

**THE AFTERMATH OF THE
NON-COOPERATION MOVEMENT:
Mapping Nationalist and Other Forms of
Consciousness**

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Prerana Chaturvedi



**CENTRE FOR HISTORICAL STUDIES
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI-110067
INDIA
2004**

Chairperson
Centre for Historical Studies
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi-110067, India



CERTIFICATE

Certified that the dissertation entitled "The Aftermath of the Non-Cooperation Movement : Mapping Nationalist and Other Forms of Consciousness" submitted by Prerana Chaturvedi for the degree of Master of Philosophy, is a bonafide work of the candidate carried out at this centre. It is further certified that the dissertation, to the best of our knowledge, has not been previously submitted in any form for any degree of this or any other University.

It is recommended that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation for the award of the M.Phil. degree.

Dr. Indivar Kamtekar

Supervisor
Centre for Historical Studies
School of Social Sciences
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi-110067

Prof. Mridula Mukherjee

Chairperson
Chairperson
Centre for Historical Studies
School of Social Sciences
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi-110067

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INTRODUCTION

“..... You have chosen to cast this burden on me at a strange and critical period in our national history when rival theories and principles are at war with each other and the foundations of our great movement for freedom as we have known it for the last three years or more, have been shaken; when senseless and criminal bigotry struts about in the name of religion and instils hatred and violence into the people.....”¹

The above quoted extract, taken from Jawaharlal Nehru's Presidential address delivered at the United Provinces Political Conference held at Benaras, best sums up the period 1923-27 i.e. the aftermath of the Non-Cooperation Movement.

The aftermath of the Non-Cooperation Movement, has been referred by a historian as the years of stagnation marked by a period of virulent factionalism and indiscipline.² Calling it a period of contradictory developments, Bipin Chandra writes that “the withdrawal of the Non-Cooperation Movement in February 1922 was followed by the arrest of Gandhiji in March and his conviction and imprisonment for six years for the crime of spreading disaffection against the Government. The result was the spread of disintegration, disorganisation and demoralisation in the nationalist ranks. There arose the danger of the movement lapsing into passivity. Many began to question the wisdom of the total Gandhian strategy. Others started

¹ The *Leader*, 15 October 1923. (The address was read at the conference held on the 13th October, 1923 in Nehru's absence on account of illness, first after his release from the Nabha prison.)

² Bipin Chandra, *India's Struggle for Independence*, New Delhi, 1989, p. 246.

looking for ways out of the impasse.”³ Sumit Sarkar also talks of this period as that of failed expectations marked by a fall in the Congress membership, which he calls an indicator of fall in the popularity of the Congress; the widening rift between the Swarajists and the no-changers, and the unprecedented communal riots.⁴ So almost all the research done on this period appears to be on the same line, i.e. the differences in the Congress on the question of Council entry, and the communal strife that engulfed the country during this period.

However, the nationalist resurgence witnessed after the announcement of an all-white Simon Commission in November 1927, which culminated in the Civil Disobedience Movement, reflects a process of decline and renewal that marked this period. It shows that despite of all the confusion on the surface, somewhere the nationalist ideology had taken roots. The aftermath of the Non-Cooperation Movement was unprecedented in many ways, as unprecedented as the Non-Cooperation Movement itself was. The Non-Cooperation Movement signalled the beginning of a new phase of the Indian nationalist movement.⁵ Mahatma Gandhi, its author, was for the first time putting to test his ideology of Swadeshi and non-violent Satyagraha on a national scale. His contribution to the national movement was unique as “he was the first national leader who recognised the role of the masses and mass action in the struggle for national liberation in contrast to earlier leaders, who did not comprehend their decisive significance for making that struggle more effective.”⁶

³ Ibid., p. 235.

⁴ Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India*, New Delhi, 1983, p. 226.

⁵ A.R. Desai, *Social Background of Indian Nationalism*, Bombay, 1948, p. 346.

⁶ Ibid., p. 347.

The Congress-Khilafat alliance forged by Gandhi was again a new phenomenon, which was never to be witnessed again in the long struggle for India's freedom from British rule. Thus, Hindu-Muslim unity became a hallmark of the Non-Cooperation Movement, but in its aftermath, the alliance shattered to pieces like a broken wave, which found an echo in the intense communal riots, that engulfed almost the entire nation. The Congress backed Mahatma Gandhi during the non-cooperation days like a single block and never once questioned his method and ideology. But after the movement collapsed, and its author was put in jail by the British, the Congress started speaking in different voices and came to the verge of a split which was, in the later years, prevented by Gandhi himself after he was released from jail. However, those differences had sufficiently damaged the Congress, which was a divided house on several questions, ranging from the practicality of Gandhi's ideology, on the issue of boycott of councils and even on the question of acceptance of office after the Swarajists had entered the Councils.

The aftermath of the Non-Cooperation Movement was a period of mixed and contradictory trends. While the incidents taking place in the daily lives of the common people showed that the nationalist spirit was not dead, yet at the same time it has to be acknowledged that deep divisions surfaced during this period, which left the Indian social structure divided on caste and communal lines. The confusion and conflict within the Congress ranks contributed in further aggravating the situation. The doubts and despair that marked this period, were expressed by Jawaharlal Nehru in the following lines:

“.....let us be quite clear in our minds about our goal and the manner of reaching it. There was no doubt in us three years ago. In 1920 and 1921 we were

full of faith and confidence. We did not sit down to debate and argue, we knew we were right and we marched on from victory to victory. We felt the truth in us and every fibre of our being thrilled at the idea of our fighting for the right, and fighting in a manner unique and glorious. Those were brave days, the memory of which will endure and be a cherished possession for all of us.”⁷

Agitated by the existing state of the Congress and the negative effect it would have on the public psyche, he added:

“.....Then our leader (Gandhiji) left us and, weak and unstable and inconsistent, we began to doubt and despair. The faith of the old went and with it much of our confidence. There followed a year of strife and dispute and mutual recrimination, and all our energy was diverted to combating and checkmating our erstwhile comrades in the rival camp. Pro-changer and no-changer went for each other, and the average no-changer was not behind the pro-changers in forgetting the basic lesson of non-violence and charity and in imputing the basest of motives to persons of a different way of thinking. We failed to keep even our tempers, how then could we exercise right judgement? And so gradually non-violent non-cooperation began to lose some of its fundamental features and for many became an empty husk, devoid of real significance.”⁸

⁷ *The Leader*, 15 October 1923.

⁸ *The Leader*, 15 October 1923.

The Non-Cooperation and the Civil Disobedience Movements have also been studied by Judith Brown.⁹ Instead of placing Mahatma Gandhi at the centre of all Political activity, she simply takes him as an angle of approach, thereby making the study of the leader as a study of change in Indian politics.¹⁰ Completely denying the 'myth' of a 'monolithic political movement' led by Gandhiji whose 'charismatic' appeal amongst the masses rallied thousands under the banner of non-cooperation, Judith Brown asserts that in fact his appeal as a continental leader lay in the fact that he put forward new methods of relating with the rulers and that he took up the issues and interests of social groups which till now were outside the spheres of politics.¹¹ She takes specific cases of how the movement took deep roots in places like Assam, United Provinces, Bihar and Punjab. But, she says that on close inspection, wherever the movement became genuinely popular, attracting a large-scale response, it seems that a local issue of significance to ordinary people was finding an outlet through the all India campaign.¹² According to her, once the mass movement recedes, Gandhi was marginalized and local level Congressmen began to scramble for loaves and fishes through the constitutional framework already put in place by the colonial state.

Perhaps this kind of observation is inbuilt into her explanatory framework of Congress organisation as an elaborate network of 'contractors' and 'sub-contractors'.¹³ However, our mopping out of the period from 1923-27 brings out a greater degree of complexity in terms

⁹ Judith Brown, *Gandhi's Rise to Power (1915-22)*, Cambridge, 1972 and *Gandhi and Civil Disobedience*, 1928-34, Cambridge, 1975.

¹⁰ Judith Brown, *Gandhi's Rise to Power (1915-22)*, Cambridge, 1972, p. XVI.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 302, 322, 346-347.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 322.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 353.

of ideas, emotions and activities. This kind of an explanation overlooks the significant experience of the Non-Cooperation Movement, which was absorbed by large sections of the populations who in no way were concerned with constitutional framework. Chapter one of my dissertation brings forth a series of incidents, which constitute subterranean levels of sedimented nationalist consciousness.

In a study of the Indian National Movement, more emphasis is often laid on the active phase of the movement as compared to its passive phase. As has been depicted in the quotations given by Bipin Chandra and Sumit Sarkar, the period between two national movements, as in the case of the Non-Cooperation and Civil Disobedience Movement, is often ignored as a period of confusion marked by internal bickering and strife. However, a closer look at this period will make us realise that a movement in the history of a nation is a continuous process and that the internal bickering and strife definitely reveals contesting visions of politics and strategy in an organisation but at the same time it leads to more crystallised policies, programmes and ideas. Also, the success or failure of a movement cannot be judged by whether it could achieve the goal set out at the beginning or not. The real success of a mass movement lies in understanding and analysing the extent to which its ideology is adopted by the masses. Once the movement subsides this consciousness is manifested in various forms. A keen observer like Mahatma Gandhi knew this and aimed at building upon this consciousness through his constructive programme, which would lead to the next movement. This theme is central to my study of the aftermath of the Non-Cooperation Movement i.e. the period 1923-27.

In the first chapter, the aftermath of the Non-Cooperation Movement will be studied not from the point of view of the purely

active phase of the mass movement but from the point of view of the impact which the mass movement has left behind, which was of crucial importance for the emergence of the next mass movement i.e. the Civil Disobedience Movement. Though the Non-Cooperation Movement touched its peak and then subsided yet some incidents continue to occur in its aftermath, pointing towards the continued restlessness among certain pockets and sections of the population.

Instead of dealing with the Non-Cooperation Movement and analysing its success and failure, in this chapter, I propose to look at some aspects of the reach and penetration of the Non-Cooperation Movement amongst the masses, and how it was being manifested in everyday life even after the collapse of the movement. The chapter also deals with changes in policy brought about by the Government. This is being done with the purpose to show how changes in the colonial policy were taking place to meet the nationalist challenge. An approach of this kind inevitably raises certain questions – how was Indian nationalism perceived by the colonial regime? How strong it was thought to be? And how much of a threat it was to their authority?

The colonial Government during this period was trying to assess the damage done by the Non-Cooperation Movement and was constantly busy discussing strategies and tactics to contain the nationalist consciousness from spreading further amongst the masses. This contention is illustrated through the medium of two agitations, around which the chapter mainly revolves – the Nagpur Flag Satyagraha and the agitation for the removal of the Lawrence statue in Lahore.

The nationalists were also using the District Boards and Municipalities as mediums for the purpose of spreading the nationalist ideology during this period. Resolutions were being passed everyday, relating to the hoisting of National Flag on Government buildings, for promoting the use of *charkha*, wearing of *khadi* and Gandhi caps etc. The Government realised that its authority was being challenged in its own domain but found itself unable to do anything except for contemplating the withdrawal of grants from these institutions or devising a clever way to get out of a difficult situation. The purpose behind including such incidents in the chapter is to bring forth the principle embodied in them, that bugged the colonial state. That principle was the assertion of national sovereignty. It is this principle that imparts an almost unparalleled significance to incidents, which can otherwise easily be overlooked in a study of the Indian National Movement.

The aftermath of the Non-Cooperation Movement was also witness to the collapse of the Hindu-Muslim alliance forged by Mahatma Gandhi over the Khilafat issue. The period 1923-27 witnessed communal riots on an unprecedented scale. These riots which were taking place in cities, towns and villages were not centred around one common issue of national importance but were triggered off by local issues, bordering on the trivial. When seen in the light of the communal harmony and understanding of 1919-22, they present a stark contrast, which is difficult to understand. Instead of analysing how the Congress-Khilafat alliance unravels and finally breaks on the political plane and how the secular leaders turn communal in the aftermath of the Non-Cooperation Movement. The second chapter will deal with the riots taking place during this period, the issues around which they centred, but more importantly the reasons, due to which incidents and issues which could have been peacefully settled, took a

communal turn. An attempt has also been made to analyse and understand the events leading to the disintegration of the Hindu-Muslim alliance at the mass level, the issues which resulted in the sectarian conflict in different places and the role played by the electoral reforms in further deepening the divisions on communal lines.

The period between 1923-1927 was a period of intense communal debate and discussion within the Congress. Conflicts arose not only between party and party in the Congress, but also between section and section in a party. There were differences not only on the question of Council entry but also on the extent to which Non-Cooperation could be adopted as an effective programme for the purpose of achieving Swaraj. The third chapter deals with how this debate shaped up and how after three attempts at striking a compromise between the two factions, a compromise was finally reached at the Coconada Congress in December 1923, under the guidance of Mahatma Gandhi, who always referred to the Swarajists as the representatives of the Congress in the Councils. It will trace the events after the A.I.C.C. meet at Patna in September 1925, when the political work of the Congress was made over to the Swaraj party, which is often referred to as the complete surrender of Mahatma Gandhi to the Swaraj party. But differences arose within the ranks of the Swaraj party as well on the question of acceptance of office by its members.

However, many opportunities and issues on which an agitation could have been started were lost due to the internal differences within the Congress. One such issue was the certification of a hike in salt duty in March 1923, it was due to the conflicts and differences in the Congress, that an issue on which Gandhi would launch the mighty

Civil Disobedience Movement, was never once seriously explored by the Congress leaders in his absence. From this situation of confusion and hopelessness, how by the time of the Civil Disobedience Movement the entire Congress was again solidly behind Mahatma Gandhi has been analysed in the third chapter.

THE REACH AND PENETRATION OF THE MASS MOVEMENT

In this chapter the aftermath of the Non-Cooperation Movement will be studied not from the point of view of the purely active phase of the mass movement but from the point of view of the impact which the mass movement has left behind, which was of crucial importance for the emergence of the next mass movement i.e. the Civil Disobedience. Though the Non-Cooperation touched its peak and then subsided yet some incidents continue to occur in its aftermath pointing towards the continued restlessness among certain pockets and sections of the population. The authorities were able to observe certain forms of the impact of the movement which we call forms of sedimentation of nationalist consciousness. This sedimentation, perhaps, later on provided the basis for the rise of the Civil Disobedience.

The object of this chapter is to look at some aspects of the reach and penetration of the Non-Cooperation Movement amongst the masses. To what extent the nationalist consciousness had permeated amongst the masses? How was it manifested in everyday life? Also, I propose to look at the changes in colonial policy brought about to meet the nationalist challenge. How was the Indian nationalism perceived? How strong it was thought to be? How much of a threat it was to their authority? The colonial Government was constantly busy discussing strategies and tactics to handle the mass movement.

The documents pertaining to this period reveal certain 'patterns of observation'. The colonial regime was suddenly very sensitive to local issues and their likely impact on the national level. The first impact was the creation of a sense of serious concern, with a dash of

fear in the officialdom, regarding a resurgence of the mass movement. In a way the fear of revival of the movement made them sensitive to be on the lookout for its local manifestations. A study of the documents on this period also reveals that this was the time when all forms of consciousness such as nationalist, caste and community were emerging and were mingled with each other in a way that it was not very easy to separate them in water tight compartments. Since Non-Cooperation was the first mass movement led by Gandhi under the banner of non-violence, it put the Government in a quandary and the entire administration was gripped by important questions – How such a mass movement should be dealt with in the future? How to identify the beginnings of a movement so as to contain it? These two questions became their major source of worry and concern. These questions activated their imagination by creating imaginary scenarios, likely to pose a threat in the future.

The Non-Cooperation Movement left behind a sense of anxiety amongst the officials, a desire to fight back. An attitude of ambivalence characterised the colonial officials during this period, who were constantly trying to gauge the strength of Indian nationalism in order to contain it within the confines of 'legitimate nationalism' without crossing the limits; limits which the bureaucracy had set in its own mind, beyond which it would pose a threat to the Government authority. It is with these questions in mind that this chapter will be confined to a study of northern India i.e. United Provinces, Central Provinces, Bihar and Orrisa, and some parts of Punjab during the period of 1923-1927.

However, instead of undertaking a study of each province separately, this chapter will deal with incidents taking place in different provinces at different times during this period. All of them

might not be having a national significance or impact but nevertheless contributed towards denting the authority of the colonial state.¹ For this purpose the chapter will be divided into two sections, and each section will deal with separate incidents. Though these incidents were confined to specific pockets and can be termed as local level protests, yet they were connected by a strand of similarity not only in terms of objectives, support base, pattern of occurrence etc., but also in terms of the Government's reaction to them. Their significance in the course of the national movement lies in the fact that even if small in themselves, they constitute an important part of the national movement, underlining the fact that the Non-Cooperation Movement, was a beginning of that long process which was carried down to the Civil Disobedience and the Quit India Movement.

Section-I

The first such incident is the Nagpur Flag Satyagraha referred to in the official files as the "agitation in connection with the so called Swaraj or National Flag."² It involved a conflict between the authorities and the volunteers over the right to carry the National or Swaraj flag in a procession through any road without any prior permission. The incident might have been a very small one but what was important was the assertion of rights on the part of the local nationalists, and the Government efforts to curtail and limit that right in an effective manner without further aggravating the situation or giving importance to what they called a 'trivial issue'³. Strangely enough, even when the

¹ The Nagpur Flag Satyagraha finds only a brief mention in R.C. Majumdar's "*History of the freedom movement in India*", Vol.III, p. 169 and in Sumit Sarkar's "*Modern India*", p. 228.

² Home, Poll. File no. 280 of 1923 & K.W., File no. 198 of 1923 & K.W. and File no. 254 of 1929.

³ The phrase was used in the official documents.

issue is dubbed as 'trivial', the officials discussed it at length. The debate on this issue took place at three levels- between the Central Province Government, the Government of India, and the Secretary of State for India. This debate has to be understood keeping in mind the new reality of British India when nationalists had entered the Legislative Councils, Municipalities and District Boards through elections, where in many cases they constituted a majority against the Government, even if that majority was a narrow one. The Government was apprehensive and cautious at the same time about the kind of activity that these bodies might undertake thereby posing a threat to its authority.

A report prepared by the Central Provinces Government that was forwarded to the Secretary of State by the Government of India traces how the whole issue of the National Flag gained such prominence. "The flying of the national flag began to assume prominence in the latter half of 1922. There had been earlier demonstrations at Bangalore and Bhagalpur but the present agitation commenced with a resolution of the Jubbulpore Municipality in July 1922 to present an address of welcome to the Civil Disobedience Committee and to hoist the national flag on the Municipal buildings. The local Government and the Government of India thought it wise to ignore this action of the Municipality but subsequently at the instance of the Secretary of State, the Government of India took steps to prevent the flag from being flown on the buildings of Municipality and other local bodies. In March 1923, signs of organized attempts to fly the flag were perceived at Jubbulpore and the persons behind this movement shortly afterwards shifted their ground to Nagpur, where the battle royal was waged. On the 6th June, the Congress sitting at Nagpur decided to take up the flag movement as an all-India affair and to extend the agitation to other provinces. Sporadic but unimportant outbursts of flagflying

occurred in Bengal, Bombay and elsewhere and the 18th July was proclaimed as an all-India flag day when the flag was flown in several places in India.”⁴

The Government, however, had anticipated incidents like the flying of Swaraj flags; allocations of municipal funds to issues, which would convey the message of Government authority being defied; display of portraits of Gandhi and Tilak in Municipal buildings, and schools run by them; and other such activities. The reason behind this was that the nationalists had entered and taken over what were hitherto considered as the outer parts of the periphery of the colonial administrative set-up. These concerns and apprehensions were voiced from many quarters. The *Leader*, the leading English newspaper from Allahabad, quoted from an article written by Sir Valentine Chirol in *The Times*, where he had said that “the non-cooperation movement in the form which Gandhi gave to it may be disintegrating, but the extremist party is continuing the struggle with considerable success in an equally or perhaps more dangerous form by capturing the municipal machinery as a prelude to the capture of the rural district boards, and then of the provincial Council.”⁵ In a similar strain the fortnightly report for the United Provinces stated that, “the Congress party has secured a long desired jumping off ground for a concerted attempt to revive agitation against Government, and the new Boards may devote themselves to making the best of the opportunity. The control of a large municipality offers endless chances of making mischief, of raising racial issues and of defying Government.”⁶

⁴ Home, Poll. File no. 280 of 1923 & K.W., p. 8.

⁵ The *Leader*, 16 May 1923.

⁶ Home, Poll. File no. 25 of 1923. Fortnightly report for the second half of March 1923 for United Provinces.

It is in this context that, from the archival documents, we can notice a general debate going on in official circles, for the purpose of formulating a policy in order to contain such incidents. Sir William Marris, I.C.S., United Provinces, voiced such concerns when he wrote to Sir W.M. Hailey, I.C.S., and Member of the Viceroy's Council and in charge of the Home Department:

“Is there any likelihood that the Home Department will address Local Government about anti-Government political activities on the part of local bodies like Municipalities and District Boards? I spoke to His Excellency about it and suggested to him that enquiry on the subject by the Government of India would be useful.”⁷

Responding to the above letter, Sir Hailey wrote back that, “we can say that we have noticed reference to action taken by local bodies under influences explicitly antagonistic to Government; and should be glad if Local Government could give us any information on the subject based on the experience of the last two years. Action of the nature referred to appears to take two directions, demonstrative such as presentations of addresses to ex-convicts or internees; attempts to fly the Swaraj flag, exhibitions of portraits of Tilak and other opponents of Government and more serious attacks, such as resolutions in favour of boycotting British or Empire goods.”⁸

The above quoted extract clearly shows that the Government was prepared for such actions, which could be considered antagonistic to the Government. It even differentiated on the basis of those

⁷ Home, Poll. File no. 280 of 1923 & K.W., p. 16.

