereby causing much uneasiness to the rulers.

3. Calmness proves deceptive

The deceptive calmness in Bengal was rudely disturbed by the shooting down of Ernest Day, a European merchant, by Gopi Mohan Saha in Calcutta on 12 January, 1924. It was a case of mistaken identity, the actual target was the notorious Police
Commissioner of Calcutta, Sir Charles Tegart. The assassination of a European caused the Government ominous foreboding. Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das on the other hand extolled the bravery of Gopi Mohan Saha, whose execution took place in the Presidency Jail on 1 March, 1924, and got a resolution passed at the Bengal Provincial Conference at Sirajganj in praise of him. This resolution was interpreted by Gandhiji as a vote in favour of the cult of violence. He came out with an open denunciation and ultimately got another resolution passed at an All India get-together of the Congress modifying it. This intolerance on the part of Gandhiji, who did not cease admiring De Valera and Kemal Pasha, was of a piece hard to explain. The revolutionaries for their part from the very beginning were ready to accept Gandhiji and regard his activities as supplemental to their own.

Trailing the murder of Ernest Day the Police in Bengal discovered a well-equipped and well-stocked bomb factory at Dakshineswar, a suburb of Calcutta, and rounded up a good many young men for trial in the Dakshineswar Bomb Case including Harinarain Chandra. The offshoot of the Dakshineswar Bomb Case was the murder of Rai Bahadur Bhupendra Chatterjee, Special Superintendent, I.B., C.I.D., inside the Alipore Central Jail on 28 May, 1926. He was hit on the head by an iron rod. Ananta Hari Mitra and Promode Ranjan Chaudhuri, under-trial prisoners in the Bomb Case, were sent for trial and hanged on 28 September, 1926 in the Alipore Central Jail. This showed to what extent the revolutionaries were prepared to go. These early outbursts were, however, only a tip of the iceberg.

"The child that was to kill King Kangsha was secretly thriving at Gokul". So was thriving in strict secrecy a revolutionary monster that was soon to hit the administration hard. The leader Hemchandra Ghosh organised a well-knit band of disciplined dare-devils. He was known as "Barda" (eldest brother) among his followers many of whom had not even seen his face. As a school student at Dacca, Hemchandra met Swami Vivekananda on 13 April, 1901, and was electrified by his message that for a subject nation there was no religion except the worship of Sakti (goddess of destruction) to drive out the foreigners. That was his initiation to the cult of revolution and he built up his
formidable striking force, inch by inch, brick by brick. An associate of “Anushilan” and an ally of “Jugantar” it had links with both but was not to be identified with either.

Hemchandra Ghosh’s party actually started field work in 1905 with a few enthusiasts like Haridas Dutta, Sris Pal, Khagen Das, Rajen Guha, Surendra Bardhan and others. During the first phase of the revolutionary movement his party was known by the secret code name of “Mukti Sangha”. The daring Rodda Arms Haul of 26 August 1914, which brought a windfall of strategic arms for the revolutionaries of Bengal, was the team work of “Mukti Sangha” and the “Atmotionsi Samity” of Bipin Behari Ganguly. Hemchandra’s arrest in 1915 stalled the growth of his party but a nucleus was kept alive by the faithfuuls, namely, Promotha Chaudhuri, Alimuddin Sahib (Master Sahib), Krishna Adhikary and Promotha Chakraborty. On release in 1920 Hemchandra Ghose was back to his task of fomenting an armed struggle for Indian Independence. But this time he adopted a new strategy of camouflage to fool the police that he and his followers had enough of it and were now settling to normal family life. Below the surface, the new faces that had joined the party carried on their organizational promotion with verve and vigour, secretly guided by the top leadership, unsuspected by the authorities. A valuable accretion to the sprawling revolutionary net-work of Hemchandra was the disillusioned non-cooperator turned social worker, Lalit Barman of Comilla, who had felt the inadequacy of social and constructive work to remove the curse of foreign domination and longed for national service more solid and more radical.

During the preparatory period of the twenties Hemchandra Ghosh’s party functioned under innocuous names like Social Service League, Shreec Sangha, Santi Sangha, Dhruba Sangha to serve as a cover and to perform social service which afforded a useful training for the revolutionary cadres.

The overall training was extremely rigorous which insisted on strict discipline, moral character, liberal education and physical fitness. According to this school of revolutionaries, the war of liberation was no amateurish activity or an outlet for immature romantic adventurers. The logic of the organizers was impeccable:
Discipline stands between power and pollution;
Moral character shields against temptation and timidity;
Education tempers instincts and impulses;
Health ensures energy and endurance;
Secrecy is synonymous with security.