⁸ Home, Poll. File no. 280 of 1923 & K.W., p. 16.

incidents, which would prove to be more harmful or in other words would hurt the interests of the Government, and those, which expressed more, a symbolic value and were therefore termed as merely demonstrative. Attempts to fly the Swaraj Flag were considered demonstrative. In other words it had more of a symbolic value. Yet the debate on the issue clearly shows the extent to which it had unnerved the Government. Such strains of nervousness were demonstrated in the following extract taken from a letter dated, 30th March 1923, written by Sir Marris, now the Governor of United Provinces, to Sir Hailey. He wrote:

“Municipal elections in parts of this province have resulted in at least the partial victory of the non-cooperators. Complete returns are not in; but in many places, including some of the larger cities, boards will be in office with strong majorities opposed to Government. It seems likely that these will take their orders from the Central Congress and Khilafat Organization and may under their instructions set about using their powers, which the municipal law gives them to embarrass Europeans and the Government. I think we must be prepared with a counter programme.”⁹

Anticipating the kind of issues that these bodies might take up, he further added:

“One of the first matters likely to be raised is the flying of the Swaraj Flag on municipal buildings. About this two diametrically opposite views are possible. Some of

⁹ Home, Poll. File no. 198 of 1923 & K.W., p. 3.

my officers think that it would be a mistake to interfere. They argue that if we intervene at all we must be prepared to go to the bitter end. If we do so, we shall alienate they say, the whole of moderate opinion. There is something about a flag that instantly arouses sentimental attachments. If we once take up this flag question, it is undeniable that we must have serious difficulties and to interfere with the flag may invest it with extraordinary importance and possibly give the other side a new rallying cry.

On the other hand, I personally think we cannot acquiesce in the flying of the Swaraj Flag. Apart from that, the act is a challenge. The flag is meant to mark sovereignty, and municipal bodies, which derive their being from the established constitution and receive aid from the Government cannot be allowed openly to deny the constitution or the Government. That seems to me a point of principle.”¹⁰

It is clear from the above paragraph that though the incidents of hoisting flags at local places were small and insignificant in nature but the principle embodied in such instances has been explicitly stated in this letter i.e. ‘the assertion of national sovereignty’. It was this principle that bugged the colonial state and not the smallness of the incident. The act of stopping people from hoisting the Flag could lead to a series of dilemmas. Contemplating ways to get out of an irritating situation, Sir Marris suggested the withdrawal of grants from such bodies, but then himself added that, “the withdrawal will not be felt by the offending board for some months, during which time the flag will

¹⁰ Home, Poll. File no. 198 of 1923 & K.W., p. 3.

fly unchecked.”¹¹ Thus, the letter underlines a sense of helplessness on the part of the colonial officials. They came to the conclusion that, certain forms of defiance have to be consciously ignored, without blowing them up into big issues of national importance through state intervention. Thus the limit of legitimate nationalism were being extended through these seemingly small incidents.

However the flying of the Swaraj flag was not the only source of anxiety for the Government. The issue appeared to be more deep rooted. It was the fear in the minds of the officials regarding the spread of subversive ideas during the period, which was triggering this kind of a debate and forced the Government to plan in anticipation. This vague sense of fear and anxiety of not being strong enough to control was reflected in their discussions. In this context Sir Marris observed:

“So much for the flag. But there are other ways in which a non-cooperation board can pervert its powers for political ends. It may give the teaching in municipal schools an anti-Government bias. It may take the ground that in the past the proportion of expenditure in civil stations and those municipal services which are of more value to the European population has been disproportionate. Here, again, I feel the difficulty of joining issue with the non-cooperator on what will become purely racial grounds. Once it can be represented as a racial question, we loose the sympathy of intermediate people.”¹²

¹¹ Home, Poll. File no. 198 of 1923 & K.W., p. 3.

¹² Home, Poll. File no. 198 of 1923 & K.W., p. 4.

The colonial Government's fears and apprehensions regarding the Board and Municipalities being used as a jumping off ground did come true. The fortnightly reports of various provinces during this period are full of such incidents. But what is more interesting is that the manner in which the authorities reported these incidents conveyed a state of helplessness. A situation where the Government knew that its authority was being challenged in its own domain but found itself unable to do anything except for contemplating the withdrawal of grants or devising a clever way to get out of a difficult situation. Another apt example of this was the agitation for the removal of the Lawrence statue in Lahore, which will be discussed in the next section.

Another reason behind the Government being in an anticipatory mood was that the elections to these bodies were a part of the reforms initiated by them. Perhaps the Government thought that to engage the nationalist element in electoral reforms was less dangerous than the Non-Cooperation Movement, which would involve the masses. True, that their authority would be challenged in their own sphere, but the damage would not exceed a certain point, and if it did, there were ways of curtailing it. Perhaps, it also anticipated that these bodies would soon be bogged down by caste and communal differences, which were a hallmark of the Indian social structure. In the eyes of the Government corruption was another issue, which was likely to help them.

The Government knew that working out the reforms and electoral politics was an effective way of sharpening the caste and communal consciousness, which would then automatically blunt the nationalist consciousness. The fortnightly report for Meerut reported that "*gujars, jats and rajputs* are making strenuous efforts to secure

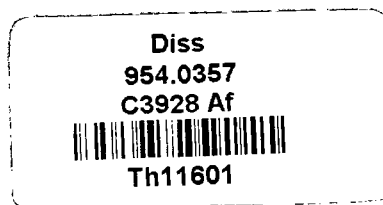
representation, and that this struggle for seats by sections of the community, which formerly took little interest in local affairs, is significant of the spread of the political spirit. The same phenomenon is noticed elsewhere.”¹³ Another report stated that, “the number of *Mahar* conferences indicates the growing political consciousness of the depressed classes.”¹⁴

The period 1923-1927 witnessed contradictory trends. The political consciousness that had been aroused during the non-cooperation days found an expression in varied forms in its aftermath. While on one hand the nation was plagued by unprecedented communal riots, on the other hand the nationalist spirit was being manifested in different parts of the country in various ways. Small and big incidents were taking place during this period, which were not necessarily organized or directed by a central leadership. These incidents related to everyday lives of the people, and were neither big nor important enough to be noticed by the press or by the central leadership of the Congress. But the only side taking keen notice of these incidents was the colonial Government itself, which would record and report even the smallest incident in its files and fortnightly reports. These reports make an interesting reading because of the manner in which they were recorded. It seems that the Government was trying to gauge the popularity and support base of the nationalist movement and in the process it identified, the wearing of *khadi* and Gandhi caps, the popularity of *charkha*, and the rise and fall in the Congress funds etc. as symbols of nationalism.

¹³ Home, Poll. File no. 25 of 1923. Fortnightly report for the first half of April for United Provinces.

¹⁴ Home, Poll. File no. 25 of 1924. Fortnightly report for the second half of May 1924 for Central Provinces and Berar.

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The nationalists too devised novel ways of keeping the nationalist spirit alive amongst the masses. Boards and Municipalities served as excellent mediums for the purpose of spreading the nationalist ideology. The fortnightly report for Bihar and Orissa stated that, local bodies which had been captured by Congressmen had been making the most of their opportunities, by declaring the wearing of *khaddar* and the cult of the *charkha* to be essential for loyal servants of the local bodies, and by propaganda in the controlled schools by prescribing a hymn with a slight anti-Government tone to be sung by school each morning before the classes start.¹⁵ Similar incidents were reported from other provinces such as the United Provinces where, the Allahabad District Board made the singing of *Bande Mataram* and *Hindustan Hamara* compulsory in its schools as a prelude to the day's work.¹⁶ In the Central Provinces the Government reported that, "the Saugar District Council passed a resolution in favour of maintaining its proceedings, accounts and correspondence in *Hindustani* and is appealing to its employees, masters and pupils in the schools to wear nothing but pure *khadi*."¹⁷

Such incidents were at times reported in the press as well. This contributed to the public perception of the colonial Government not being in full control of its institutions. For instance the *Leader* reported about a meeting of the Lucknow Municipal Board, which sat for nearly eight hours and disposed of 92 resolutions that were on the agenda. The most important resolution ran as follows:

¹⁵ Home, Poll. File no. 112 of 1925. Fortnightly report for Bihar and Orissa for the first half of May 1925.

¹⁶ Home, Poll. File no. 25 of 1924. Fortnightly report for United Provinces for the second half of June 1924.

¹⁷ Home, Poll. File no. 25 of 1924. Fortnightly report for the Central Provinces & Berar for the second half of April 1924.

“Whereas it is one of the functions of a municipal board to patronize and encourage indigenous industries it is hereby resolved that henceforth all the uniforms supplied to municipal employees should as far as possible be made of *khaddar*.”¹⁸

Similarly the press would at times report incidents, which highlighted the nationalist spirit of individuals being expressed in public spheres. One such incident was reported by the *Leader* where the district traffic superintendent, Nainpur, had an altercation with an employee over his right to wear any cap he chose, in the office. The employee temporarily yielded to his wishes to avoid a scene. Next day again, however, he went to the office with his Gandhi cap on.¹⁹

The above quoted incidents show the deliberate defiance of the Government authority inside the institutions established by them, and by individuals who were parts of these institutions. But there were incidents involving the common masses as well. The fortnightly report for Bihar and Orissa reported one such incident from Muzzafarpur where “the town sub-inspector of police, who had taken an active part against Khilafat extremists in the past, was unable to bury his grandmother unless he agreed to have a shroud of *khaddar*. The public declined to attend the burial.”²⁰ The Government took consolation from the fact that, “this is an echo of the social boycott of 1921 and 1922 but occurrences of this description are fortunately

¹⁸ The *Leader*, 2 May 1923.

¹⁹ The *Leader*, 27 October 1923.

²⁰ Home, Poll. File no. 25 of 1924. Fortnightly report for Bihar and Orissa for the second half of December 1924.

now-a-days rare.”²¹ Incidents like these were not only reported in the fortnightly files but were used by the Government, as yardsticks for the purpose of assessing the reach of the nationalist ideology amongst the masses, and the damage done to their authority. As a result these incidents found a way in newspapers published from London, which from time to time undertook such assessments. In one such article titled ‘*Political Outlook in the United Provinces*’, a correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian* quoted a similar incident of how the people in a small country town refused to allow the corpse of a ‘Government man’ to be carried out till his sons wrapped it in *khaddar*.²²

The correspondent reporting for the *Manchester Guardian* further went on to make a fair assessment of India in the aftermath of the Non-Cooperation Movement and the difference it had brought about in the attitude of the masses. He wrote

“But there is a difference. Neither in the town nor in the country have they forgotten the hope that was once raised in them and they are a little less subservient, a little more independent, and I fear a little less friendly. When I questioned some Oudh villagers myself. I found the most intelligent of them ready to admit that they still hoped Swaraj would come some day that they believed that it would bring with it lower rents, lower prices and less oppression. They told me that they would be glad to have Indian officers instead of Englishmen. I fear they

²¹ Home, Poll. File no. 25 of 1924. Fortnightly report for Bihar and Orissa for the second half of December 1924.

²² The *Leader*, 12 February 1923.

have come to distrust Europeans regarding them as the friends of the *talukdars*.”²³

But the correspondent took solace from the fact that the entire Indian social structure, on account of its diversity and complexity, was not as yet against the British *Raj*. So he undertook an analysis of sorts to find out those sections or classes of Indian society, which could still be relied on or in other words which would still support British rule in India:

“So much for the tenants and small townfolk. But what of the *chamars*? The *chamars* are not yet fully awake, but I talked to one of the very few *chamars* who know English. He is trying to raise and organize his castemen, and from what he said to me, I judge that in the United Provinces as in Madras, the untouchables will choose to ask protection and assistance from the British *Raj* rather than to trust himself to the tender mercies of the higher castes. In fact, the *chamar* made his first entry into politics by breaking an attempt to boycott the Prince of Wales visit to the United Provinces.

At the other end of the scale the *talukdar* is another trustworthy supporter of the British *Raj*. The attitude of the smaller *zamindar* is somewhat different from that of the *talukdar*. They have less to lose than the *talukdars* and they are more closely in contact with the current of popular feeling. They will become good nationalists someday if they are not that already.”²⁴

²³ The *Leader*, 12 February 1923.

²⁴ The *Leader*, 12 February 1923.

The above quoted extracts clearly reflect the anticipatory mood in which the British found themselves in the aftermath of the Non-Cooperation Movement. They acknowledged the inroads that the nationalists had been able to make in capturing the popular imagination. But at the same time they knew that there were sections from amongst the Indians who would still support the British, and it is their support, which would carry the British *Raj* forward in the aftermath of a mass movement. During this period the British were busy with the process of assessing exactly where they stood and the extent to which their hold upon India had loosened. A special correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian* in India wrote that "assuming that no blow comes from without and that the Mohammedans are placated by the conclusion of a favourable peace with Turkey, I do not think India will be able to organize a really formidable revolutionary movement in the next five years and perhaps not in the next ten years."²⁵ However not so sure about the future he added:

"What is to be expected is that country will refuse to abandon its present attitude of sullen aloofness and distrust except that from time to time it will find vent for its energy in a spasm of agitation, each spasm taking an uglier shape than the last. Boycott will succeed mob violence, and a murder campaign may come later. These agitations will necessitate coercion, pretty strenuous coercion, because non-cooperation has succeeded in stripping the idea of the jail of most of the terror and all the disgrace that used to attach to it. Coercion will excite

²⁵ *The Leader*, 4 March 1923.

friction and make new enemies. The councils will become more and more organs of criticism and of agitation and will be less and less inclined to accept any responsibility for the administration, of the transferred subjects. All the time there will be flowing a steady stream of propaganda that is lies. The attitude of distrust of all things English is something of a pose with the generation that is passing away. It will come natural to the rising generation. For that generation is being taught to accept without question readings of history which its fathers regarded as interesting paradoxes."²⁶

The anticipatory mood in which we find the colonial Government in India and the British press which shaped the public opinion in London, can be interpreted as a general acknowledgement of the fact that the nationalist ideology had been able to penetrate amongst the masses. But the divisions which surfaced in the aftermath of the Non-Cooperation Movement not only in the Congress but also amongst the masses on religious and caste lines, encouraged the Government to draw its policy according to the situation so as not to aggravate the situation further and alienate the sections which had still not crossed the critical line. It is in this light that we have to understand the debate on issues such as the Nagpur Flag Satyagraha and the agitation for the removal of the Lawrence statue. The correspondence taking place at the highest levels should be looked at from the angle of the Government, hard put to formulate policies, in order to deal with such incidents that it found irritating, but at the same time carrying the potential to aggravate the situation by serving as pretexts for launching mass movements or Satyagrahas. Thus the impact of the

²⁶ *The Leader*, 4 March 1923.

mass movement, took the form in the mind of the bureaucracy, not as a confused situation, but as a series of dilemmas that could not be resolved satisfactorily. Sir Marris wrote to Sir Hailey:

“I set these things down with no alarmist intention, but because I feel the need for looking a few moves ahead. I think a new round in the game is very possibly begun. What I would like to know is this-

Are the Government of India agreed that attempts by non-cooperating Boards to use their opportunities for political purposes against Government and the Europeans are to be withstood as strongly as possible? Are they prepared to contemplate special legislation, or do they wish nothing to do attempted beyond the withdrawal of grants? These are not hypothetical questions, for the emergency may be upon us at short notice.”²⁷

A careful study of these reports reveals the unfolding complex nature of the colonial state in India. It had to contend not only with the situation in India where it was conscious of its actions and policies being judged in the minds of the masses but also the way in which news related to India was received in London. This is highlighted in the following extracts where the Indian bureaucracy responded to suggestions, such as a general proscription of the flag by law, emanating from the India Office. The Government of the United Provinces responded in a letter dated 26th March 1923:

“Any general proscription of the flag by law would, for the reasons above urged, be highly inadvisable. At

²⁷ Home, Poll. File no. 198 of 1923 & K.W., p. 4.

least equally so, I venture to think, would be the Secretary of State's proposal to prohibit the use by public bodies of any flag except flags especially authorised by Government.

The Secretary of State speaks of the painful impression made on parliamentary and public opinion at home by the reports of flag incidents such as have occurred. But the Secretary of State singularly neglects the probable effects on parliamentary and public opinion in India of proposal for the introduction and certification of legislative measures of the kind he proposes."²⁸

Sir Hailey, Private Secretary to the Viceroy also remarked in a similar vein that, "a symbol or a song may at the time have only a passing sentimental interest; to prohibit it may give it almost a religious value. To be frank, I think that the proposal of the India Office exhibits at once ignorance of India, of history, and of the elementary principles of Government. This is I think the attitude we should take with the Secretary of State. That the flying of the Swaraj Flag is objected to in England we know; and this is a fact which we cannot entirely overlook, for it does no good either to India or the Indian Government that there should be irritation in England. It is always best for India when the English public forgets its existence. But the irritation on this occasion shows an undue sensitiveness, or an ignorance of the real facts, and attempts to satisfy English critics may result producing the very evils which at present exist mainly in their imagination."²⁹

²⁸ Home, Poll. File no. 198 of 1923 & K.W., p. 6.

²⁹ Home, Poll. File no. 198 of 1923 & K.W., p. 7.

The Government also tried to understand the various nuances of the nationalist consciousness, which incidentally also revealed the real character of its own rule in India. In the correspondence quoted above Sir Hailey observed:

“The ‘Swaraj’ flag has for the moment been accepted by the non-cooperation people as an emblem; but if it were banned a great many quite moderate people, who look on ‘Swaraj’ as merely an expression for the development of India’s Dominion status within the Empire would feel aggrieved. We are to render penal the flying of a particular flag and this must of course be described in the law. A small variation in the flag would make our law abortive. Further, the ‘*Charkha*’ is as much a symbol of non-cooperation as the Swaraj Flag; in some places, such as Delhi, it is the actual symbol chosen; are we to penalize exhibitions or representations of this? But the whole proposition is really illogical. We do not penalize the preaching of non-cooperation as such; the papers and platforms are full of it; we allow avowed non-cooperators to be elected to our local Boards and are prepared to receive them in the assembly; yet we are to penalize a symbol of the creed.”³⁰

The above quoted extracts reflect on the real nature of the colonial state in India, which was neither totally autocratic, based on absolute force nor on liberal rules. However, this did not make it a democratic regime, but at the same time legal rights and rule of law did form an important part of its overall structure. The fact that

³⁰ Home, Poll. File no.198 of 1923 & K.W., p. 6.

arrests made in relation to such incidents would be discussed in the law courts of the *Raj* and every single fault on the Government's part, or any weak link in the handling of such incidents, would result in a spurt of nationalist spirit and might even serve as a pretext for launching similar mass movements, were reasons enough for the Government to be careful about the correctness of its legal position. So the Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department, Mr. S.P. O'Donnell in a circular, which was dispatched to all local Governments and Administrations, observed:

“The flying of this flag is not in itself an offence under the law and cannot therefore be prohibited generally or made the basis of a prosecution. The Government of India consider, however, that it is very undesirable that this flag should be flown on the buildings of Municipalities or other local bodies. The provisions of the Municipalities and District Board Act in regard to the control of these bodies do not appear to provide any remedy which in practice could be effectively employed; but District Officers can and should do all that is in their power to discourage the display of such flags on buildings which are the property of a Municipality or a District Board. In the last resort, and in the event of a local body ignoring the representations made to it, the Government grants can be withheld, and the Government of India consider that if a Municipality or District Board persists on flying the Swaraj flag on any of its building, and it is clear that this is being done with the object of manifesting hostility to British Rule, this course would be fully justified and should be adopted. They have already made

it clear that in no circumstances should the Swaraj flag be flown in conjunction with the Union Jack.³¹

The Nagpur Flag Satyagraha was essentially peaceful throughout and the nationalist press too contributed its bit, in the manner it reported the movement on a daily basis, by highlighting the diverse support base of the movement and questioning the legal standing of the Government in arresting people for the 'crime' of carrying the flag in a peaceful manner. The following extract taken from an article published in the *Leader* is one such example. The article reported the trial of Mr. Sunderlal, a satyagrahi, who was arrested and produced in a court of the *Raj* itself. It includes arguments presented by the public prosecutor, which were questioned by the magistrate. The article seemed to be underlining the weak ground on which the Government stood and the very fact that the magistrate, a Government employee himself, was questioning its legal and moral standing served as an indication of the declining authority of the *Raj*. The article concluded:

".....The second witness, Mr. Yar Mohammad Khan, sub-inspector, Katni produced the rough and fair copies of the notes of speeches taken by him. When asked to point out the objectionable passages, he said the speakers had called the Government 'satanic' and had appealed for its change. He wanted to overthrow the Government not by violence but by sacrifice. When asked by the magistrate whether it was objectionable to tell people to hoist the national flag, the public prosecutor said, 'yes, it, enjoins a sacrifice of 50,000 people and it is inciting.'

³¹ Home, Poll. File no. 198 of 1923 & K.W., p. 22.

Magistrate- Mere incitement won't do. Incitement to what? The public prosecutor replied it was incitement against Government.

Magistrate- But it is incitement for sacrifice and not for violence.

The magistrate then asked Mr.Sunderlal to execute a bond for attendance next day. The accused said he was willing to give his word of honour for appearance, but refused a bond or a bail. Thereupon he was exorted to jail.”³²

The incident took place in Nagpur and Jubbulpore, but it is important to note, that the above quoted extract is taken from a newspaper that was published from Allahabad. In other words during this period i.e. in the aftermath of the movement, small incidents like these contributed in arousing the political and nationalist consciousness of the masses. The fact that they were not directed, organized and controlled by a central leadership, and were launched at the initiative of the masses only added to the credibility of the notion that the authority of the colonial regime was declining. This widespread feeling, which was slowly taking root amongst the masses, was reflected in the uneasiness of the Government in handling such issues. Despite the fact that the Government, “regarded the agitation as Civil Disobedience and an attempt to overcome the authority of the Government”³³, it was still very cautious and refrained from taking action on grounds, on which there was even the remotest possibility of defeat because that would have eroded its authority and credibility

³² The *Leader*, 15 April 1923.

³³ Home, Poll. File no. 280 of 1923 & K.W., p. 34.

more than the flag itself. This is clearly brought out in the following extract from a report of the Central Province Government:

“.....Every Englishman, I am sure, resented that flag movement first and foremost on the ground that it offered an insult to the Union Jack and Government must have shared this sentiment. But the admission that the blow had gone home would only encourage more blows and the agitation if encouraged by repression might easily grow to alarming dimensions. Moreover, the weapons of defiance were limited. Flying the national flag, however much it might be reprobated, was not in itself an offence and there was no certain ground for action unless the movement developed into an attack on Government in its functions of maintaining law and order.”³⁴

There was reluctance on the part of the Government to recognize incidents and movements like the Flag Satyagraha as representing genuine nationalist sentiment. However it did acknowledge that the real issue was “the organized defiance of Government authority.”³⁵ The Government was apprehensive as well as in an anticipatory mood. It knew, as has been quoted before, that a new round in the game had begun and incidents of this nature would now be taking place across the length and breadth of the country, sometimes on a large scale and sometimes, confined to the limits of towns and localities. It also knew that the nation, in the aftermath of the Non-Cooperation Movement, was a divided house. The Congress leadership was divided, and the masses were divided on caste and communal lines. Therefore a

³⁴ Home, Poll. File no. 280 of 1923 & K.W., p. 10.

³⁵ Home, Poll. File no. 280 of 1923 & K.W., p. 22.

national movement involving the masses was not a possibility in the near future. But nevertheless the nationalist consciousness of the masses had been aroused and there was a widespread distrust for the foreign Government. Candid confession of this reality were made in the *Manchester Guardian*, which rightly assessed the situation as following:

“The army of non-cooperation has suffered a crushing tactical defeat. It has to reorganise for a new plan of campaign. Its leaders are divided amongst themselves and the rank and file have not much confidence in them.

But the spirit of non-cooperation remains not pure Gandhism but distrust of the foreign Government; a longing to be quit of it and an unwillingness to work with it even for the common good.

The educated classes and the townfolk are permeated with this spirit. The *ryot* is affected over a large area as yet rather superficially, it is true but conditions in the village are such that the spirit is likely to strike deeper roots. The army is as yet apparently unaffected, but the army is recruited from the villages and sooner or later must follow the villagers' lead, even if direct contamination can be avoided

The country as a whole is in sympathy with the rashness of the non-cooperators rather than with the produce of the Moderates. Bear this in mind when you read of the conciliatory temper displayed by the members of the Legislative Assembly and of the Provincial Councils, they do not represent the country, certainly not if they

ever suggest that a reconciliation could be bought cheaply.”³⁶

The above quoted extract clearly reflects apprehension and a slight fear on the part of the officials. That the Non-Cooperation Movement was just the beginning of a long drawn-out battle and incidents like the Nagpur Flag Satyagraha a ‘a new round in the game’, was a fact accepted by the bureaucracy and brought out by Sir Hailey who remarked:

“There is to my mind little doubt that it has done real harm to Government. The flag demonstrations were only a gesture in a long campaign of attack on Government, their cessation has not abated the desire, nor reduced the ability of non-cooperation to attack us in other directions.”³⁷

Incidents like the Flag Satyagraha, when evaluated in terms of tangible achievements, might not be allotted a place of much significance in the history of the national movement. But they were unique in many ways. The Nagpur Flag Satyagraha for instance, was hotly debated even in the nationalist sphere. The Swaraj party or those known as the ‘pro-changers’ within the Congress openly questioned the motive, utility and practicality of the movement, and giving it credibility by associating the name of the party with it. Pandit Motilal Nehru questioned the rationale of the movement and asked, “whether the prestige of the Congress is likely to be enhanced by the sort of civil

³⁶ *The Leader*, 4 March 1923.

³⁷ Home, Poll. File no. 280 of 1923 & K.W., p. 15.

disobedience which has been started at Jubbulpore and Nagpur.³⁸ The division within the Congress came out in the open when the Swarajist leader, C.R. Das said that he felt "no inspiration to join the Satyagraha and that it did not appeal to him."³⁹ When a resolution was moved on the subject in a meeting of the Congress Committee "all the members of the Swaraj Party present abstained from voting in favour of the resolution."⁴⁰ The deep divisions on the issue did not go unnoticed in the official circles as well. A report prepared by the Central Province Government, which was to be forwarded to the Secretary of State, highlighted the differences in the nationalist camp:

"In fact the cleavage within the ranks of the Congress had become so pronounced, that the time when the flag agitation, at Nagpur reached its height the Swaraj Party were anxious to see the no-change party (who ran the flag movement) defeated in their battle with the Government."⁴¹

A section of the nationalist press that sympathized with the pro-changers led a scathing attack especially when the movement was concluded. They questioned the claims of the no-changers, that the movement symbolized a great victory against the colonial regime. An extract from *The Mahratta*, which was quoted in the official files to prove that the Government had not been defeated, said:

"Pandit Motilal Nehru has clearly brought out the real nature of the Nagpur flag affair in one of his speeches.

³⁸ *The Leader*, 7 May 1923.

³⁹ *The Leader*, 14 July 1923.

⁴⁰ *The Leader*, 14 July 1923.

⁴¹ Home, Poll. File no. 280 of 1923 & K.W., p. 10.

He fully appreciated the devoted self-sacrifice of the workers, but he expressed his regret that he could not pay a similar tribute to the conception itself; nor could he appreciate how the result could possibly be taken as a victory for the Congress. He failed entirely to see what principle had been established and how the country had advanced by the immense sacrifice made."⁴²

However the fact that the Congress was a divided house and that the Flag Satyagraha was questioned and criticized in a section of the nationalist press, does not take the sheen away from the spirit of the movement. The hoisting of the flag symbolized an act of defiance as well as a kind of statement of freedom. If the Non-Cooperation Movement was the first mass movement, than it can be said that movements like the Flag Satyagraha were its consequences because they reflected the spirit of the masses. Incidents like the Flag Satyagraha and many such incidents that were taking place in cities, towns and even the remotest villages had become a part of the daily lives of the people. Some were significant and some were not. Sometimes they involved the least important of the people (politically speaking) and were centred on issues, which might be of no importance. Yet the very fact that if nowhere else, they were present in the files of the colonial regime, which was keenly aware and noticed these new trends in the public sphere, speaks volumes about their real significance and the extent to which the nationalist consciousness had permeated the masses. They reflect on how much of a success the Non-Cooperation Movement actually was.

⁴² Home, Poll. File no. 280 of 1923 & K.W., p. 51.

The National Flag Satyagraha did not involve the bigwigs of the Congress. It was not centrally controlled, directed or organized yet, not a single incident involving violence marred the movement. The press might have criticized the manner in which it was conducted, but for more than a year the movement was reported daily in the press. Though it was taking place in one town yet the entire country read about it, thought about it and volunteers from every part of the country poured in. Those who were not participants cheered the Satyagrahis and were at times warned that they too would be arrested. People turned up in large numbers at the trials of the arrested Satyagrahis. All this contributed in building up a national momentum, in keeping the nationalist spirit alive even if in a small way. This was significant when we consider the fact that at many places the nation was burning in the fire of communal riots, and the Congress in the absence of its leader, who was in the jail, was on the verge of a split. The Government did not lose this opportunity either, and as the fortnightly reports reflect, was keenly observing each and every development including the working out of the reforms from the lowest level of municipality to the highest level inside the Councils. In circumstances like these the importance of movements like the Flag Satyagraha should not go unnoticed, as it served as a platform for the masses. The *Leader*, commenting on the non-violent nature of the movement observed:

“Yesterdays’ ten volunteers, mainly *Marwaris*, more than one of them being *Lakhpatis*, were sentenced each to six months rigorous imprisonment, three months under each section, 143 and 188. Today is the turn of the *Momin* batch. The fact that a clan like the *Momins*, specially noted for their violent spirit, have come up for a perfectly non-

violent move like this indicates the success of the movement.”⁴³

Thus, the flag movement should not be looked at from the angle of a desperate move, on the part of a faction of the Congress, aimed at reviving the nationalist consciousness of the people in the aftermath of the Non-Cooperation Movement. Its significance lies in analysing not only the flag but also the *charkha*, wearing of *khadi*, celebration of Gandhi day and National Flag Day, as ‘representational sites’ or as ‘symbolic spaces’, where the nationalist spirit of the masses was being manifested. Ordinary men and women could not enter the Councils but they found a platform, in these movements, for the purpose of expressing their sentiments and views.

That the initiative was coming, more or less, from the local leadership and involved the masses is proved by many reports. Incidents where single persons would carry a flag through the prohibited area became an order of the day.⁴⁴ Women also participated actively and even courted arrest. Reporting the trial of Smt. Subhadra Devi who, the *Leader* said “would not come in the court without the flag, which was at last given to her. She refused to obtain her release on bail or even give a written promise to attend the court on the 9th June. She was ready to give an oral promise but not bind herself not to take the flag through the civil station. She was therefore taken to the *havalat*.”⁴⁵ Small incidents involving the unordinary courage of ordinary people, when reported in the newspapers inspired the ordinary masses, which read or heard stories about them. For

⁴³ The *Leader*, 11 May 1923.

⁴⁴ The *Leader*, 6 June 1923.

⁴⁵ The *Leader*, 6 June 1923.

instance, an issue of the *Leader* carried a report about a man who had been arrested and “had apologized in the early days. He came up again on his own account though the Satyagraha committee would not accept him. He stood a couple of minutes and explained to the crowd his crime of weakness in apologizing and with a brave song on his lips triumphantly marched off under arrest.”⁴⁶ On one occasion “some children formed a procession and imitating their elderly Satyagrahi friends carried the flag into the prohibited area, singing national songs.”⁴⁷ The *Leader* commenting on the incident added that, “this batch has no connection with the regular Satyagraha organization.”⁴⁸

Seven years later, from the day when the flag movement was first launched as an expression of the nationalist consciousness of the masses, the colonial regime would still find itself in a dilemma. The supposed ‘trivial issue’ that was looked upon as a mere symbolic gesture, which was bound to die a natural death, had actually become a ritual. The Government was still confused and in this state of confusion John Thompson (Home Dept.), in a letter (dated, 22nd October 1929) to H.W.E. Emerson, Secretary to the Government of India wrote in connection with a resolution passed by the Delhi Municipality to hoist the National Flag on the Municipality building. He said:

“Seven years have passed since then. The hoisting of the National Flag has become a regular ritual in which political leaders who are not themselves altogether against the British connection take part and only the other day I

⁴⁶ The *Leader*, 6 June 1923.

⁴⁷ The *Leader*, 24 May 1923.

⁴⁸ The *Leader*, 24 May 1923.

understand that the Municipal Committee of one of the big towns in the United Provinces passed a resolution in favour of hoisting the flag on the Town Hall. I do not think that the Delhi Municipality if left to itself is likely to pass such a resolution but I see that we are promised a visit from Mr. Gandhi on the 1st of November and it is possible that the combined influence of excitement and timidity might sway the committee the other way.

It may be argued that the hoisting of the National Flag is not necessarily an act of disloyalty and that interference with mere symbols is rarely worth while, but it would be looked on by the populace as an act of defiance which Government should not tolerate in the streets of Delhi."⁴⁹

The important point is, whether an act in itself was trivial or not was not decided by the Government but by the 'populacé' who attributed meanings to it. Thus the hoisting of the flag not only symbolized an act of defiance and a statement of freedom, but more importantly, it was also a way of expressing the distrust of the foreign Government and a desire to be quit of it. The next section revolves around the agitation for the removal of the Lawrence statue in Lahore.

Section II

This section deals with the agitation for the removal of the statue of Lord Lawrence from the city mall in Lahore. The statue stood on a piece of land, which was owned by the Government but was later

⁴⁹ Home, Poll. File no. 254 \ 1929, p. 1.

on gifted to the City Municipal Committee for maintenance. The agitation took place at a time when the nationalists had entered the District Boards, Municipalities etc., which were being used by them for the purpose of arousing the nationalist consciousness of the masses and increasing the level of political awareness of the public. The fact that the nationalists were now in control of these branches of the colonial regime was bound to have a psychological impact on the public mind. There were many ways in which Government authority could be defied, but a defiance that came from within the organs of the colonial set-up in India and led to a situation where the Government found itself in a helpless situation and unable to take steps, which it would have normally taken, left a deep impact on the psyche of the nation. The Government, as has been discussed in the previous section, anticipated such incidents, but still every time found itself entangled in a situation, difficult to extricate itself from.

The agitation for the removal of the Lawrence Statue in Lahore is also one such incident, which forced the Government to weigh its own legal standing and review the extent of control it could exercise on its own administrative branch. Though the Nagpur Flag Satyagraha and the Lawrence statue agitation were two different movements separated by distance, yet the principle involved in both the movements was similar. This movement was again an act of defiance, an expression of freedom. It reflected a newfound pride, which emanated from the knowledge that common, ordinary people could enter the administrative branches and take decisions or pass resolutions, which in a normal situation would have been crushed as an act of defiance. The fact that the Government was forced to formulate strategies to deal with such situations proved the extent to which the Non-Cooperation Movement had humbled the colonial regime in India. These incidents, as previously said, might not be having much

significance in terms of tangible achievements but they serve as important indicators in the assessment of what the popular sentiment was after the collapse of the Non-Cooperation Movement.

The Government too was baffled by the issues around which such movements were constructed. A set pattern can be traced in the way the Government reacted and handled such situations. In the case of the Lawrence statue agitation, the Chief Secretary of the Government of Punjab, H.D. Craik informed G.H.W. Davies, Deputy Secretary to the Government of India, "that advanced Indian opinion in Lahore regards both inscription (*'Will you be governed by the sword or the pen?'*) and the pose of the statue as an arrogant claim to British supremacy and as insulting to Indian national feeling."⁵⁰ As in the case of the Nagpur Flag Satyagraha the Government did not consider the demand as representing the genuine nationalist sentiments of the people and looked at the issue as another excuse for the purpose of launching civil disobedience. The Deputy Commissioner of Lahore in a report dated 23rd May 1923, wrote:

"Very few indeed knew that there was any inscription on the base of the statue, and those few saw nothing offensive in the words. It was not until after the elections when the committee was captured by non-cooperators that the public was made generally aware of words described for the first time as 'insulting and provoking'. Extreme politicians saw an opportunity of attacking Government and at the same time of enlisting popular sympathy, and they exploited it to the full. The agitation as conducted by them was essentially anti-

⁵⁰ Home, Poll. File no. 53 of 1923.

Government and anti-British, the Municipal Committee being used as a means of keeping it alive. The agitation was linked up with the campaign of civil disobedience, appeals were made to racial animosities; volunteers were enlisted and their minds inflamed by the regular issue of seditious circulars; and finally the forcible removal of the statue was planned- a resort to violence which was condoned as 'offensive civil disobedience', whatever that may mean."⁵¹

The agitation for the removal of the Lawrence statue started during the non-cooperation days and it earned the support of the Congress. Mahatma Gandhi referred to it on his visit to the city. Addressing a public meeting at Lahore in 1921 he "congratulated the Municipal Committee on their resolution and expressed the hope that if Government did not accept it 'the men and women of the Punjab would lay down their lives to see the proposal accomplished'."⁵²

The agitation regained its momentum around December 1922, when the General Secretary of the Lahore City Congress Committee addressed the Municipal Committee in a letter, asking them if they intended to take adequate steps to have the statue removed from its present position within three weeks. The City Congress Committee also requested the Municipal Committee, that if they were not prepared to take up the issue, then they should inform the Congress Committee as soon as possible so that they "as the representatives of

⁵¹ Home, Poll. File no. 86 of 1924

⁵² Home, Poll. File no. 53 of 1923.

the people might decide on taking such action as might be deemed necessary and advisable to carry out the wishes of the people.”⁵³

In the meantime the nationalists started issuing pamphlets, posters and letters in order to generate public awareness on the issue and appealed to the people to join the National Volunteers with the object of removing the statue. The Municipality as a result passed a resolution on 19th May 1923, that “the present statue be removed and in its place another statue of Lord Lawrence of different kind without the inscription and the pose which are considered objectionable, be put up as early as possible, the cost to be shared by the Government and the Municipality in the ratio of two and one respectively.”⁵⁴

The authorities, this time in Punjab, found themselves in a situation similar to the one faced by their counterparts in the Central Province. The agitation in Punjab took place almost around the same time as the Flag Satyagraha in Nagpur, and the authorities in Punjab did not fail to take notice of the similarities in both these agitations. Though the movements in both the provinces were not directly related and were not being directed or organized by a central leadership in the Congress, yet they were somewhere very strongly connected and the Government was wary of this connection. As has been mentioned in the previous section, the Congress organization was in disarray after the Non-Cooperation Movement subsided. But even in the absence of a centrally coordinated movement on a national scale, agitations like the Flag Satyagraha, for the removal of Lawrence statue in Lahore, and of a similar nature in Calcutta for the removal of the Holwell monument, were very much related to each other. The connection between these

⁵³ Home, Poll. File no. 53 of 1923.

⁵⁴ Home, Poll. File no. 53 of 1923.

movements and the numerous incidents taking place in everyday life is to be understood from the angle that these were means, at times devised by the masses, through which the nationalist consciousness of the ordinary people was being manifested. The Government no doubt found them trivial but at the same time small incidents forced the Government to sit up and take notice because the Government was wary of mass participation.

This anticipatory and cautious approach is reflected not only in the documents related to these movements but also in the fortnightly reports which highlighted small incidents taking place in different parts of the country. These incidents were scattered, unrelated to each other, yet were bound together by the common thread of a new found defiance amongst the masses, caused by the distrust of the foreign Government, which was being expressed in novel ways. For instance the fortnightly report for Bihar and Orissa reported one such incident where a play called '*Bharat Durdasha*', excited a good deal of local interest at Monghyr. The play was a well-known drama, but parts of it were distorted to alter the meaning from the defense of India to its delivery from the oppression of the colonial regime.⁵⁵ Such incidents left the Government puzzled, and at one point it was of the opinion that Congress plans, to popularise *khaddar* and instruct the people in spinning and weaving methods were 'not likely to set the Ganges on fire.'⁵⁶ But at the same time, the Government was forced to take cognisance of "a case of Benares where 2,000 boys from municipal schools wearing *khaddar* and Gandhi caps were escorted by their

⁵⁵ Home, Poll. File no. 25 of 1923. Fortnightly report for Bihar and Orissa for the first half of November 1923.

⁵⁶ Home, Poll. File no. 25 of 1923. Fortnightly report for Bihar and Orissa for the first half of February 1923.

teacher to the Town Hall, where they were addressed by the members of the local Congress Committee.⁵⁷

The confusion and contradiction faced by the Government was clearly reflected in an incident where it was reported that, "of 238 boys, who appeared at the Shahjehanpur High School for the Vernacular Final Examination this month, only four wore Gandhi caps and five *khaddar*. The headmaster who was stationed at Bijnor last year, notes that 50% of the boys then wore Gandhi caps and that *khaddar* was common."⁵⁸ The Government seemed to be weighing the difference between the active and passive phase of the movement with a certain degree of satisfaction, which is all the more ironical because it involved an acknowledgement of the nationalist spirit, but the fact that it had registered a decline, when compared to the Non-Cooperation days, was a cause for relief. So when the Commissioner of Jhansi reported that in the course of an extended tour of the Bundelkhand district, he met with a cordial reception everywhere, the Government was quite relieved and concluded that, "only in the larger towns is there any sign of disloyalty in the division."⁵⁹

One of the consequences of the reach of nationalism was that the anti-Congress forces were in the process of being demoralised and this fact was unpalatable to the colonial authorities. For instance in the United Provinces this phenomenon was observed and the Government reported that, in Etawah a resolution that *charkhas*

⁵⁷ Home, Poll. File no. 25 of 1923. Fortnightly report for United Provinces for the second half of May 1923.

⁵⁸ Home, Poll. File no. 25 of 1923. Fortnightly report for United Provinces for the first half of March 1923.