The implementation of the training programme was entrusted primarily to Bhabesh Chandra Nandy, a truly great teacher by all standards. The goal of attainment was freedom—freedom of the soul, freedom of the country, freedom from all shackles.

Sir Charles Tegart in a reminiscent mood at a banquet in Palestine is reported to have observed:

Of all the revolutionaries I have come across, the greatest and the grandest lot was the Bengal brand who surpassed their counterparts in other countries by the sheer excellence of their moral character.

Restlessness spread among the women too. The conservative opinion was at first not inclined to welcome the womanhood into the revolutionary fold. But it could not stop them from taking their rightful place in the gallant march to national emancipation. A lady of high calibre and personal charm, Sm. Leela Nag (later on Leela Roy) cast her spell over the young girls of Dacca. With the primary object of improving the social and economic position of women in Bengal through education she founded the Deepali Sangha in 1923. Social Service League and Deepali Sangha soon began a collaboration which eventually led to women being drawn into the revolutionary party of Hem-chandra Ghosh and his right-hand man, Anil Chandra Roy.

The participation of women in the revolutionary movement in the mid-1920s foreshadowed the large role women would play in the Civil Disobedience Movement of the early 1930s. A British historian has observed that by actively participating in the liberation struggle the Indian women instantly accomplished what three-quarters of a century of social reforms movement failed to do for the emancipation of Indian womanhood.

4. The Revolutionary Cult Acquires New Dimensions

Press propaganda played an increasingly important role during this period. Helped by the repeal of the Rowlatt Act and the Indian Press Act in 1922, a large number of nationalist news-
papers and journals made their appearance by 1924. The articles came just short of open sedition, the undisguised praise of old revolutionaries became a feature of the nationalist propaganda. The English Daily Forward, founded by Deshbhandhu Chittaranjan Das as the mouthpiece of his Swarajya Party, set a high standard in wedding journalism to the cause of nationalism under the editorship of Satyaranjan Bakshi. Satyaranjan’s inimitable style of functioning, oddly enough, claimed an ardent admirer in Mr. Prentice, the then Home Member of the Government of Bengal. Once, he phoned to tell Satyaranjan Bakshi that the Forward was the first item he used to consume at his breakfast table, and without the editor’s witty warheads delivered through its columns his morning repast would taste neither sweet nor sour. The devastating broadsides he fired at the administration, the wizardry of his phrases and the subtle manner of muck-racking so upset the Anglo-Indian newspaper, The Statesman, that in an editorial “Lest we forget Satyaranjan Bakshi” it demanded stern action against him.

The Legion of Honour for championing the cause of nationalism through journalism was also due to Makhanlal Sen and Satyen Majumdar of Anandabazar Patrika, Hemendra Prasad Ghosh of Basumati, Ramananda Chatterjee of Modern Review and others.

A nationalist journal in a colonial country like India had to fight every moment for its existence. In the life of Forward the fatal hour arrived when it published a full page report under the banner headline “Horrified Spectator” strongly commenting on the conduct of the East India Railway Company’s officials after the terrible train disaster near Belur in 1929 where many people were killed and maimed. The British company sued the Forward for defamation and was awarded by the court one lakh and fifty thousand rupees as damages against the paper. Extinction stared the Forward in the face. The management then headed by Subhas Bose and assisted by Satyaranjan Bakshi took a dramatic step. One fine morning the people woke up to be greeted with the appearance of a new Daily, the Liberty in place of the Forward with the editor, Satyaranjan Bakshi, unchanged. The show went on without interruption and the vindictive bureaucracy was left to bite their nails and gnash their teeth.
The publication of the Bengali monthly journal *Benu* (flute) from Calcutta in April 1926 heralded a significant phase in the underground preparations of revolutionary Bengal. Edited by Bhupendra Kishore Rakshit Roy of Hemchandra Ghosh's party as an organ of the revolutionaries, it received unexpected blessings from literary circles including Rabindranath, Saratchandra, the Pondicherry group of writers around Sri Aurobindo and others. Enriched with their valuable writings *Benu* served, for a brief summer though, as a unique medium to meet the robust cultural needs of a generation on the march to freedom. "Its pages," as an eminent author put it, "emitted more fire than the barrels of a gun." It set the stage for the great happenings of the next decade.

Forceful writings in the women's journals, *Jayashree* edited by the Shree Saugha group and the *Mandira* edited by the Jugantar Party, also helped to keep up the tone and temper of the period.