⁵⁹ Home, Poll. File no. 25 of 1923. Fortnightly report for United Provinces for the first half of March 1923.

should be used in girls schools was passed, while a resolution that all District Board employees should wear Indian made clothes was being considered. In a pensive mood the authorities noted that, "the number of avowed non-cooperators on the board is very small, but very few of the members have the moral courage to take a firm stand against anything believed to have the support of the Congress."⁶⁰ The electoral reforms introduced by the British divided the Indian social structure on caste and communal lines, as was intended, but more importantly they clearly reflected the popular opinion and the support enjoyed by the nationalists amongst the masses. The *Leader* highlighted this while reporting on the elections:

"The municipal elections held in the United Provinces have shown what a strong hold the Congress party has acquired in the urban areas. In Lucknow, Allahabad, Benares, Cawnpore and several other towns of importance the Congress candidates have obtained significant victories. The various loose terms comprised in the term co-operators or moderates have been beaten at the polls, because they were lacking in organization and also because the popular sympathies are with those who have dared and suffered in the country's cause."⁶¹

The Government too acknowledged the reach and impact of the movement, which is implicit in the following observation:

⁶⁰ Home, Poll. File no.112/IV/1926. Fortnightly report for United Provinces for the second half of April 1926.

⁶¹ The *Leader*, 29 March 1923.

“It is noticeable that most of those candidates, who, during the last Legislative Council voted with the Government, were defeated. In fact in the large majority of constituencies the fact has to be faced that any support of the Government is a real handicap to a candidate.”⁶²

A major concern of the Government during this period was the effect or the fallout that a local issue could have on an all-India level. This concern was reflected in the case of the Flag Satyagraha when the Central Government repeatedly pointed out the gravity of the situation to the provincial Government when it initiated talks with the nationalists. The same anxiety was reflected in the debate relating to the agitation for the removal of the Lawrence statue in Lahore. The Government during this period seemed to be weighing each and every incident for its potential for triggering a mass movement and the impact it could leave on a national scale. It was scared that a local issue, even if confined to the limits of a town, might act as a spark and lead to a full blown out confrontation with the nationalists again. It was for this reason that each and every incident, even if the Government considered it insignificant, was first intensely debated at the highest levels for repercussions. This concern was brought out in the case of the Lawrence statue as well when J. Crerar, in a letter, dated 9th August 1923, wrote to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Punjab:

“The agitation has already had repercussive effects in other provinces, as, e.g. in connection with the Holwell

⁶² Home, Poll. File no. 112/IV/1926 Fortnightly report for Bihar and Orissa for the second half of December 1926.

monument at Calcutta, and is therefore of more than provincial concern.”⁶³

In a similar vein the Deputy Commissioner, Lahore tried to establish a connection between the Lawrence statue agitation and the Flag Satyagraha in Nagpur. Pointing it out in a letter, dated 23rd May 1923, he wrote to the Commissioner, Lahore Division that, “the national flag movement, between which and the statue agitation a parallel has often been drawn, will certainly receive an impetus.”⁶⁴

The Government was again in a dilemma when it tried to understand the motive and the support base of the demand for the removal of the statue. According to the Deputy Commissioner, Lahore, “the satisfaction of a popular grievance was a mere cloak for other designs. It was openly declared that a blow was to be struck at the prestige of the Government and that the removal of the statue was to be followed by ‘the removal of the imperial Government’.”⁶⁵ As in the case of the Flag Satyagraha, here also the Government doubted the support base of the movement and considered the demand as a pretext on the part of the Congress to unite its forces against the Government. Before taking any action, which could give a further impetus to the movement, the authorities in Punjab hoped and waited for the movement to die a natural death. H.D. Craik wrote to J. Crerar in the initial stages of the movement that, “the Governor in Council felt that there was a considerable chance of the movement dying a natural death through lack of support and came to the conclusion that in

⁶³ Home, Poll. File no. 53 of 1923.

⁶⁴ Home, Poll. File no. 53 of 1923.

⁶⁵ Home, Poll. File no. 86 of 1924.

these circumstances the premature arrest of the ring leaders might give the movement an impetus which it could not gain of itself.”⁶⁶

However the Government was soon forced to reconsider its stand when “a report was received that 200 volunteers from Rawalpindi had arrived at Lahore”⁶⁷ in order to launch an agitation for the removal of the statue. The newspapers reporting on the agitation also revealed a different picture. The *Leader* reported that, “one Sardar Amrik Singh of the Gujranwala district was arrested today at 12 noon while attempting to remove Lord Lawrence’s statue from the Mall with the help of a chisel and a hammer. He resisted the arrest but was overpowered by the police who soon arrived on the spot and dispersed the crowd, which had gathered round the statue. Shouts of *Sat Sri Akal*, *Mahatma Gandhi ki jai* and *Bande mataram* were raised by the crowd when he was taken to the *thana*. The statue is now guarded by a strong picket of armed police.”⁶⁸ The very next day “one Mulk Raj who had announced that he would follow Sardar Amrik Singh for removing the statue was also arrested.”⁶⁹ The agitation was initially not considered as representing genuine nationalist sentiment but when the sequence of individual arrests continued the *Leader* was also forced to take a deeper look into the issue. Another arrest of “one Ratan Chand, a *khaddar* dressed youth”⁷⁰ was reported on 21st May. The very same day the *Leader* again reported the arrest of “one Jehangir Chand, who styles himself as editor of a vernacular paper, *Sher-e-Punjab*, was taken into police custody while he was proceeding towards the statue with a chisel in his hand with the intention, it is

⁶⁶ Home, Poll. File no. 53 of 1923.

⁶⁷ Home, Poll. File no. 53 of 1923.

⁶⁸ The *Leader*, 17 May 1923.

⁶⁹ The *Leader*, 19 May 1923.

⁷⁰ The *Leader*, 21 May 1923.

alleged, of removing the statue.⁷¹ The *Leader* then drew the following conclusion after taking into consideration the entire sequence of events as they occurred:

“It now appears that some persons, including Congress volunteers and workers, want to make the removal of Lord Lawrence’s statue from its present site, an issue for starting civil disobedience in Lahore although no such course of action has been sanctioned by the Congress executive in the Punjab. Mr. Sanatanam, President of the Punjab Congress Committee, when interviewed stated that no such sanction had been asked for or given by the Provincial Congress Committee. These were acts of individual civil disobedience resorted to on their own initiative. As far as he personally knew there had been no attempt to organize any number of men for this kind of civil disobedience by any of these who had courted imprisonment or by any one else.

It seems that Sardar Amrik Singh’s action has had the effect of spurring others to do the same.”⁷²

The above quoted extract from the *Leader* clearly shows what the popular sentiment was in the aftermath of the Non-Cooperation Movement. Though the movement subsided yet the period between the Non-Cooperation Movement and the Civil Disobedience Movement cannot be depicted as a period of complete stagnation and confusion. As has been discussed in this chapter the different and novel ways in which the nationalist consciousness of the masses was being

⁷¹ The *Leader*, 21 May 1923.

⁷² The *Leader*, 21 May 1923.

manifested were an indicator of the success of the Non-Cooperation Movement. The Nagpur Flag Satyagraha, the agitation for the removal of the Lawrence statue and the numerous incidents, which were taking place in different parts of the country, symbolised this spirit of nationalism, which the Non-Cooperation Movement had successfully inculcated amongst the masses. Incidents taking place in one part of the country spurred the imagination of people who were miles away, and this would lead to similar incidents elsewhere. The Government was able to construct this connection and adopted a cautious attitude when it came to handling incidents like these. Giving voice to such fears and apprehensions, regarding the demand for the removal of the Lawrence statue, the Deputy Commissioner of Lahore said:

“.....To agree to its removal at all involves the admission that the statue is offensive to Indian feeling. If it is removed to another place in India, a foundation will be laid for a similar agitation at some time convenient to those responsible for the present one.”⁷³

The fear that one agitation would trigger off a similar one elsewhere was vindicated in the case of the Lawrence statue agitation, as a similar agitation was launched miles away in Calcutta, for the removal of the Holwell monument also known as the Blackhole Pillar. On 12th June 1923, “Lasman Singh, nephew of Dal Bahadur Giri, a Gurkha non-cooperator leader of Darjeeling, appeared near the pillar with the National flag in one hand and a hammer in the other. He was arrested immediately and taken to the police station followed by a crowd shouting *Bande Mataram*.”⁷⁴ Similar attempts to destroy the

⁷³ Home, Poll. File no. 86 of 1924.

⁷⁴ *The Leader*, 15 June 1923.

monument were made, after the first arrest in the case was reported. The very next day i.e. on the 13th June 1923, "a fifth attempt to destroy the Blackhole monument was made. At about 5.30 quite a large crowd was collected near the monument when a young national volunteer Jugdeo Prasad Sribasti, who came this morning from Gorakhpur appeared with a national flag and a hammer. The police immediately arrested him. The crowd who cheered the man was ordered to disperse. Several people refused to move and five among them were arrested. Some stones were hurled at the police, but nobody was hit."⁷⁵ On July 18th, after several such attempts to destroy the monument were thwarted by the police, the "Holwell's monument, in Dalhousie Square, Calcutta, known as the Blackhole memorial, was declared a protected monument."⁷⁶ In this case also "the President of the Calcutta Congress and Khilafat Committee stated that his committee had not yet decided what course they should take in the matter. For the present, the action of individual volunteers was unwarranted and unsanctioned."⁷⁷ The *Leader* thus concluded that, "evidently it is a movement organized by a few young men unconnected with the Congress or Khilafat organizations."⁷⁸

The fact that the Government was being attacked in its own domain had a twin effect. On one hand it inculcated a sense of pride and confidence in the public mind. However, on the other hand, the bureaucracy consisting of both British and Indian officers was getting demoralized. They were repeatedly being forced to deal with incidents where they found themselves in a helpless situation. The fact that individuals who till recently were behind bars, were now passing

⁷⁵ The *Leader*, 16 June 1923.

⁷⁶ The *Leader*, 19 July 1923.

⁷⁷ The *Leader*, 15 June 1923.

⁷⁸ The *Leader*, 15 June 1923.

orders and resolutions which they were bound to obey, created embarrassing situations which humiliated them. The fortnightly report for Bihar and Orissa brought out one such incident:

“The Deputy Commissioner of Manbhum who is an Indian officer of the Indian Civil Services, reports that the non-cooperators at their first meeting ‘carried everything as they liked by overwhelming majorities.’ He finds his position ‘humiliating’ and has asked to be relieved of the responsibility. Most of the Board’s income is derived from the Jharia coalfields but the Deputy Commissioner fears that a large proportion will be spent on ‘national’ education and on the compulsory spinning of the *charkha* From the neighbouring district of Hazaribagh which also depends on the cess obtained from its collieries for the greater part of its income, a similar state of affairs is reported and the Deputy Commissioner is equally apprehensive.”⁷⁹

The fortnightly report for United Provinces reported a similar incident when, “the Benares Municipal Board held a special meeting to discuss their Health Officer, who is a Government servant. One of the complaints against the Health Officer was that he did not wear *khaddar* or Gandhi cap.”⁸⁰ In the case of the agitation for the removal of the Lawrence statue, the Deputy Commissioner of Lahore weighed the options open to the Government and said that, “a concession in this matter will do more to take the heart out of English officials than

⁷⁹ Home, Poll. File no. 25 of 1924. Fortnightly report for Bihar and Orissa for the second half of July 1924.

⁸⁰ Home, Poll. File no. 112 of 1925. Fortnightly report for United Provinces for the second half of February 1925.

any event of recent years. They will feel that they have been let down by Government and this feeling will be shared by a large number of Indian officials, who under conditions of great difficulty are striving, to maintain the authority of Government against disruptive forces and whose success depends on the respect which the Government commands. I cannot therefore recommend that the proposal be accepted.”⁸¹

So the Government took into account the consequences that it might have to face if it acceded to the demand for the removal of the statue and asserted its legal claim on the statue which it claimed, “is held by the Municipality in trust on the implied understanding that it is suitably installed and maintained.”⁸² The Municipality contested this view and insisted that it was absolutely their property.⁸³ The Government was forced to review its stand when it became clear that the demand was supported not only by the extremist element, but also by “respectable people at large in the Punjab who take umbrage at the pose and inscription on the statue which, they hold, continually reminds them that they are a conquered province. A sentiment which is shared by respectable people not otherwise given to agitation has to be reckoned with, whatever its logical basis.”⁸⁴ The colonial regime after the collapse of the Non-Cooperation Movement, was not only trying to gauge the damage done to its authority, but was also devising strategies so as to contain this damage, or in other words to prevent the recurrence of such a movement. In the process it tried to understand the support base of the nationalists. It clearly divided the Indian social structure into those who had already crossed the line

⁸¹ Home, Poll. File no. 86 of 1924.

⁸² Home, Poll. File no. 53 of 1923.

⁸³ Home, Poll. File no. 53 of 1923.

⁸⁴ Home, Poll. File no. 53 of 1923.

and those who had not. It was the support of the latter, which it believed was crucial for the survival of British Raj in India. This attitude is clearly reflected in the following extract taken from a letter, written by the Chief Secretary to the Government of Punjab. It said:

“In the meantime the latent feeling of dislike to the statue among well disposed persons has grown and has been stimulated by the prominence, which the extremists’ agitation has given to the question. It is reflected in the attitude of the Municipality, which although only partially composed of extremist members has always shown a marked degree of common feeling in their expression of dislike to the present statue. And it is further evidenced by almost entire unanimity of the Press in its animadversions on the question. There is little likelihood of such a feeling dying out. On the contrary every fresh attempt to remove the statue will probably add to the latent dislike felt towards it by persons who would never in any way join or countenance such attempts.”⁸⁵

While the Government was desperately trying to figure out a way by which it could extricate itself from the tricky situation, the dislike for the statue kept on increasing amongst all the sections of the public. The matter was raised again and again in the Municipal Committee. Reporting the matter the *Leader* said:

“The resolution of Lala Ushnak Rai that a wall be erected along the railings existing at present to the height of about 20 feet so as to screen the Lawrence statue from

⁸⁵ Home, Poll. File no. 53 of 1923.

the public view again came up for discussion before the Lahore Municipality. He appealed to the European and Indian Christians in the house to consider the wounded feelings of the Indians, saying that the words '*Will you be governed by pen or swords?*' were addressed to Indians and not to Europeans. He pointed out that the silence on the part of the Government did not mean the end of the matter. They were demanding their right under the Municipal Act. A majority of the members supported the resolution."⁸⁶

Having reached the conclusion "that the agitation was factitious at the outset but has now taken root"⁸⁷, the Government then tried to reconcile its various interests. An acceptance of the demand would deliver a blow to the Government's authority and would be 'looked on as a concession to disloyal agitation', which the colonial Government was not in a position to afford. But an outright rejection of the demand would further alienate those sections which were still loyal or which were yet undecided. So the Government of Punjab, on the advice of the Secretary of State in London and the Government of India, decided and conveyed the decision to the Commissioner of Lahore that, "the Government are not in a position to make any contribution, and that, if it was the intention of the Municipal Committee to suggest that the Government should find two-thirds of the cost from public subscriptions, the Government would prefer that the Committee should itself raise the subscription required."⁸⁸

⁸⁶ The *Leader*, 14 February 1923.

⁸⁷ Home, Poll. File no. 53 of 1923.

⁸⁸ Home, Poll. File no. 53 of 1923.

The Commissioner of Lahore informed the Municipality which was short of funds and not in a position to raise the amount, which was required in order to remove or replace the statue. It therefore dropped the issue and requested the Government to take over the Lawrence statue. The Viceroy of India in a telegram, dated 9th November 1923, informed the Secretary of State for India with a hint of relief and satisfaction that, "orders of the Punjab Government rejecting proposals of Municipality that Government should bear part cost of substitution of new statue were communicated to Municipality towards the end of October. At the meeting of Municipal Committee on 27th October, question of substitution was dropped in view of financial stringency and Government were requested to take over the existing statue."⁸⁹

The issue was thus solved but not without exposing the precarious position in which the colonial regime found itself in the aftermath of the Non-Cooperation Movement. At the same time the movement is also an interesting example of a local level agitation launched at the initiative of the ordinary people which forced the Government to review its own position, and thus reflects on the extent to which the Non-Cooperation Movement was successful in arousing the nationalist consciousness of the masses.

⁸⁹ Home, Poll. File no. 53 of 1923.

ASSERTION OF COMMUNAL IDENTITIES

The Non-Cooperation Movement signifies the beginning of a new phase in the struggle for India's freedom. More significantly, it marked the rise of Mahatma Gandhi on the Indian political scene as the unchallenged authority whose personality and ideology would become an inseparable part of the national movement. Gandhi, a shrewd observer, had carefully studied the Indian political scene before launching the Non-Cooperation Movement. His experience in South Africa and his involvement in local struggles like in Champaran, Kheda and Ahemdabad upon his arrival in India had made him realize the shortcomings of the method of appealing to the liberal sense of the colonial masters by submitting petitions and hoping that the next stage of constitutional reforms would be a genuine move in the direction of delegating authority to the Indians and a step forward towards attaining self government. However these hopes were dashed to the ground in 1909, and again in 1919 when the principle of diarchy was introduced.

Gandhi realized that if the rulers of India were aliens then so were the methods being applied by the Indian politicians. There was no involvement of the masses, who had no say in the day-to-day governance of their lives. But more importantly they did not have a say in seeking redress to the system. He also underlined the importance and absolute necessity of Hindu-Muslim unity because the differences between the two communities were often played up by the colonial government as justifications for their presence in India for the purpose of maintaining law and order, without which India would be annihilated owing to the deep distrust between the two communities which was supposed to be firmly rooted in India's history. This

argument was based on the assumption that there were homogeneous Hindu and Muslim communities, and is therefore erroneous. Another fundamental tenet of the Non-Cooperation Movement laid down by Gandhi was the emphasis on Swadeshi, which meant withdrawal of support from the colonial regime in all forms. Since a mass movement launched on a national scale could have serious repercussions if it took a violent turn, so non-violence was to be the cornerstone of the Non-Cooperation Movement and was the foundation of Gandhi's ideology.¹

A complete turnaround in terms of strategy was thus effected by Gandhi which was reflected not only in the manner in which the congress organization during this period penetrated beyond the traditional centres of political activity to take root in the towns and villages of India, but also in the way Mahatma Gandhi allowed the Khilafat issue to completely take over the Non-Cooperation Movement in order to forge a Hindu-Muslim alliance. He acted swiftly. In his own words, "he seized upon the 'moment of moments' and called upon the Hindus to help the Muslims to the utmost, for such an opportunity to unite the two communities 'would not arise in a hundred years.'"² Some leaders in the Congress were sceptical of mixing up the Khilafat issue with that of the national freedom.³ Khilafat was a religious issue and arousing Muslim passions around it could prove to be dangerous because such passions, once aroused would be difficult to contain. Many authors working on the period have also argued that "alliances are always forged for specific purposes and their continuance depends on their being mutually beneficial for the contracting parties. They can

¹ For details of the Gandhian strategy of non-violence see Bhagwan Josh, *Struggle for Hegemony in India, 1934-41*, Vol.II, New Delhi, 1994.

² Abdul Hamid, *Muslim Separatism in India 1885-1947*, Lahore, 1967, p. 144.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

never be interpreted as proofs of unity of different groups, a mistake which the Congress leaders repeatedly made in their dealings with the Muslims.”⁴

The period of intense communal strife from 1923-27 is often referred to as a proof of the underlying distrust, which marked the alliance, and puts a question mark against any claims of Hindu-Muslim unity achieved during this period.⁵ The Congress, according to this line of argument, “had no direct access to and wielded very little influence over the Muslim masses.”⁶ The emphasis laid by Gandhi on cow-protection is cited by some authors to paint the alliance as a simple bargain struck by him to save the cow in return for Hindu support for the Khilafat issue.

However the above arguments, even if to a certain extent true, provide too simplistic an explanation to a highly complex and critical period in Indian history. The Non-Cooperation – Khilafat alliance ‘is justly regarded as the high watermark of Hindu-Muslim unity so far unmatched in the history of this country.’⁷ The alliance between the Congress and the Khilafat organization did not mature into a permanent Hindu-Muslim accord, but the Hindu-Muslim unity of the period 1916-22 which would never be replaced again, was an unprecedented phenomenon.

⁴ Prabha Dixit, “Political objectives of the Khilafat Movement in India” in Mushirul Hasan, ed., *Communal and Pan-Islamic Trends in Colonial India*, New Delhi, 1985, p. 65.

⁵ For summarised details on the communal riots that plagued the North Indian provinces of United Provinces, Central Provinces and Bihar and Orrisa during the period 1926-27, see table attached at the end of the chapter taken from Home, Poll File no. 10/56/1927.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

⁷ Ali Ashraf, “Khilafat movement: A Factor in Muslim Separatism.” In Mushirul Hasan, ed., *op.cit.*, p. 82.

This chapter will not deal with the period when the Congress-Khilafat alliance was strong, or with the events which led to the formation of the alliance. It will also not deal with the events that led to the collapse of the alliance. The chapter deals with what happens after the alliance breaks up, and why it happens. The period 1923-27 witnessed communal riots on an unprecedented scale. These riots which were taking place in cities, towns and villages were not centred around one common issue of national importance but were triggered off by local issues, bordering on the trivial. When seen in the light of the communal harmony and understanding of 1919-22, they present a stark contrast, which is difficult to understand. Instead of analysing how the Congress-Khilafat alliance unravels and finally breaks on the political plane and how the secular leaders turn communal in the aftermath of the Non-Cooperation Movement. The chapter will deal with the riots taking place during this period, the issues around which they centred, but more importantly the reasons, due to which incidents and issues which could have been peacefully settled, took a communal turn.