The vacuum created by the evaporation of the Ghadr Party after the First World War brought into existence the Hindusthan Republican Association of Benaras in 1923 through the efforts of Sachin Sanyal and Jogesh Chatterjee of Bengal. It was the first party in India to talk in terms of the Russian Revolution and Marxism. It affirmed faith in the leaders of Soviet Russia as well as the scers of ancient India, being, however, nearer to Vivekananda and Aurobindo than to Marx and Lenin. The leaflet *The Revolutionary* published by the group and secretly distributed all over India from Peshwar to Rangoon began with the quotation "Chaos is necessary to the birth of a new Star." The ultimate objective of the party was the Federated Republic of the United States of India, the immediate aim was the attainment of Indian Independence by an armed and organized revolution. It was to make exploitation of man by man impossible.

The major activity of the party during its first two years was concentrated on collecting money by dacoity from wealthy Indians or Government coffers. This method of forced contributions to oil their war machine was no innovation on the part of Indian revolutionaries. The Irish Republican Party and Lenin's Bolshevik Party in their early stages are known to have used it too. The revolutionary ethics ruled that the end justi-
On 9 August, 1925, a passenger train running from Saharanpur to Lucknow was stopped by pulling the alarm chain after it left Kakori station. Ten armed youths pulled down from the brake van the iron chest containing the day's collections from all stations, broke it open and made away with the booty without leaving any clue. The long arms of law eventually brought to book the conspirators. In the Kakori Conspiracy Case seventeen were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment, four were transported for life and four were hanged, viz. Ramprasad Bismil, Rajen Lahiri, Ashfaqulla and Roshan Singh.

Bhagat Singh as yet unspotted by the guardians of law and order, put new vigour into the party shattered by the massive dose of repression. He added the word "Socialist" to the name of the party. But it would seem that the party rejected the class conflict and sought to bring about socialism in Independent India by democratic means.

Consistent with the policy of Divide and Rule, the British tried to rouse communal passion in the country to stem the tide of rising nationalism. But national recovery was assisted by the British political blunder in appointing an all-white Simon Commission to decide on the future of India's constitutional reforms. It provided an issue on which all Indian nationalists could unite in opposition, from the bomb-throwing revolutionaries to the very constitutional moderates. "Go Back Simon" was the answer given by the Indians to this deliberate insult to their self-respect when Sir John Simon, the Chairman, landed at Bombay along with the members of the Commission. Protest hartals, processions and demonstrations warmed up the political atmosphere in the country and swept away the cobwebs of unhealthy tendencies in the body politic.

The reorganized and revitalized Hindusthan Socialist Republican Association under the leadership of Bhagat Singh was on the war path. The police lathi charge on a boycott procession against the Simon Commission at Lahore in which Lala Lajpat Rai, the Lion of the Punjab, was severely assaulted (he died a few days later) presented the Association with a golden opportunity to commit a startling act. On 17 December, 1928 Mr. J.P. Saunders, the Police Officer who actually committed the assault on Lalaji, was shot dead by Bhagat Singh and Chandra
Sekhar Azad in front of the Lahore Police Station.

To oppose the moderate Congress objective of Dominion Status which was reiterated at the Calcutta session of the Congress (1928) the Independence League for India had grown up in November 1928 out of the joint efforts of Subhas Chandra Bose and Jawaharlal Nehru. The idea at any rate originated with the Bengal revolutionaries at least a year before Bose and Nehru organized it on the All-India level.

The impressive session of the Congress at Calcutta in December 1928 came and went without fulfilling the expectations of the people. The session was, however, remarkable from another point. The grandeur of the march-past by 2000 strong Congress Volunteer Corps under the G.O.C. Subhas Chandra Bose ranks it as the greatest show on earth. It was the I.N.A. in embryo. For the first time in Congress history 100 girl students joined the Congress Volunteer Corps under the leadership of Oxford educated Latika Ghosh, niece of Shri Aurobindo.

The revolutionaries of different hues and hankering assembles in strength at the Calcutta Congress to take stock of their problems and prospects. The dream of a united revolutionary party did not materialise. The Anushilan-Jugantar amalgamation effort finally broke down. The groups and parties were left to pursue their own plan and programme under their respective patrons, J.M. Sen Gupta, Chairman of the Reception Committee or Subhas Bose, G.O.C.

The difference in outlook between the impatient but inexperienced young blood of the revolutionary movement and the go-slow “dadas” had become acute. Prompted by an aggressive mood of confrontation revolt groups were formed composed of members from both the Jugantar and the Anushilan breaking away from traditional party ties. This development was partly a manifestation of the generation gap problem in the field of politics. It had the effect of energising the revolutionary movement in Bengal by resisting the enervating influence of easy-going congress politics which the old ‘dadas’ had become prone to.