On the surface, it might look as if after the communal harmony of the non-cooperation days, all of a sudden almost the entire nation got engulfed in a communal blaze. But the fortnightly reports of the period 1920-22 reflect a situation where there is a subtle undercurrent of tension at local levels centring around issues such as cow-sacrifice. At the same time it has to be kept in mind that these incidents were reported by the government in order to highlight the shallow nature of the Hindu-Muslim alliance. The British government, which subscribed to the view that Hindus and Muslims were fundamentally incompatible, viewed the alliance as a short term political formula forged in order to bend the government and an attempt at wresting

political space by both the communities. The government officials with a kind of smug satisfaction often reported these incidents. The United Provinces administration reported that "the opinion of officers on tour is that the movement in the interior of the district is shallow and unreal and the bulk of the people know nothing about it and do not care."⁸ The Government time and again reported a feeling of insecurity and bitterness between the two communities.⁹ This bitterness, that the Government talked about, most of the times resulted from disputes and misunderstanding centred around the sacrifice of cow on the occasion *Bakr-Id*. The fortnightly report of August 1920 notes, "In Azamgarh and some of the eastern districts, the prospects of the coming *Id* are growing doubtful. A large number of Mussalmans are making a definite stand insisting on cow-sacrifice. They fear that if cow-sacrifice is given up this year to placate the Hindus, the establishment of a precedent may be held to bind them indefinitely."¹⁰ The disappointment of the Hindu community 'at the attitude taken up by the Mussalmans on the subject of cow-sacrifice'¹¹ was highlighted and reported throughout the Non-Cooperation Movement even if there were as many incidents where Muslims willingly gave up cow-sacrifice out of goodwill. For instance, it was reported in Fyzabad that the Municipality "passed a resolution prohibiting cow-killing in the municipal area but the resolution remained a dead letter. In some places the ultra-orthodox sacrificed more cows than usual. In other places, for example in Sitapur there was hardly any sacrifice of cows and one Mussalman who did sacrifice was excommunicated and

⁸ Home, Poll. File no. 33. Fortnightly report for the second half of November 1920 for United Province.

⁹ Home, Poll. File no. 18 of 1921. Fortnightly report for the first and second half of September 1921 for United Province.

¹⁰ Home, Poll. File no. 111. Fortnightly report for the first half of August 1920 for United Province.

¹¹ Home, Poll. File no. 112. Fortnightly report for the second half of August 1920 for United Province.

deprived of water for a whole day.”¹² The Government then concluded with a certain amount of satisfaction that “on the whole the number of cows sacrificed probably remained the same.”¹³ In another incident a destitute Hindu had died in a hospital and “no Hindus were forthcoming to perform the funeral ceremony. The corpse was removed by Muhammadan volunteers with cries of ‘*Ram nam sat hai*’”¹⁴ The government again observed sceptically that, “the permanency of this attitude, however, remains to be proved.”¹⁵

These incidents might suggest that the Khilafat-Congress alliance was a superficial arrangement between the politicians belonging to the two communities, which had failed to percolate to the lower levels. In a report the administration noted that, “the *Bakr-Id* passed off without disturbance. Abdul Bari of Lucknow was prominent in an effort to induce Muhammadans not to kill cows, but the *Muslim Hitaishi* strongly opposed this movement on religious grounds and it seems to have made no impression on the lower class Muhammadans who feared that inaction this year might be regarded as a precedent and that the government would never allow them in future to return to their old practice.”¹⁶ Though most of the riots that took place after the collapse of the movement were centred around issues like cow-slaughter, music before mosques etc., but it needs to be kept in mind that cow-sacrifice had always been a contentious issue between the two communities. It did not originate in the period when Non-

¹² Home, Poll. File no. 70. Fortnightly report for the first half of September 1920 for United Province.

¹³ Home, Poll. File no. 70. Fortnightly report for the first half of September 1920 for United Province.

¹⁴ Home, Poll. File no. 59. Fortnightly report for the first half of October 1920 for Rajputana and Ajmer-Merwara.

¹⁵ Home, Poll. File no. 59. Fortnightly report for the first half of October 1920 for Rajputana and Ajmer-Merwara.

¹⁶ Home, Poll. File no. 112. Fortnightly report for the second half of August 1920 for Bengal.

Cooperation Movement was launched or in the aftermath. Gail Minault argues that just like the Khilafat was merely a symbol on which to focus a variety of Muslim anxieties; the cow served a similar purpose for the Hindus.¹⁷ Mushirul Hasan argues on a similar line and points out that the cow had been systematically made a symbol around which to mobilize the Hindu community by leaders 'claiming to be ardent champions of Hindu-Muslim unity. Tilak made the cow symbol an integral part of the Shivaji festival and assumed a leading role in Poona's Cow Preservation Society. Others venerated and worshipped the cow and shared a life-long passion for its protection. Gandhi was one of them. He regarded the cow with the same veneration as his mother, declaring that its protection was a central fact of Hinduism and dearer to him than anything else.¹⁸ Hasan says that by consciously linking up the issue of cow-slaughter with the Khilafat issue, Mahatma Gandhi made it look like a bargain even though he firmly denied having any such intentions.¹⁹

Muslims in many places renounced eating beef and at places were prevailed upon by Muslim leaders not to destroy the Hindu-Muslim accord.²⁰ But once the alliance snapped, a feeling of mutual distrust surfaced amongst both the communities and issues such as cow-slaughter, which were a symbol of Hindu-Muslim unity when the movement was on, now became a bone of contention between the two communities. That a feeling of deep distrust became visible on both sides cannot be denied. The riots took place in the remotest of towns and villages. It can be said that Hindu-Muslim unity, as an ideology

¹⁷ Gail Minault, *The Khilafat Movement: Religious Symbolism and Political Mobilisation in India*, Delhi, 1982, p. 78.

¹⁸ Mushirul Hasan, *Nationalism and Communal Politics in India 1885-1930*, New Delhi, 2000, p. 219.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 220.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 220.

and in the form in which Gandhi propagated it, had not percolated down to the lowest levels. Another phenomenon unique to the movement was the growing influence of the *Ulema*. The *Ulema* was brought in to establish a contact with the Muslim masses and were largely responsible for turning Khilafat into religious cry for the Muslims; whereas for the Hindus, non-cooperation was a matter of politics. By January and February 1922, Gandhi realised that the movement was no longer in control and after violence broke out in Chauri Chaura, he called off the Non-Cooperation Movement. But the Khilafat question remained unresolved and the *Ulema*, which over the time had got into a position of power, found it very difficult to explain the decision to their followers who had been meticulously rallied around the symbol of Khilafat.

However this does not mean that the Congress-Khilafat alliance was an opportunistic arrangement between the leaders of the two communities with no support at the mass level. That the alliance attained the unprecedented objective of mobilizing the ordinary masses against the colonial regime was an achievement in itself. It is to the credit of the communal understanding, which prevailed during this period, that an incident like the Moplah rebellion, which took place in Malabar in August 1921, was not painted in communal colours. There were many reasons that triggered off this rebellion in which the Muslim peasantry looted, killed and forcibly converted individuals from amongst the landlord class, which was predominantly Hindu. Economic grievances, government repression and even a twisted interpretation of the Khilafat were some of the reasons for the outbreak of the rebellion. The incident of forced conversions and looting, which were reported on daily basis during the period, could have easily triggered reactions in the rest of the country. But owing to

the excellent understanding between the leaders and even at the mass level, that did not happen.

The press was divided on the issue of Moplah rebellion. Though the entire press condemned the incident yet there was a clear difference of opinion regarding the reasons that triggered it off. "The extremist press held that the Moplahs were goaded into breaking the law by provocative acts on the part of the officials, while the moderate journals opined that the Non-Cooperation Movement was more or less responsible for the outbreak as it had poisoned the mind of the ignorant and fanatical Moplahs against the government."²¹ The newspapers carried reports of the Hindu landlords known as *Namboodris* being forcibly converted.²² Some newspapers like the *Leader* even questioned the rationale of the Non-Cooperation, which propagated the need for Hindu-Muslim unity as one of its fundamental tenets. An article in the *Leader* reported:

"Tales of the forcible conversion to the Muhammedanism by the Moplah rioters are being received from all parts of Ernad. The Moplahs seem to threaten every Hindu with death in the event of his failure to embrace the Muslim faith. The rioters have not spared a single Hindu house in Ernad without being looted."²³

A few days later the *Leader* again carried the reports of 'indiscriminate murder, rape and plunder of innocent Hindus and even

²¹ Home, Poll. File no. 18 of 1921. Fortnightly report for the first half of September 1921 for Central Provinces and Berar.

²² The *Tribune*, 3 August 1921.

²³ The *Leader*, 1 September 1921.

practicing forcible conversions.²⁴ The writer then sarcastically commented on the Moplah rebellion as a 'lurid commentary on the unreality of the much vaunted Hindu-Muslim unity.'²⁵ The *Pioneer* directly blamed the Non-Cooperation and the Khilafat movement for the outbreak:

"The hoisting of the Khilafat flag, the boastful shout of the rebels, '*We have now got Swaraj*', the formation of the Moplah 'Volunteer' Corps in the open and avowed connection with the Non-Cooperation Movement, the wearing of uniforms and carrying of arms of a uniform pattern by the rebels, all point to the intensive Non-Cooperation propaganda that has been carried on among the Moplahs for the last eight months as the root cause of the outbreak, which has all the indications of having been deliberately planned by unscrupulous men.'²⁶

The *Leader* even issued an appeal "to the Arya Samajists to go to Malabar and to purify those Hindus that have been forcibly compelled to embrace Islam and to bring them back to the religion of their forefathers. The Moplahs by their excess have terribly injured the cause of Indian nationalism."²⁷ It is to the credit of the Congress and the Khilafat committee leaders, as well as the understanding achieved at the mass level between the two communities that the highly provocative incidents that occurred in Malabar did not trigger off violent reactions elsewhere in the country. The fortnightly reports of the period do not contain a single incident of communal violence in the

²⁴ The *Leader*, 5 September 1921.

²⁵ The *Leader*, 5 September 1921.

²⁶ The *Pioneer*, 2 September 1921.

²⁷ The *Leader*, 5 September 1921.

North Indian provinces of Bihar and Orrisa, the Central Provinces and Berar, United Provinces and Delhi. The administration and a section of the press, as quoted above, attempted to directly blame the Khilafat movement for the rebellion who were staunchly defended by the extremist press led by newspapers such as the *Tribune* and The *Searchlight*. The *Tribune* in an article made out a strong case against establishing any such connections. It said:

“In reality it is difficult to see why Non-Cooperation should be sought to be made a scapegoat in this particular case. The unfriendliness exhibited by the Moplahs to Hindus shows that the spirit of Non-Cooperation of which cooperation between the Hindus and the Mahommedans is the very essence, can have had little to do with the outbreak while the violent acts and the measures of active resistance attributed to them show that they neither understood nor appreciate the other half of the creed of the non-cooperator, namely, the supreme necessity for non-violence.”²⁸

In the same vein the *Searchlight* also argued that, “the reported attacks on Hindu shrines and on Hindus are facts which militate against the charge that the outbreak is due to political agitation. The fact that the outbreak is not the first of its kind also points to a presumption against attributing the riots to political agitation.”²⁹ Though the pro-Non-Cooperation press staunchly defended the movement and the Congress leaders insisted that “it was not the Congress propaganda but the absence of the same that is responsible

²⁸ The *Tribune*, 30 August 1921.

²⁹ The *Searchlight*, 2 September 1921.

for the outbreak”³⁰, yet the rebellion and the incidents of forced conversions, murders and looting did leave an impression on the public mind and might have contributed in generating distrust between the two communities. Analysing the impact left behind by the Moplah rebellion both at the political plane as well as the mass level, Gail Minault says that, “Hindu-Muslim understanding had been irrevocably violated by the Moplah rebellion. Even Gandhi had to admit that mutual distrust and a sectarian spirit were predominant.”³¹

Another factor that added to the distrust between the two communities was the growth of religious movements started by organizations such as the Arya Samaj. Two prominent Hindu themes were the *Shuddhi* (reclamation of outcasts and conversions from other communities) and *Sangathan* (self-strengthening). As a reaction the Muslims started parallel movements on the same line, which were known as the *tabligh* and the *tanzim*. However, it is difficult to say who was reacting to what during that period. David Page commenting on the growth of such movements says that the *Shuddhi* and the *Sangathan* movements were a “Hindu reaction to the superior powers of mobilization demonstrated by the Muslims during the Khilafat movement.”³² Whatever might have been the reason, these movements contributed significantly towards deepening the feeling of distrust and fear. In a majority of the cases these movements, their activities, leaders etc. played an important role in triggering off communal violence wherever they were active. At least on the surface these movements could be blamed for the communal antagonism, though various historians like David Page, Mushirul Hasan, Gyanendra

³⁰ The *Searchlight*, 9 September 1921.

³¹ Gail Minault, op.cit., p. 149.

³² David Page, *Prelude to Partition*, Delhi, 1999, p. 75.

Pandey, Gail Minaault etc., point out that beneath the surface there were other, more important reasons. The view of these authors will be discussed later in the chapter after briefly looking at some of the riots that took place during the period and the issues around which they revolved.

A general feeling of distrust and uneasiness is reflected in 1922 when the Government observed that "there are distinct signs, that, Hindu-Muslim unity, never genuine, is waning. The campaign to secure the wearing of *khaddar* at the *Id* either simply failed or caused irritation. Resolutions by Municipal Boards prohibiting cattle slaughter are strongly resented. A section of Hindu extremists has, as before, been unable to commit the Muhammadans by carrying resolutions for immediate civil disobedience. The overt signs may not be numerous, but it is certain that Muhammadans are increasingly restive of Hindu dominance."³³ The differences were noticed not only among the masses, but also at the grass root levels in both the Congress and the Khilafat organizations. The Civil Disobedience Enquiry Committee and the Khilafat Enquiry Committee, which were touring the country at the time for the purpose of testing the preparedness of the nation for launching a programme of Non-Cooperation, reflected a contrary tendency. While touring the province of Bihar and Orissa the former recorded a majority of witness, as not in favour of launching such a programme as the province, presently, was not prepared for it. On the other hand witnesses who deposed to the Khilafat Enquiry Committee, urged mass civil disobedience and the wholesale boycott of foreign goods and declared that their district were ready for mass civil

³³ Home, Poll. File no. 18 of 1922. Fortnightly report for the first half of June 1922 for United Province.

disobedience.³⁴ The administration observed "this difference of tone between the Hindu and Muhammadan witnesses is not without significance. The Commissioner of Patna thinks there is a growing split between the Khilafat and the Hindu Congress parties, and mentions a report from Bihar that the Khilafat and Congress committees there are already splitting up into small groups which are working independently. The feeling is evidently growing in strength that Hindu-Muslim unity is not genuine and that the two movements cannot go hand in hand."³⁵

The differences that had developed at the grass root levels in both the organizations were in turn relayed to the masses and were expressed in the form of violent incidents that took place on occasions such as *Muharram* and *Ganpati* festival.³⁶ The Government also noticed that festivals such as *Dussherha Ram Lila* which till 1921 "bore a distinct appearance of a demonstration against police interference"³⁷ were in 1922 concluded with the help of "the police standing by at strategic points in case of rows developing between rival communities."³⁸ In 1922 the differences between both the communities had started to appear on the surface, both at the organizational and the mass level, and as pointed out above, were inter-related. A careful reading of the events taking place at the national level when analysed along with the reports of incidents taking

³⁴ Home, Poll. File no. 18 of 1922. Fortnightly report for the second half of August 1922 for Bihar and Orissa.

³⁵ Home, Poll. File no. 18 of 1922. Fortnightly report for the second half of August 1922 for Bihar and Orissa.

³⁶ Home, Poll. File no. 18 of 1922. Fortnightly report for the first half of September 1922 for Central Provinces.

³⁷ Home, Poll. File no. 18 of 1922. Fortnightly report for the second half of September 1922 for Delhi.

³⁸ Home, Poll. File no. 18 of 1922. Fortnightly report for the second half of September 1922 for Delhi.

place in the lowest rungs of the organizations, clearly show that the distrust at the level of political leadership was seeping down to the lower levels. The proclamation of Muslim leaders like Abdul Bari, the erstwhile apostle of Hindu-Muslim unity, who now spoke the language of a zealot and urged Muslims to sacrifice cows without regard for Hindu feelings³⁹, were bound to trigger off a chain-reaction at the grass-root level. The Government officials noticed these reactions. In a fortnightly report the administration observed that "the Khilafat workers took no part in the procession organized by the Congress committee in honour of Gandhi's birthday, and two of them, in the course of a quarrel, took occasion to inform the Congress workers that, if the Khilafat questions were satisfactorily settled, there would be an end of Hindu-Muslim unity."⁴⁰ This bitterness of feelings was not confined to the Muslims alone and was shared by the Congress workers as well, who were increasingly being identified as representatives of the Hindu community. At a meeting at Patna, held to raise subscriptions for the Congress reception fund, a speaker wished to know what steps the Congress Committee were taking to protect the Hindus from insults and humiliations at the hands of Muhammadans who had forcibly realized subscriptions from the Hindus for the *Muharram*.⁴¹

In the meanwhile movement like *Shuddhi* and *Sangathan*, which inevitably provoked a reaction on the Muslim side as well, were gaining in momentum. Other than these movements which were being carried out by the Arya-Samaj, with leaders like Swami Shardhanand, Moonje

³⁹ Francis Robinson, *Separatism Among Indian Muslims, 1860-1923*, Cambridge, 1974, p. 339.

⁴⁰ Home, Poll. File no. 18 of 1922. Fortnightly report for the first half of October 1922 for Bihar and Orissa.

⁴¹ Home, Poll. File no. 18 of 1922. Fortnightly report for the first half of September 1922 for Bihar and Orissa.

and Malviya actively campaigning for them, many local level movements, *dals* and *akharas* sprang up during this period which were then countered by many Muslims who were simultaneously organizing their community on similar lines. In Central Province and Berar, the Government reported that, "the *Sangathan* movement is spreading. A *Mahabir Dal* with a managing committee has been formed at Sangor and branch *Maha Sabhas* have also been organised. At Amraoti the formations of a Muhammadan '*akhara*' as a counter blast against the *Sangathan* movements is reported."⁴² Visits of religious leaders like the Shankracharya further aggravated the volatile state of affairs that prevailed during the period. On one such tour of Berar on behalf of the Hindu *Sangathan* movement the Shankracharya stated that, "he would prefer India to be under British rule for another century rather than that Swaraj should come with Muhammadan assistance."⁴³ A month later Swami Satyadeo toured the province on behalf of the same organization. The administration reported that, "before he left he succeeded in offending the Muhammadans at some centres by remarking that they were almost all converted Hindus."⁴⁴ Such visits and statements when reported in the press evoked strong sentiments on the other side. The fortnightly report for Bihar and Orissa stated:

"The visit of Swami Shardanand to Arrah, Patna and Bhagalpur excited the Muhammadans in anticipation. The Jamai-ul-Ulema issued an Urdu poster asking for funds to

⁴² Home, Poll. File no. 25 of 1923. Fortnightly report for the first half of October 1923 for Central Province and Berar.

⁴³ Home, Poll. File no. 112 of 1925. Fortnightly report for the first half of February 1925 for Central Province and Berar.

⁴⁴ Home, Poll. File no. 112 of 1925. Fortnightly report for the first half of May 1925 for Central Province and Berar.

combat the *Shuddhi* movement and exposing the Hindu attempts to pervert the Muslim community, and an opposition meeting was called at Arrah to hear the preaching of a *Maulvi* brought down from the Punjab."⁴⁵

The process of action and counter-action was not confined to these organizations alone, but was percolating down to the lower levels, with local leaders urging their respective communities to abstain from maintaining any relations with the members of the other community, resulting in volatile situation. The United Province Government commenting on the general atmosphere of doubt and suspicion reported that, "In Allahabad precautions are necessary for every petty festival. In Fatehpur and Balrampur the Arya-Muslim feud continues to give trouble."⁴⁶ The masses were also getting embroiled in these conflicts. A Muhammadan lecturer in Muzzafarpur warned his co-religionists that "35,000 Hindu students are being trained in the United Province as Arya Samaj preachers, and therefore it is essential that the Muhammadans should present a united front to the Hindu aggression."⁴⁷ So the atmosphere was one of religious competitiveness, and the daily squabbles centred around the most trivial of issues. A fortnightly report for United Province stated that, "at Maurwana the Muslims objected to Hindus sitting and sleeping whilst their procession went past, and a melee ensued in which 13 simple casualties occurred. One young Muslim was killed."⁴⁸ Thus the

⁴⁵ Home, Poll. File no. 25 of 1923. Fortnightly report for the first half of August 1923 for Bihar and Orissa.

⁴⁶ Home, Poll. File no. 112 of 1925. Fortnightly report for the first half of March 1925 for United Province.

⁴⁷ Home, Poll. File no. 112 of 1925. Fortnightly report for the first half of July 1925 for Bihar and Orissa.

⁴⁸ Home, Poll. File no. 32 of 1927. Fortnightly report for the first half of July 1927 for United Province.

situation in almost entire North India was electric, and even a rumour could spark off communal riots. In the Muttra district the local authorities had to contradict a widely held belief that stray Muslims were murdering sleeping Hindus.⁴⁹ In Saharanpur there was excitement over a bogus handbill that the *Jama Masjid* was to be auctioned.⁵⁰ Quarrels between members belonging to the two communities in same village or locality were blown out of proportion and took a communal turn, triggering off a series of conflicts in the neighbouring areas. A fortnightly report for the United Province stated:

“A chance quarrel in a village in the Jaunpur district has since led to a number of isolated assaults between Hindus and Muhammadans, and it has been necessary to send a small force of armed police to keep order. The rival parties are bent on exaggerating to the utmost the various episodes, which occurred. In one instance the Hindus are accused of murdering a child who died from natural causes. An atmosphere of antagonism originally developed from a quarrel in March when the Hindus were accused of burning the *Holi* in a Muhammadan graveyard. There has also been a riot in a village in the Bijnor district between *Jat* zamidars and *julaha* tenants. This quarrel also arose over a graveyard. Rohilkhand further reports a series of incidents, trivial in themselves, but numerous and significant in present circumstances.”⁵¹

⁴⁹ Home, Poll. File no. 32 of 1927. Fortnightly report for the first half of August 1927 for United Province.

⁵⁰ Home, Poll. File no. 32 of 1927. Fortnightly report for the first half of August 1927 for United Province.

⁵¹ Home, Poll. File no. 25 of 1924. Fortnightly report for the first half of May 1924 for United Province.

The concept of communal representation, introduced by the British, had been institutionalised through electoral reforms. As a result there was much emphasis on the minority status of one community vis-à-vis the majority of the other, not only at the national level but in the provinces as well. This insecurity and increased consciousness was reflected in incidents involving claims and counter claims of religious conversions, which were being carried out by many religious and revivalist organizations on both the sides. The Commissioner of Meerut reported that the Meerut Hindu Sabha "held a large meeting to discuss means of counteracting what was asserted to be an organised campaign by Muhammadans to kidnap Hindu women and children for the purpose of forcible conversions."⁵² This incident triggered off similar incidents in other cities like Cawnpore and Agra where "both Muhammadans and Arya Samajists produced in the district court numerous orphans alleged to have been forcibly converted."⁵³ Provocative speeches by prominent leaders belonging to both the communities added fuel to the fire. For instance the Hindu leader Dr. Moonje addressed a meeting at Amraoti, in the Central Provinces, on the subject of *Sangathanand Shuddhi*. "In his speech he referred to the Nagpur riots and said that there were 20,000 Muhammadans 1,20,000 Hindus. What would happen if the *Mahars* were converted to Islam and the numbers were thus equalized?"⁵⁴ Statements like these generated a sense of fear and apprehension amongst the masses, which was not confined to the cities, where most of the religious organizations were active, but was spreading in the

⁵² Home, Poll. File no. 25 of 1924. Fortnightly report for the second half of June 1924 for United Province.

⁵³ Home, Poll. File no. 25 of 1924. Fortnightly report for the second half of July 1924 for United Province.

⁵⁴ Home, Poll. File no. 32 of 1927. Fortnightly report for the second half of October 1927 for United Province.

countryside as well. In a village in the Meerut division, Muslim villagers were eager to build mosques, which their Hindu counterpart would not allow them to do. The fear as reported by the commissioner was that, "it is apparently impossible to convince the Hindus that the erection of a mosque does not involve the right to perform *kurbani*."⁵⁵ Such incidents and conflicts, which were built around the most trivial of issues, were taking place almost on a daily basis during this period. At times they were deliberately started on some pretext or other, when in reality the issue was something else, and could be traced back in history as a contentious issue between the two communities. The fortnightly report for United Province stated one such incident:

"In Benaras, trouble threatened at one of the historic danger-points in that city—a legacy of Aurengzeb's iconoclastic zeal. Hindu from the villages armed with *lathis* assembled in numbers on hearing that the Muhammadans intended to cut the *peepal* tree at the Gyanbafi mosque. This mosque was erected on the ruins of a demolished Hindu temple and stands in an enclosure of Hindu temples, shrines and sacred wells."⁵⁶

However at times the communities would mobilize themselves for no ostensible reasons, and around issues, which were not even provocative. For instance on one occasion, in Benaras, about 800 Muslims gathered in a small mosque, which usually accommodated about 20 people. The issue, which triggered off such mobilisation, was the ringing of the school bell in a neighbouring municipal school

⁵⁵ Home, Poll. File no. 25 of 1924. Fortnightly report for the second half of July 1924 for United Province.

⁵⁶ Home, Poll. File no. 25 of 1923. Fortnightly report for the second half of September 1923 for United Province.

during prayer.⁵⁷ In another incident, in Cawnpore, two Hindu students were drinking water at a pump near a temple when two Muslims came up and said they wished to wash their hands at the pump. This led to an altercation, which gradually developed next morning into a Hindu Muslim quarrel on a scale that the authorities had to call for military help.⁵⁸ In some cities the situation was so bad that police precautions were required for every wedding party. There was hardly an occasion during the period 1923-27 when festivals like *Muharram* and *Dussehra* did not end up in a communal riot in some place or other. The Government of the United Provinces reported several such incidents that took place in the year 1925 on the day of *Muharram*. The Report stated:

“Their were many provocative acts, eg., a conch blown up by a doctor in charge of a Government hospital, cow dung spread on the floor of a yard where *tazias* were placed, the *Ramayan* read in a loud voice outside a mosque, and broken glass and thorns thrown on the route of a procession just about to pass. In Muttra the Hindus organised volunteers who made themselves obnoxious to both the Muhammadans and the police, and in Gorakhpur a pamphlet was issued calling upon the Hindus to hold aloof. Only in Jhansi it is said that all classes joined in the celebrations, but even there the Bar boycotted the usual entertainment given by the Muhammadan Gentry. In Agra *taziadars* refused for four days to take out their *tazias* but eventually submitted to

⁵⁷ Home, Poll. File no. 32 of 1927. Fortnightly report for the first half of October 1927 for United Province.

⁵⁸ Home, Poll. File no. 32 of 1927. Fortnightly report for the second half of August 1927 for United Province.

the regulations. In several other places *tazias* were not taken out at all owing to restrictions enforced by the local authorities.”⁵⁹

The Government keenly observed the friction generated specially on occasions like the *Muharram* celebrations and “contrasted it with those of two years ago when the Hindus vied with one another in providing refreshments for the Muhammadans.”⁶⁰ By the year 1924, not only had the two communities stopped participating in each other’s festivals, but also observed social boycott of the other community to the extent that even low caste Hindu servants left their Muslim employers and Hindu agricultural labourers refused to work in their fields.⁶¹ The officials noted “a complete breach of social relations between Hindus and Muhammadans. Stories of the type that usually become current when tension is high—a joint beef being thrown into a Hindu well or a cow’s head being thrown into a Hindu temple are being reported, and the ground is prepared for trouble that may break out on the occasion of any trifling incident at the time of a Hindu or Muhammadan festival.”⁶² In the communal frenzy of this period even the dead were not spared, when burials and cremations became issues between the two communities. In Akola, some Muhammadans armed with sticks attacked a Hindu funeral party, which had passed a

⁵⁹ Home, Poll. File no. 112 of 1925. Fortnightly report for the first half of August 1925 for United Province.

⁶⁰ Home, Poll. File no. 25 of 1924. Fortnightly report for the first half of August 1924 for Central Provinces and Berar.

⁶¹ Home, Poll. File no. 112 of 1925. Fortnightly report for the second half of August 1925 for Bihar and Orissa.

⁶² Home, Poll. File no. 112 of 1925. Fortnightly report for the second half of August 1925 for Bihar and Orissa.

dargah with music playing.⁶³ Similarly a Fortnightly report stated that in Muzzafarpur, “feelings between Hindus and Muhammadans are growing worse. In one village the Hindus prevented the Muhammadans from burying a corpse on land, which the Muhammadans claimed as a burial ground. The corpse was eventually buried with the assistance of police.”⁶⁴

The atmosphere of religious frenzy fired the imagination of the masses. As a result new festivals, fairs and processions were invented. They served the purpose of mobilising the communities in order to display their strength to the other community. In the United Province, the Government reported that, “the usually trivial *Ram Dal* processions have become a focus of contention, the Hindus seeking to celebrate them and the Muhammadans to prevent them altogether.”⁶⁵ The *Shuddhi* and *Sangathan* movements emerged during this period as a Hindu reaction to the superior mobilising abilities demonstrated by the Muslim community through the Khilafat movement. This feeling of religious competitiveness had reached the towns and villages also where the rural population began to be polarised and sought to mobilise itself around festivals and religious processions. The Government of Bihar and Orrisa reported one such incident that took place in Bettiah:

“The occasion of the rioting was the *Mahabir Dal* procession. Such processions, until recent years, were very small and not important. About three years ago, the

⁶³ Home, Poll. File no. 112/1/1925. Fortnightly report for the second half of October 1925 for Central Province and Berar.

⁶⁴ Home, Poll. File no. 32/1927. Fortnightly report for the second half of July 1927 for United Province.

⁶⁵ Home, Poll. File no. 25 of 1924. Fortnightly report for the second half of September 1924 for United Province.

Hindu community in North-West Tirhut began to boycott the *Muharram*, and to compensate the lower class Hindus who had enjoyed assisting in the *Muharram*, the *Mahabir* processions were organised on a large scale in imitation of the Muhammadan ceremony. The Muhammadan felt intense resentment first because the *Mahabir* processions on a big scale originated in the boycott of the *Muharram*, and, secondly, because the festival is a caricature of the *Muharram*, all the paraphernalia being imitated—even the cry ‘*Husain, Husain*’ finding a replica in the cry ‘*Jai Sew, Jai Sew*’.”⁶⁶

Talking about how the procession originated and assumed such significance the report goes on to say:

“The innovation dates from the time when the preachers of the Arya Samaj began to frequent Tirhut with their lecturers against non-Hindu religions and particularly against Islam. The practice at the Arya Samaj meetings is to bring down with two or three religious lecturers, one man who is notorious for his vituperations of Islam (incidentally he is entitled to the largest fee). The hostility between the communities which is nourished on these lectures reached its climax at the *Mahabir dal* celebration, which has become almost as provocative to the Muhammadans as the *Bakr-Id* to the Hindus. This year printed notices were issued among the rural villages calling upon the Hindus to come in to the towns, where

⁶⁶ Home, Poll. File no. 32/1927. Fortnightly report for the first half of August 1927 for Bihar and Orissa.

processions would be organised, with spears and *lathis* (for the performance). The result of these preparations was the assembly in Motihari and Bettiah of crowds estimated at twenty and ten thousand people respectively. The procession was taken from in front of a mosque and rioting began.”⁶⁷

Another cause of dissension was playing of music before mosques. As a result wedding processions, *artis* conducted in temples, reciting the *Ramayana* on festivals such as *Dussehra*, could easily trigger off a riot in a charged up atmosphere. At times the Hindus would make as much noise as possible when passing before a mosque.⁶⁸ In Lucknow the administration had to intervene in order to resolve an *arti-namaz* dispute between the two communities.⁶⁹ However at some places, the Muslims were the aggressor. For instance in 1927, the overlapping of the Hindu marriage season with the earlier days of *Muharram* resulted in a number of riots in the United Province. The Government reported that in “Bareilly the Muslims stopped their processions on July 3 on the strength of a report that a marriage procession had passed through a distant quarter of the city with music. On July 4, the *taziadars* insisted that no music should be allowed with any marriage procession, however remote from their own celebrations. The Muslim processions were discontinued for six days, though the *taziadars* were by no means unanimous and though a growing number recognised the unreasonableness of their attitude.”⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Home, Poll. File no. 32/1927. Fortnightly report for the first half of August 1927 for Bihar and Orissa.

⁶⁸ Home, Poll. File no. 32/1927. Fortnightly report for the first half of June 1927 for United Province.

⁶⁹ Home, Poll. File no. 25 of 1924. Fortnightly report for the first half of December 1924 for United Province.

⁷⁰ Home, Poll. File no. 32/1927. Fortnightly report for the first half of July 1927 for United Provinces.

As discussed above, most of the riots that took place during this highly volatile period centred around issues like cow slaughter, music before mosques and some real or imagined grievances on festivals like *Muharram* and *Dussehra*. However these issues were not invented during this period. Cows were slaughtered earlier also by the Muslims on the occasion of *Bakr-Id* and festivals like *Dussehra* and *Muharram* were peacefully celebrated, with both the communities often participating in each others festivals. So why did these issues become a bone of contention, all of a sudden, between the two communities? Was the collapse of the Non-Cooperation and Khilafat entirely responsible for the communal frenzy that overtook almost the entire nation during this period? Though it is true that the Khilafat movement did result in the development of an all-India Muslim identity, and in a way the Non-Cooperation – Khilafat alliance was responsible for introducing religion in the realm of politics. The failure of these movements did play an important role in unleashing a wave of bitter communal riots during the period 1923-27. But to say that this was the only reason, is a very superficial explanation of a very complex process.

However, to explain the various dimensions of Hindu-Muslim relations as propounded by many historians would be going beyond the scope of this dissertation. Reference to other scholars' work is limited only to those aspects, which impinge upon the method of mapping the communal consciousness during this period.⁷¹ Mushirul Hasan traces the roots of communal conflicts to the act of 1909 which,

⁷¹ For a very different framework of understanding relations between the Hindus and the Muslims, over a long period of history, see Shashi Joshi and Bhagwan Josh, *Struggle for Hegemony in India, 1941-47: Culture, Community and Power*, New Delhi, 1994.

“for the first time, provided institutional legitimation to the notion of a distinct, separate Muslim political identity.”⁷² By introducing separate electorates, the British, very cleverly divided the Indian society on religious lines. The reforms created a sense of communitarian solidarity, which resulted in sharp polarisations of interests. Indian political opinion was sharply divided on the need for introducing the principle of separate electorates in the first place. The Congress opposition to it was viewed by the Muslim community as a Hindu attempt to dominate the Muslims. Statement issued by some Hindu leaders, in the aftermath of the Non-Cooperation, did nothing to allay these fears, but deepened them further. For instance before the elections conducted in the year 1926, a Committee was set up in order to assess the working of the reforms introduced by the act of 1919. The press reported certain Hindu leaders as, ‘being confident that the Reforms Enquiry Report will lead to a further advance towards self government and means, therefore, another step on the road leading to Hindu predominance.’⁷³ The principle of separate electorates was first tried out in 1909 on a limited scale but extended and institutionalised by the Act of 1919. Mushirul Hasan argues that, ‘the implications of these Reforms were not felt at the height of the Non-Cooperation Movement, when provincial elections in 1920 were generally boycotted. But once that phase was over, the writing on the wall was clear.’⁷⁴ So the suspicions and fears, which were dispelled, when the Congress Khilafat alliance was forged, again reappeared on the surface once the movement had collapsed.

⁷² Mushirul Hasan, *op.cit.*, p. 180.

⁷³ Home, Poll. File no. 112 of 1925. Fortnightly report for the second half of March 1925 for United Province.

⁷⁴ Mushirul Hasan, *op.cit.*, p. 184.

David Page also adopts the same approach, and argues the British initiative was ultimately responsible for dividing the two communities. According to him the crucial turning point in this process was the Montague-Chelmsford constitutional reforms of 1920. He says that the superior powers of mobilisation exhibited by the Muslims may have sparked off the Arya Samaj campaigns of *Shuddhi* and *Sangathan*, which in turn provoked the *Ulema* to start similar movements. However, 'it was not the evangelical zeal of Hindu and Muslim religious leaders but the political rivalries of the Swarajists and the Liberals'⁷⁵, which created a state of communal tension during this period. In other words more than the activities of the religious leaders and movements started on both the sides, the manner in which election propaganda was conducted during this period, did more damage to the cause of communal harmony. Page argues that, 'the lurid pictures of an all-devouring Muslim leviathan conjured up by such intelligent men as Malviya and Chintamani bore almost no relations to the Muslim position as a minority community with only thirty percent of the elected representation in the council. They bore a great deal of relation, however, to the reality of power within the Hindu community itself such propaganda exercises must be seen, therefore, as means of outmanoeuvring the Swarajists rather than as a response to a Muslim challenge.'⁷⁶ The fortnightly report and other documents pertaining to this period also contain certain evidence, which supports this line of argument to some extent. For instance, on the occasion of *Ramlila*, the playing of music became an issue, not between the two communities in Allahabad, but between the Malviya party and the Nehru family. The fortnightly report for the period contains the following incident:

⁷⁵ David Page, op.cit., p. 84.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 84.

“The approaching *Ram Lila* is still causing anxiety in Etawah and Allahabad. In the latter place the attitude of the Malviya party appears to be responsible entirely for the trouble. The people immediately concerned desire a peaceful *Ram Lila* but this party claims that the Hindus have an absolute right to play music when and where they please. They refuse therefore to agree to the district magistrate’s proposal that music should not be played in front of two principal mosques during sunset prayers, or to give any undertaking that the processions will be got through before sunset. The magistrate believes that their motive is largely the desire to show the Nehru family that they do not rule the Allahabad Hindus.”⁷⁷

Gyanendra Pandey also argues on the same line, that the manner of political mobilisation, the methods used, and the statements made, not only during the Non-Cooperation Movement but also in the subsequent electoral campaigns were largely responsible for heightening the communal consciousness amongst the masses.⁷⁸ He talks about the role played by the Congress leaders in the development of this situation of perennial tension and recurrent conflict. This includes not leaders like Madan Mohan Malviya who actively campaigned on communal lines but also the secular wing of the Congress, which did not lag far behind in ‘appealing to overtly religious sentiments for the sake of immediate electoral gains.’⁷⁹ In the course of a speech delivered in Lucknow, Pt. Madan Mohan Malviya “advocated

⁷⁷ Home, Poll. File no. 112 of 1925. Fortnightly report for the first half of September 1925 for United Province.

⁷⁸ Gyanendra Pandey, *The Ascendancy of the Congress in Uttar Pradesh 1926-34*, Delhi, 1978, p. 116.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

the policy of fighting Municipal elections on a communal basis, though at the same time he depreciated quarrels between the two communities.”⁸⁰ This advice when translated into action by small leaders in localities, towns and villages led to communal friction. An example that took place in Aligarh, around the same time when this speech was delivered, centred around the usual dispute regarding the right to play music before mosque. The Hindus were led by Jwala Prasad, who was a candidate for municipal elections. A similar dispute had earlier taken place in Allahabad and the Government observed that, “the Aligarh Hindus were strongly effected by the claim of the Allahabad Hindus that their right to play music at will should not be interfered with.”⁸¹ The Government had the following observations to make, regarding the incident:

“This year there were two circumstances peculiarly effecting the *Ramlila*. One was the coming elections. Everyone seeking election made it his concern to show his co-religionist electors that he at least intended to stand up at all for every right claimed by his religion. It is commonplace of the separate electorate system that a Hindu candidate has no need to placate Muhammadans and vice versa. He has only to stand well with his co-religionists, and it is well recognised in local elections that the only politics necessary for this business is to abuse the opposite religion and to exalt one’s own at its expense by any sort of means. The other was the *Ram Lila* incident at Allahabad.”⁸²

⁸⁰ Home, Poll. File no. 112/I/1925. Fortnightly report for the second half of November 1925 for United Province.

⁸¹ Home, Poll. File no. 106/XV/1925.

⁸² Home, Poll. File no. 106/XV/1925.

Congress leaders like Motilal Nehru, Abdul Kalam Azad, Rajendra Prasad, Dr. Kitchlew, the Ali brothers and Gandhiji himself, tried to bridge the gap between the two communities by extensively touring various provinces and setting up Unity Conferences. But nothing seemed to work. "At Dehradun Muhammad Ali's insistence on friendship with Hindus was not well received. Abdul Kalam Azad, who was also at Lucknow, admitted in his address that it might take half a century to secure Hindu-Muslim unity."⁸³ Mahatma Gandhi found himself in a helpless situation. "He felt that in the prevailing surcharged atmosphere and mutual distrust he would not be able to persuade either the Hindus or the Muslims to accept his solution."⁸⁴ According to Mushirul Hasan inaction on his part also contributed to the further deterioration of the situation. However the documents reflect a situation where Gandhi had actually been sidelined. The collapse of the Hindu-Muslim alliance had also undermined his influence within the Congress. For instance in the year 1925, "no Muhammadan members attended a meeting of the Lucknow municipal board held to decide the terms of an address to Mr. Gandhi, and the nominated members left before decision was reached. Abdul Bari told his followers not to be present at the meeting at which Mr. Gandhi is to speak. The local Arya Samaj resolved not to present an address to Mr. Gandhi."⁸⁵

As discussed before David Page attributes the communal tension prevailing during this period to the political rivalries of the Swarajists

⁸³ Home, Poll. File no. 25 of 1924. Fortnightly report for the second half of July 1924 for United Province.

⁸⁴ Mushirul Hasan, *op.cit.*, p. 212.

⁸⁵ Home, Poll. File no. 112/1/1925. Fortnightly report for the first half of October 1925 for United Province.

and Liberals, and the reaction that it inevitably aroused on the Muslim side. This approach is shared by Gyanendra Pandey also who says that, leaders like Malaviya were largely responsible for the volatile situation, but more importantly 'Nehru and his Swarajist colleagues gave way under this communal pressure in the end and adopted something of a Hindu communalist position.'⁸⁶ Gyanendra Pandey talks about a 'shift in Swarajist tactics' in the months immediately preceding the elections, when the Swarajists tried to revive their 'Hindu contacts' by inviting religious leaders like Swami Satyadev to campaign for them. He says that the Swaraj party "became 'as good as a Hindu body' as one could want and (Motilal) Nehru himself a 'true Hindu'.⁸⁷ Some members of the Swaraj party attended meetings of Hindu *Mahasabha* as well. Reporting about one such meeting held at Benaras, the administration stated that, "the object of the *Mahasabha* was largely political, in that it enabled the extreme Swarajists, who attended in numbers, to get into touch again with many people of importance, whom they could hardly have met except of a quasi social reform platform."⁸⁸ In Aligarh two unsuccessful Swarajist candidates for the legislative council tried to work up a Satyagrah campaign in connection with music before mosques.⁸⁹ In Cawnpore the murder of a Dalit ('*chamar*') by a Mussalman caused considerable tension between Hindus and Muslims. A demonstration, in which about three thousand Hindus participated, was led by a member of the Municipal

⁸⁶ Gyanendra Pandey, op.cit., p. 121.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 123.

⁸⁸ Home, Poll. File no. 25 of 1923. Fortnightly report for the first half of September 1923 for United Province.

⁸⁹ Home, Poll. File no. 32/1927. Fortnightly report for the first half of February 1927 for United Province.

Board who carried the corpse.⁹⁰ Thus leaders belonging to both the communities played an important role in further aggravating an already fragile situation. Commenting on the prevailing state of affairs, the Government reported:

“Hindu and Muslim leaders do nothing to appease and much to inflame communal feelings. Isolated and comparatively unimportant incidents are seized on as material for aggressive speeches and angry resolutions. The methods of political agitation are being more and more utilized in support of so-called religious claims. Communal feeling is thereby kept in a state of ferment, and the task of localising religious disputes is becoming increasingly difficult.”⁹¹

Thus electoral reforms introduced by the Act of 1919, the manner in which propaganda for elections was conducted and the role-played by leaders belonging to both the communities, played an important part in sharpening the communal cleavages. Another structural change introduced by the Montague-Chelmsford reforms was extension of the scope of local self-Government. “For the first time, a large mass of work relating to public health, sanitation and education came under the effective control of Indians, who received many powers which they could exercise to favour their friends, relatives and members of their religious community.”⁹² The Chairman and members of the district, local and union boards, and

⁹⁰ Home, Poll. File no. 32/1927. Fortnightly report for the second half of October 1927 for United Province.

⁹¹ Home, Poll. File no. 32/1927. Fortnightly report for the first half of August 1927 for United Province.

⁹² Mushirul Hasan, “Communalism in the Provinces: A Case Study of Bengal and Punjab 1922-26” in Mushirul Hasan, ed., *op.cit.*, pp. 251-253.

municipalities became masters of almost all local services. They could not only provide employment to various important posts, but it was also within their powers to issue contracts for public works undertaking, grant of permission to organise *bazaars* and *melas* and, imposing local taxes. They exercised almost complete control over primary education and even the decisions regarding the route of religious processions which was one of the most sensitive issues during this period and a bone of contention between the two communities, were taken by them.⁹³ So the provincial councils, boards and municipalities provided new space, where the battle for gaining political influence would be fought on communal lines.

The monthly reports prepared by the provincial Governments during this period show that there was a marked tendency towards communal groupings in the councils as well as the local bodies. In a situation like this, issues such as cow-slaughter, routes of religious processions etc. resulted in sharp divisions. But in an atmosphere of mutual distrust, which prevailed during this period, even the most trivial of issues were contested between the members on communal lines, and often sparked off riots. As in the case of the Councils, the elections to these local bodies were also fought on local lines, with many candidates 'appealing to the baser feelings of their constituents'⁹⁴. The Central Provinces Government reported that the elections of the office bearers to the Jubbulpore Municipality were fought on purely communal grounds and not a single Muhammadan secured office.⁹⁵ A similar report from Allahabad said, "communal

⁹³ Ibid., p. 253.

⁹⁴ Home, Poll. File no. 112 of 1925. Fortnightly report for the second half of August 1925 for United Province.

⁹⁵ Home, Poll. File no. 112 of 1925. Fortnightly report for the second half of August 1925 for Central Province and Berar.

considerations continue to govern the working of the board. At a recent board meeting there were two candidates for the post of water-works engineer. The Hindu candidate received all the Hindu votes and was therefore elected, whilst the Muhammadan candidate received all the Muhammadan votes.”⁹⁶ The Commissioner of the Monghyr district reported a deadlock in the Municipality owing to communal differences, and therefore suggested that “it may be necessary to supersede the municipal commissioners if the executive is prevented from functioning.”⁹⁷ In Jhansi all the Muhammadan members of the Jhansi Municipal Board resigned “as a protest against the systematic oppression practised by the Hindu majority on their Muhammadan employees.”⁹⁸ The Government reported a similar move on the part of ‘their co-religionists on the Allahabad Municipal Board.’⁹⁹ The divisions of the loaves and fishes of office in municipalities and district boards was a frequent cause of dissension between the communities, owing to which Hindu motions of no-confidence in Muhammadan chairmen and vice versa became one feature in the struggle.¹⁰⁰

The Muslim members in the Councils and on boards and municipalities were often identified by extremist Hindu leaders as cronies of the British. Pt Hriday Nath Kunzru, who was a member of the United Provinces Council, told the *Seva Samiti* at Muttra that the

⁹⁶ Home, Poll. File no. 112/IV/1925. Fortnightly report for the first half of April 1925 for United Province.

⁹⁷ Home, Poll. File no. 112/IV/1926. Fortnightly report for the first half of May 1926 for Bihar and Orissa.

⁹⁸ Home, Poll. File no. 112 of 1925. Fortnightly report for the first half of June 1925 for United Province.

⁹⁹ Home, Poll. File no. 112 of 1925. Fortnightly report for the first half of June 1925 for United Province.

¹⁰⁰ Home, Poll. File no. 25 of 1924 and K.W. Fortnightly report for the first half of June 1924 for United Province.

Government control of the Legislative Assembly was due to Muslim support with the result that Hindu interests received no consideration¹⁰¹. In an atmosphere of mutual distrust and hatred, statements like these affected further schism in the society. As a result any resolution regarding, cow-slaughter, routes of religious processions, constructions of mosques or temples etc., almost always became a cause of dissension. But at times decisions on such issues were actually provocative owing to a Hindu majority on these bodies. Such decisions inevitably caused strong resentment amongst the ordinary Muslims. The Ballia Municipal Board obstructed the *Muharram* processions by allowing the erection of temporary shops in the heart of the city. The Government reported that, 'the Chairman behaved most unreasonably when called upon by the District Magistrate to have them removed, and the structures had to be dismantled by the police.'¹⁰² Most of the times the Government had to intervene in order to resolve such conflicts. So in a way incidents like these strengthened the Government claim that their presence in India was necessary for the purpose of maintaining law and order, as the Hindu and Muslim communities were incapable of living peacefully. The manner in which the Government reported such disputes seems to underline this claim. For instance, the Government reported that, in Allahabad the Magistrate had to intervene to prevent "the erection of a temple within the Grand Trunk Road boundary and in immediate vicinity of a mosque by a local Hindu priest, who is a member of the municipal board and a notorious anti-Muslim agitator."¹⁰³ In a similar incident the Lucknow Municipal Board resolved to give some additional land to the Hindu temple in the Aminabad Park. The

¹⁰¹ Home, Poll. File no. 32/1927. Fortnightly report for the first half of May 1927 for United Province.

¹⁰² Home, Poll. File no. 25 of 1924. Fortnightly report for the second half of August 1924 for United Province.

¹⁰³ Home, Poll. File no. 32/1927. Fortnightly report for the first half of March 1927 for United Province.

Muhammadan shopkeepers reacted immediately and applied at once for permission to build a platform in the park for the purpose of prayer. The Commissioner had to point out to the board, 'that parks are intended for recreation, not for religious worship.'¹⁰⁴

Resolutions by Municipal Boards prohibiting cow-slaughter were also strongly resented. In most cases such resolutions were passed due to a majority enjoyed by the Hindu members on the boards and councils, which deepened the Muslim fear of being dominated by the Hindus if self-government was granted without any provisions being made to safeguard the interests of the Muslim community in India. The Central Provinces Government reported that, "the election of only Non-Cooperation Hindus to be office bearers of certain committees is causing ill-feeling and resignations among the Muhammadans. In Jubbulpore Muhammadans are showing anxiety about the attitude of the Municipal Committee towards cow-killing, and the local extremist Muhammdan threatens bloodshed if cow-killing is interfered with."¹⁰⁵ The real, as well as imagined fear of Hindu domination was so acute that Muslims in some places, appealed to the administration about 'the paucity of their representation' on the District Boards and Municipalities.¹⁰⁶ Debates in the Legislative Assembly regarding the promotion of the Urdu script and allowing its use in courts etc. also provoked communal bitterness.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Home, Poll. File no. 112 of 1925. Fortnightly report for the first half of May 1924 for United Province.

¹⁰⁵ Home, Poll. File no. 18 of 1922. Fortnightly report for the first half of June 1922 for Central Province and Berar.

¹⁰⁶ Home, Poll. File no. 112 of 1925. Fortnightly report for the second half of January 1925 for Bihar and Orissa.

¹⁰⁷ Home, Poll. File no. 112 of 1925. Fortnightly report for the second half of January 1925 for Bihar and Orissa.

Thus the struggle for office and patronage was almost invariably conducted on communal lines. The acrimony generated in United Provinces Legislative Council when a bill for the promotion of compulsory primary education in the rural areas was introduced, provides an interesting example. The provincial Government reported that, "the Muslims united in an attempt to secure a larger number of teachers of their community. An amendment designed to secure this end by introducing religious instructors was negatived. When the motion to pass the bill, as amended, was moved, a Muslim leader gave expression to the resentment felt more particularly against the Swarajists, and the Muslim members then left the House in a body so that the bill might be passed in their absence. The four Swarajist Muslims supported their co-religionists and are said to have resigned from the Swaraj Party."¹⁰⁸

The Hindu-Muslim alliance forged during the Non-Cooperation Movement, and the communal harmony achieved during that period was an unprecedented phenomenon. The Muslim support for the national movement gained during the course of the Non-Cooperation Movement was virtually lost in its aftermath, i.e. the years 1923-27, never to be regained again. This imparts significance to this period when viewed from the angle of building an understanding of the communal relations between the two most important communities of India.

¹⁰⁸ Home, Poll. File no. 112 of 1926. Fortnightly report for the second half of February 1926 for United Province.

<u>DATE</u>	<u>PLACE OF OCCURRENCE</u>	<u>CASUALTIES</u>	<u>CAUSE OF DISTURBANCE</u>
1 st FEBRUARY 1926	Agra city, U.P.	One person roughly handled by hooligans	Cause alleged to be playing of music by Hindu marriage procession. A Muhammadian crowd also attempted to take a corpse in procession through main bazaar.
12 th & 13 th APRIL 1926	Rewari, Punjab	1 killed, several injured	The trouble originally arose out of an individual quarrel between a Hindu and a Muslim followed by an attack on a gathering of Hindus and later the looting of shops.
14 th to 16 th APRIL 1926	Sassaram, Shahabad, Bihar and Orrisa	2 killed and 18 injured	Communal tension arising out of resentment of Muhammadans over the leasing of land in close proximity to the Jama Masjid for purposes of a cinema and the alleged playing of music by a Sikh procession while passing the Mosque.

22 nd JUNE 1926	Damoh, Central Province	7 injured	Bakr-Id celebrations.
	A village in Darbhanga district	4 or 5 slightly injured	Bakr-Id celebrations.
	Jhusi village near Allahabad	1 killed 9 injured	Bakr-Id celebrations.
	Maksudpur, Muzzaffarpur district	4 injured	Bakr-Id celebrations.
23 rd JUNE 1926	Singhasan, Darbhanga district.	4 killed	Bakr-Id celebrations.
	Shankarpur, Muzzaffarpur district.	no injuries reported	Bakr-Id celebrations.
	Bihar sub-division.	no injuries reported	Bakr-Id celebrations.
	Gaya.	no injuries reported	Bakr-Id celebrations.
	Sinhali, Barabanki district, U.P.	9 injured.	Bakr-Id celebrations. Hindu attempted to stop cow-slaughter by force.

24 th JUNE 1926	Gobindpore, Gaya district.	Riots with murder. No. of casualties not reported.	Bakr-Id celebrations.
	Delhi.	3 killed, 62 injured	Bakr-Id celebrations. Immediate cause was knocking down of a man by a runaway tonga on Khari Baoli .
	Katra, Muzzaffarpur district.	2 persons injured.	Bakr-Id celebrations.
15 th JULY 1926	Karachi.	11 injured.	Alleged annoyance to some Hindus by a Jew convert to Islam.
21 st JULY 1926	Purnea, Bihar and Orrisa.	1 person injured.	Muhharram celebrations.
27 th AUGUST 1926	Delhi.	50 persons injured.	The immediate quarrel was between a Hindu bank chaprasi and a Muslim shopkeeper who was instrumental in bringing about his dismissal.
3 rd DECEMBER 1926	Delhi.	1 killed and 4 injured.	Disturbance following the murder of Swami Shardanand.
17 th FEBRUARY 1927	Abdulpur in Ghazipur district, U.P.	1 killed and 16 injured.	Immediate cause was a quarrel between a Muslim and a Hindu halwai over the preparation of some food.

			food.
10 th & 11 th APRIL 1927	Aligarh.	40 persons injured.	Immediate cause was a dispute between Muslim ekka drivers and Hindu paroa contractors.
3 rd to 7 th MAY 1927	Lahore.	27 killed and 272 injured.	Indirect result of insult offered to Sikh woman by a Muhammadan on April 30 th , which led to the institution of criminal proceedings.
11 th JUNE 1927	Dinapur, Bihar and Orissa.	1 killed and 4 injured.	Hindus objecting to cow sacrifice by a Muhammadan.
10 th JULY 1927	Barielly, U.P.	36 injured.	Playing of music at an Arya Samaj temple near the route of a Muharram processions.
11 th JULY 1927	Maurawan in Unao district, U.P.	1 killed and 13 injured.	Muharram celebrations. Objection raised by Muslims to Hindus sitting and sleeping while their procession went past.
11 th & 14 th JULY 1927	Multan, Punjab.	12 killed and 18 injured.	Muharram celebrations.
13 th JULY 1927	Sandila in Hardoi district, U.P.	8 injured.	Muharram celebrations.

14 th JULY 1927	Ballia, U.P.	Few persons injured.	Muharram celebrations- throwing of stones at a Tazia procession.
2 nd AUGUST 1927	Bettiah town, Champan district, Bihar and Orissa.	11 killed and 80 wounded.	Attack by Muhammadans on Hindu religious Mahabiri procession.

THE DEBATE ON CONGRESS STRATEGY: THE SWARAJISTS AND THEIR CRITICS

The violence and bloodshed at Chauri-Chaura expedited the process of winding up the Non-Cooperation Movement, even though by the year 1922, Gandhi felt that he was losing control, and the forces unleashed by the movement were being channelised in the wrong direction. But the Non-Cooperation Movement by its very nature was a novel experience. Though the masses still had no say in how the colonial Government was governing their lives, but the movement offered to them ways by which everybody could contribute something in taking the national cause forward. It would perhaps be right to say that it gave the masses a sense of belonging to a nation, and not to provinces and presidencies. Therefore it was not unnatural that the abrupt end of the movement would also have certain repercussions.

In the previous two chapters we have discussed the level of awareness and the extent to which nationalist consciousness had been aroused, which in the aftermath of the national movement was being manifested in various ways in the form of small incidents taking place in everyday life. There were differences within the Congress that were revealed almost as soon as Gandhi gave the call for the withdrawal of the movement.

The rank and file of the Congress backed Mahatma Gandhi during the Non-Cooperation days like a single block and never once questioned his method and ideology. But after the movement collapsed, and its author was put in jail by the British, the Congress started speaking in different voices and came to the verge of a split. The intense debate that took place within the Congress ranks, calling for a review of strategy in the aftermath of the Non-

Cooperation Movement is summed up by Jawaharlal Nehru in the following lines:

“.....the basis of non-cooperation is direct action and this involves continuous suffering. No one can expect large masses of people to indulge continuously in direct action. Only the select can do that and that the masses can sympathise with them and join them occasionally for a short while. If the Congress really represents the people, it is natural that it should attempt to go back a little to some kind of constitutional action, whenever large number of people are tired of direct action. To the eager, ever ready for the fray, this is painful. But there is no room for despondency. Only, a heavier burden is cast on those who have to keep the method of direct action always before the people, they have to fight on whilst the main army rests or is engaged in peaceful pursuits. Let them rest assured that when the time comes the main army will not fail them.”¹

The Swaraj party led by C.R. Das and Motilal Nehru voiced the apprehensions of that faction in the Congress, which believed that a change of strategy was required so that political work could be carried on even in the non-active phase of the movement. They believed that the sphere of the agitation should be extended, in fact, should be shifted to the Councils at all levels- district, provincial and central. They wanted to take the movement to what was known as the domain of the Government, where they intended to cripple the administrative structure by rendering the Councils defunct. They believed that they could achieve this by practicing non-

¹ *The Leader*, 15 October 1923.

cooperation inside the Councils, where they could obstruct the Government at every step. The other faction within the Congress led by C. Rajagopalachari, Rajendra Prasad, Jawaharlal Nehru etc. did not agree with this view. They wanted the Congress to follow the constructive programme laid down by Gandhi, which they believed would prepare the nation for the next stage in the movement, so that the masses would understand what lay at the core of Gandhi's philosophy of non-violent non-cooperation. How this debate was shaped up; and how, again by the time of Civil Disobedience, the entire Congress was solidly united behind Mahatma Gandhi? These questions will be discussed in this chapter. It is also the purpose of this chapter to explore how deep these divisions ran and the opportunities missed owing to them.

Judith Brown's argument, where she questions the conception of the Non-Cooperation Movement as a monolithic political movement led by the unquestioned leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, is in a way correct². When the movement was launched many leaders of the Congress like C.R. Das, N.C. Kelkar, Madan Mohan Malaviya, Lajpat Rai etc. were not in complete agreement with Gandhi on certain aspects of the Non-Cooperation Movement. The boycott of Councils proved to be the most contentious issue. Leaders like C.R. Das and N.C. Kelkar "waged a last-ditched battle against it; and even when they felt compelled to swim with the Gandhian tide, they remained unconvinced of the wisdom of the decision. It is not surprising that in 1922, as soon as it became obvious that the Non-Cooperation Movement had collapsed, there should have been suggestions for withdrawal of the boycott of Councils. Among the most ardent advocates of Council-entry were Motilal Nehru and C.R. Das."³ But they were met with strong

² Judith Brown, *Gandhi's Rise to Power 1915-1922*, Cambridge, 1972, p. 322.

³ B.R. Nanda, "The Swarajist Interlude" in B.N. Pande, ed., *A Centenary History of the Indian National Congress (1885-1985)*, Vol. II, New Delhi, 1985.

opposition from the other section in the Congress, which felt that it was an act of betrayal to tone down the non-cooperation programme, to change it in any way while its author was in jail.

The controversy regarding Council-entry was started when Mrs. Basanti Devi, wife of C.R. Das delivered the presidential address at the Bengal Provincial Congress. Though the speech was delivered by her, yet it was regarded as a 'feeler' sent out by C.R. Das, who was lodged in Alipur Central Jail at that time. The speech did not amount to a direct challenge to the Gandhian philosophy, in that it recognised the village as the real field of work but at the same time called for an extension of non-cooperation to include the Councils. She asserted that, "We have got to secure the Union Committees, Local Boards, District Boards, Municipalities and we have got to work them according to our national genius. If necessary, I should think we have got to secure even the provincial Councils. In going to the Council it will be our object to carry on non-cooperation work in the Council."⁴ Though this speech was not a call for revolt against Gandhi's hold over the Congress, but it definitely triggered off a debate on the question of Council-entry. All those who had never been ardent supporters of the Gandhian programme, but felt compelled to join it owing to the overwhelming mass support, could now come out in the open to at least debate the rationale of a programme, which did not convince them entirely. Mr. Jayakar, the leader of the Swarajist Party in the Bombay Legislative Council from the year 1923 to 1925, urged for a review of the Congress programme to see "on what basis changes are necessary in the Congress programme so as to bring it up to date with a view to achieve Swaraj".⁵ The solution according to him was

⁴ *The Tribune*, 18 April 1922.

⁵ M.R. Jayakar, *The Story of My Life*, Vol. II, Bombay, 1959, p. 14.

“to form quite openly a wing in the Congress, a bold, outspoken, courageous party, that will sell its conscience to none.”⁶

Many such indications were coming from various quarters in the Congress party where senior Congress leaders were openly questioning the wisdom of the total Gandhian strategy. There were different shades of opinion on almost every issue including Council-entry. While leaders like C.R. Das and Motial Nehru supported Gandhi's constructive programme, aimed at building up mass consciousness on issues such as untouchability, spinning, the importance of swadeshi etc., but at the same time they strongly argued for a review of the Congress programme on the question of Council-entry. It was owing to these doubts and apprehensions that the Civil Disobedience Inquiry Committee was constituted, and started its work in July 1922. It consisted of Hakim Ajmal Khan as Chairman, and Pandit Motilal Nehru, Vithalbai J. Patel, Dr. M.A. Ansari, C. Rajgopalachari and S. Kasturi Ranga Iyenger as members. The procedure to be followed by the committee in taking evidence, was first to call for written answers to the questions published in the press and then to examine witnesses *Viva Voce*. 459 written answers were received in the course of the sittings of the Committee and 366 witnesses were examined orally. The final report was submitted to C.R. Das, President of the 36th Indian National Congress on 20th October 1922.

The purpose of the Committee was to closely examine the overall progress made under Gandhi's leadership, and the extent to which the nationalist consciousness had percolated to the grassroot level. However a schism had already developed on the question of Council-entry and the Committee was divided along parallel lines on the issue, with Hakim Ajmal Khan, Pandit Motilal Nehru and

⁶ Ibid., p. 14.

Vithalbhai Patel favouring a review of policy, and M.A. Ansari, Kasturi Ranga Iyengar and Rajagopalachari strenuously opposing it. The two groups later came to be known as the pro-changers and the no-changers respectively. When the Committee submitted its report it was found that the members unanimously agreed on most issues except on the question of Council-entry. While there was a general acknowledgement of the fact that the spirit of the people was not dead, and the nationalist consciousness aroused by the Non-Cooperation Movement had taken deep roots, yet the Committee concluded that the country was not prepared at present to embark upon general mass Civil Disobedience. But Council-entry proved to be the most contentious issue and had already caused a schism that was destined to develop into a split.

The pro-changers on the Committee did not challenge the total Gandhian ideology of non-violent non-cooperation but argued that, "the tactics and policies of the Congress from time to time must necessarily be such as are best calculated to ensure success. They must be shaped to meet the special conditions of each period and must change with the change of conditions."⁷ Their arguments were based on the contention that the movement had entered a new stage which required a change of strategy, that would be best suited not only to prevent the movement from petering out completely, but also to keep the mass consciousness alive till the nation was again prepared to embark on the course of civil disobedience. They asserted that their sole purpose behind entering the Councils was to end them. According to them, there was no higher form of non-cooperation than entering the Councils and non-cooperating with the Government at every step. This, they argued would expose the

⁷ Report of the Civil Disobedience Enquiry Committee appointed by the All India Congress Committee, Allahabad, 1922, p. 88.

true nature of the institutions which were projected by the British to the rest of the civilised world for their representative character.⁸

The pro-changers led by C. Rajagopalachari strongly opposed the arguments favouring Council-entry. According to them such a move involved a distinct violation of the principle of non-cooperation and a clear departure from the policy of the Congress. They argued that the Councils were the chief source of strength and prestige for the Government, and to enter them would be retrogression in the policy of the Congress. Moreover, it would amount to a diversion of public energy and attention from the constructive programme, to a campaign of converting the vast body of Congressmen to the new programme. They argued that the very basis of such a proposal was the supposition that the Non-Cooperation Movement had failed in its objective. They also expressed their apprehensions that if the proposals were accepted the Congress would become of secondary importance and the electioneering organisations would assume undue importance. Such a transfer of prestige, they argued would be fatal to the national cause. They also foresaw the possibility of inter-communal jealousies being created and fermented by the elections, which had already become a threat to the unity of the Congress.

The findings of the Civil Disobedience Enquiry Committee were debated at length in the All India Congress Committee meeting held at Calcutta in November 1922. In the meeting a resolution favouring Council-entry was moved by Motilal Nehru but could not be passed. It recommended to the Congress that, "non-cooperators should contest the elections on the issue of the redress of the Punjab and Khilafat wrongs and immediate Swaraj in strict accordance with the principle of non-violent non-cooperation and

⁸ Ibid. pp. 93-4, 97, 105-109.

make every endeavour to be returned in a majority.”⁹ However it was resolved at the same meeting that the issue be taken up for consideration again at the Gaya Congress, which was to be held in December 1922. By now the Congress leaders were openly divided on the question of Council-entry, but more importantly the Calcutta Congress revealed that there was no unanimity of opinion amongst the Swarajists as well, regarding the programme to be followed inside the Councils. Covering the Calcutta Congress, the *Young India* outlined the differences on the subject:

“Five distinct groups rallied to support the proposal of (Pandit Motilal). The first, represented by Pandit Motilal himself, was for entering Councils with a large majority for total obstruction and wrecking the Councils. The second school was represented by the President Deshbandhu Das, whose programme was to enter the Councils with a majority and move, at the first opportunity for grant of a foundation for a true Swarajya constitution and, if that was granted, to co-operate and work on that foundation; but, if it is was not conceded, to follow the programme of total obstruction and wreck the Councils. The third school was that led by Mr. Kelkar, who, thought holding on to Responsive Co-operation as the true programme, would for the present, enter the Council on whatever mandate the Congress would give. The fourth school of Messrs. Jayakar, Stokes and Malaviya stood for entry into the Councils, not for wrecking but for making use of them on national lines, obstructing where desirable, cooperating when beneficial. The fifth school was that

⁹ A.I.C.C. File No. 15/1922.

of standing for 'elections with a view to refuse to take the oath'."¹⁰

Gaya was then set to be the scene for a full-blown conflict between the two sides. It was presided over by C.R. Das, who pleaded for a change "in the direction of our activities in certain respects for the very success of the very movement which we hold so dear."¹¹ He justified the proposal for Council-entry as the extension of non-cooperation to a new field. In his capacity as the President of the Gaya Congress, he pointed out in his speech that Council-entry does not amount to a negation of the principle of non-cooperation. He asserted that to enter the Councils with the sole purpose of mending them in a manner suitable to the attainment of Swaraj, or to end them completely, was based on the same 'two-fold activity' of creation and destruction that applied to every programme ranging from the boycott of law courts, schools and colleges, to the destruction of foreign goods including foreign cloth. Thus, he questioned the logic behind following the same programme without bringing about any change to suit the new circumstances faced by the nation in the aftermath of the Non-Cooperation.¹²

However the political logic of C.R. Das and Motilal Nehru was questioned by the majority of Congressmen, in whose eyes any deviation from the programme prescribed by Mahatma Gandhi was an act of betrayal. The no-changers, as they came to be known, were led by C. Rajagopalachari who strenuously opposed the move. An amendment, moved by S. Srinivas Iyengar, proposing that the people should be advised to vote for Congressmen, who would not take their seats in the Council, was accepted by the pro-changers

¹⁰ *Young India*, 30 November 1922.

¹¹ B.R. Nanda in B.N. Pande, ed., *op.cit.*, p. 115.

¹² *Congress Presidential Address*, Second Series, Madras, 1934, pp. 587-98.

but was still defeated. The resolution moved by C. Rajagopalachari was carried by 1,740 votes against 880. This was a major defeat for the Swarajists who were left with no choice but to defy the verdict of the Gaya Congress.¹³ Thus the Gaya Congress ended in the victory of the no-change group led by C. Rajagopalachari. Thereupon prominent Congressmen of the pro-change group, met at the residence of the Maharaja of Tikari on 31st December 1922, and formed a new party within the Congress, which was to be called the Swaraj Party. The manifesto announcing the formation of the party was signed by over a hundred persons including C.R. Das, Motilal Nehru, Vittalbhai Patel, N.C. Kelkar, A. Rangawami Iyenger, S. Satyamurti and M.R. Jayakar.

The manifesto of the Swaraj Party declared that, "it accepts the creed of the Congress, viz., the attainment of Swaraj by all peaceful and legitimate means and also the principle of non-violent non-cooperation".¹⁴ Rejecting the line of argument that the Gandhian programme of non-cooperation was the only legitimate weapon for the attainment of Swaraj, Motilal Nehru asserted that the Congress creed is "nothing more than the attainment of Swarajya by the people of India by all legitimate and peaceful means, and has no reference whatever to non-cooperation which the Congress has adopted by resolutions passed at its periodicals and special sessions, such resolutions being no part of the creed."¹⁵ He appealed for making the Congress programme more broad-based and inclusive so that strict adherence to each and every policy of the Non-Cooperation programme would not be necessary. Thus, the manifesto of the party stated that several important items accepted by the Gaya Congress "are not conducive to the speedy attainment

¹³ B.R. Nanda in B.N. Pande, ed., op.cit., p. 115.

¹⁴ H.N. Mitra, ed., *The Indian Annual Register*, Sixth Issue, Calcutta, 1923, p. 872.

¹⁵ K.M. Panikkar and A. Pershad, eds., *The Voice of Freedom: selected speeches of Pandit Motilal Nehru*, Bombay, 1961, pp. 508-509.

of Swaraj”,¹⁶ as a result of which, those who did not agree with the Congress programme were forced to form and constitute themselves into a party within the Congress.

The programme of the Swaraj Party accepted the constructive programme laid down by Gandhi, but on the issue of Council-entry, laid down the following principles:

“This party will organise and set up nationalist candidates throughout the country, to contest and secure the seats in the Legislative Councils and Assembly at the forthcoming General Election on the following basis:

- a) They will, when they are elected, and have obtained the necessary mandate from their electors, present on behalf of the country, its legitimate demands as formulated by the party, as soon as the elections are over, and ask for their acceptance and fulfilment within a reasonable time, by the Government.
- b) If the demands are not granted to the satisfaction of the party, occasion will then arise, for the elected members belonging to the party, to adopt a policy of uniform, continuous and consistent obstruction within the Councils, with a view to make Government through the Councils impossible.
- c) Detailed instructions in this behalf will be given by the party after the elections are over, but in no case will any member of the party accept office.”¹⁷

Thus the Gaya Congress marked a separation of ways between the two factions within the Congress. The *Leader* reporting

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 872.

¹⁷ M.R. Jayakar, op.cit., pp. 84-85.

on the proceedings of the Congress remarked that, "the split in the Congress is a real one and is by no means of a nominal nature. The efforts of the two factions are likely to be directed more against each other than against the Moderates, or for that matter against the Bureaucracy."¹⁸ The Government also interpreted the split as an acknowledgement of "the failure of the non-cooperation policy and the evident loss of ground since Mr. Gandhi's disappearance".¹⁹ The administration also realised the significant effect that the split within the Congress ranks would have on the public mind. In one such report, the administration smugly remarked that the public are puzzled by the existence of two parties within the Congress, and do not understand what the Congress programme really is.²⁰ Another report stated that, "unless some compromise is reached, the Gandhi-ites will do their best to spoil the chances of the candidates from the Das party, preferring to let in the moderates rather than men whom they regard as traitors to the cause."²¹ The Government was constantly on a watch as to which faction was more popular amongst the masses and concluded that, "the effects of the Non-Cooperation Movement will vanish in a few months owing to the Hindu-Muslim and the Congress-Swaraj disputations."²²

However, in the course of the years 1923 to 1927 many efforts were made to bridge the gap between the two factions. The first attempt at reaching a compromise between the pro-changers and the no-changers was made on 28th February 1923, when a

¹⁸ *The Leader*, 4 January 1923.

¹⁹ *The Leader*, 9 February 1923.

²⁰ Home, Poll. File No. 25 of 1923. Fortnightly report for the first half of March, 1923 for C.P. & Berar.

²¹ Home, Poll. File No. 25 of 1923. Fortnightly report for the second half of February, 1923 for C.P. & Berar.

²² Home, Poll. File No. 25 of 1923. Fortnightly report for the first half of August, 1923 for Bihar and Orissa.

resolution recommending the suspension of Council propaganda on both sides till 30th April 1923, was moved at the All India Congress Committee meeting held at Allahabad. It was further suggested that both parties be at liberty to work the remaining items of their programmes in the interval without interfering with each other. But the compromise remained practically a dead letter and little work was done towards unity between the two groups as, on 1st May 1923, Motilal Nehru "struck a defiant note, and wrote to members of the AICC and the Provincial Congress Committees that his party 'will not desist from contesting the forthcoming elections'."²³ He asked, "Is this the time, 'to wait and look on while the Moderates and the hangers-on the Bureaucracy are putting forth strenuous efforts to give the country another three years of Government by a mock parliament?'"²⁴

The no-changers led by C. Rajagopalachari immediately reacted by 'calling upon the people to boycott the election.' However a head-on collision was avoided when a second attempt at reaching a compromise was made at Bombay, on 26th May 1923, when propaganda against Council-entry was disallowed. The no-changers were unhappy with the terms of the compromise and as a reaction six members, including Rajagopalachari, Vallabhabhai Patel and Rajendra Prasad, resigned their seats on the Working Committee of the Congress. In spite of a vote of confidence in them passed by the A.I.C.C., they refused to reconsider their decision. Thereupon a new Working Committee consisting of Dr. Ansari as President, and Jawaharlal Nehru, Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad, Purshottamdas Tandon and others as members was formed.

The new members belonged to what can be called as a neutral or centre group, and tried to bring about a rapprochement

²³ B.R. Nanda in B.N. Pande, ed., op. cit., p. 111.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 117.

between the two groups. Commenting on the long-term effect of the conflict between the two groups, on the future of the Congress organisation, Jawaharlal Nehru answered a question, put up by a Hindi journal (dated 19th June, 1923) that such developments were bound to “ ‘increase ill-will and the two parties, instead of coming together, will drift apart all the more. Although the Swarajya Party started this disagreement after the Gaya Congress, it is proper that it should be now ended instead of being intensified.’ He further added that ‘I myself am not in favour of entering the Councils but I do not want to prevent those who want to oppose the Government by entering the Councils. I believe, in the principle that to put pressure on the Government one has to sever relations with the Government, remain aloof from it and work independently. The Swaraj Party’s policy of obstructing and opposing the measures of Government may gain something for us, but nothing substantial or of importance can be gained in this way until the Council members themselves support real work and direct action.’ ”²⁵ Justifying the Gandhian programme he asserted that, “the only way to obtain Swaraj is to paralyse the Government; and this is possible by two methods- violent armed rebellion or non-violent non-cooperation. I am opposed to the first way. The other method is the only solution for the salvation of India.”²⁶

A final compromise between the two factions was reached at the Coconada Congress held on 31st December 1923. But signs of striking a compromise had started emanating in December 1923 when a special session of the Congress was called at Delhi, which was presided over by the sedate Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad. In his presidential address, he questioned whether the difference on the question of Council-entry was one of principle or of detail. He then unhesitatingly answered that, the difference on the Council issue,

²⁵ *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol. I, New Delhi 1972, pp. 360-62.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 363.

was not one of principle of non-cooperation, but was merely one of detail. In the course of his address he stated that, "freedom is our goal and non-violence and non-cooperation our principle. For the attainment of the goal we have adopted a programme every one of whose items is a means to the end. We cannot change the creed or renounce the principle, but we can change our tactics any moment at will. If we refuse to introduce such changes, it means that we refuse to fight."²⁷

The *Leader* commenting on the presidential address of Maulana Azad remarked that he has 'virtually identified himself with the Swarajists', by saying that the Gandhian programme of non-cooperation "was neither, a temporary makeshift nor was it anything unchanging or eternal. The programme takes into consideration exigencies of both necessity and duty."²⁸ After considering all the aspects of the question he came to the conclusion that, " 'in the existing circumstances it is useless for the Congressmen to boycott the Councils and to remain aloof.' He further went on to say that 'as on the occasion of the previous election a boycott was necessary for us, so under the present circumstances it is to our advantages to occupy as many seats as possible. We should try, to enter the Councils and Assemblies and should follow such a policy that those Councils and Assemblies may become a sphere of our efforts.' "²⁹ Though the efforts did not have the complete support of the no-changers yet the following resolution was passed at the Delhi Congress:

"...While reaffirming its adherence to the principle of non-cooperation, this Congress declares that such Congressmen as have no religious or other

²⁷ H.N. Mitra, ed., op.cit., Eighth Issue, ii, p. 193-194.

²⁸ The *Leader*, 17 September 1923.

²⁹ The *Leader*, 17 September 1923.

conscientious objections against entering the legislatures, are at liberty to stand as candidates and to exercise the right of voting at the forthcoming elections, and this Congress, therefore, suspends all propaganda against entering Councils. The Congress at the same time calls upon all Congressmen to redouble their efforts to carry out the constructive programme of their great leader Mahatma Gandhi, and, by united endeavour to achieve Swarajya at the earliest moment.”³⁰

Though an agreement had been reached, yet the differences between the two factions remained throughout the period, when the Swarajists entered the electoral arena. However the conflict with the no-changers was not the only handicap faced by the Swaraj party. Lack of organization and paucity of funds were also a problem. They also had to contend with a hostile press not only from European owned newspapers, but also from nationalist papers like the *Leader*, which castigated the Swarajists for adopting the same policy for which, less than a year back, the Moderates were severally criticized. The *Leader* sarcastically commended that, “at one time these institutions were described as an unmixed evil which should be shunned. But now we are gratified to note that they possess in the opinion of Mr. Das some virtue.”³¹ Another impediment, which virtually made it impossible for the Swarajist to take a radical stance, was the narrow franchise. In many constituencies there were ‘independent’ candidates, like the landlords, who did not require a party label to win. In their election manifesto, the Swarajists took great care to invite the “nationalist

³⁰ The *Leader*, 17 September 1923.

³¹ The *Leader*, 17 September 1923.

zamindars who intend contesting elections as comrades in arms provided they co-operate with the Swarajya party.”³²

The election results of 1923 proved to be a mixed bag for the Swarajists as they were returned in strength only to the Legislative Assembly and to the two provincial Councils of the Central Provinces and Bengal. While in Bombay and the United Provinces, they were returned in considerable numbers, in Madras and Punjab there were a tiny minority.³³ As a result the Swaraj Party could fulfil its undertaking of working the Council from inside, in just two provinces – Central provinces and Bengal. In the Legislative Assembly the Swarajists could command a majority only by securing the support of the Nationalist party, which consisted of nationalists who did not believe in the policy of Non-Cooperation. With their support “the Swarajist secured a series of victories- the first being on Pandit Motilal Nehru’s amendment in favour of ‘a Round Table Conference to recommend a scheme of full Responsible Government in India.’ ”³⁴ Another achievement for the Swaraj party was the throwing out of the first four heads under the demand for grants. Other than this, they also registered a victory when resolutions were passed for the release of certain political prisoners, for the repeal of Regulation III of 1818, for imposing a duty on the coal imported from South Africa to India and on the issue of setting up of a Committee of enquiry into the Sikh situation.³⁵

As stated before, it was only in the Central Provinces and Bengal Council, that the Swarajists could fulfil the purpose for

³² B.R. Nanda in B.N. Pande, ed., op.cit., p. 118.

³³ Ibid., p. 119.

³⁴ P. Sitaramayya, *History of the Indian National Congress*, Vol. 1, 2nd reprint, Delhi, 1969, pp. 453-454.

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 453-454.

which they had entered the Council. In Bengal it was owing to the tactful handling of the situation by C.R. Das, that the Swaraj Party could gain the unprecedented support of the Muslim Community. He struck an alliance with the Muslim members of the Council on terms, which could be called 'generous', which were later on not ratified by the Congress. However for as long as the alliance remained the Swaraj Party managed to inflict such damages and defeats on the Government, that it almost came to be seen as a personal rivalry between C.R. Das and Lytton, the Governor of Bengal.³⁶ In the Central Provinces where B.S. Moonje was the leader of the Swaraj party, the Swarajists rejected an offer from the Governor to form a ministry. In a series of defeats inflicted on the Government, they postponed Bills relating to 'Reserved' and 'Transferred' departments. A vote of no confidence in the ministries was passed and their salaries were fixed at the farcical figure of Rs. 2 per year. After refusing all the supplies which were in their power to refuse, the Governor was forced to "bring into operation the emergency powers conferred upon him by the Reforms Act, and to restore the grants rejected by the Council. In March 1924, the ministers resigned, and the governor took over the administration of the 'Transferred' departments."³⁷ Satisfied, that the party was steadily moving towards its goals, Motilal Nehru remarked:

"On this solemn occasion of the anniversary of the Jallianwalla, I put it to you in all humility whether we have not created a crisis such as the Government has never been confronted before. We have not shed a drop of blood. We have not crawled on our bellies. We have stood erect as men in asserting our birthright. We have made a brave show of *khaddar* in the citadel of bureaucracy. We have planted the National flag in the

³⁶ B.R. Nanda in B.N. Pande, ed., op.cit., p. 121.

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 119-120.

heart of the Council Chamber. We have driven the Government to cast off its mask of governing through the representatives of the people, and have compelled it to carry on the administration by its own autocratic powers.”³⁸

But the doubts expressed regarding the Swarajist programme surfaced again when Mahatma Gandhi was released on 5th February 1924, before he could complete his six-year prison term. Motilal Nehru, on behalf of the Swarajists, tried to secure his support but Gandhi without openly castigating or condemning them, asserted his firm opinion that ‘Council-entry was inconsistent with the principles and practice of non-violent non-operation.’ Questioning ‘not the immediate success of the Swarajists tactics, but their ultimate wisdom’, he called the Swarajist programme of obstructing the legislatures as ‘species of violence.’³⁹ Summing up the basic difference between his own ideology and that of the Swarajists, Gandhi stated:

“The Swarajists method cultivates British opinion and looks to British Parliament for Swaraj. The no-changed method looks to the (Indian) people for it...
...While one school (of thought) claims to give political education through the Councils, the other claims to give it exclusively by working among the people and evoking its organising administrative capacity.”⁴⁰

Pandit Motilal Nehru took up the gauntlet, and gave a point-by-point reply to the objections raised by Gandhi against the Swarajist programme. Agreeing that the difference between him and

³⁸ K.M. Panikkar and A. Pershad, eds., *op.cit.*, p. 518.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 125-126.

Gandhiji was 'one of principle and not of mere detail', he sought to analyse the Gandhian principles of non-violence and non-cooperation separately. Stating his views on the former he said that, "the doctrine of *Ahimsa* with all the implications and logical deductions has not been and cannot be adopted by the Congress which professes to include men of all religious and creeds in the world within its fold. Islam does not recognise it as an invariable and unfeasible rule of life, and so do not many Hindu castes and sects with which the judicious use of violence is an accepted article of faith. Whilst Mahatmaji would not resort to violence under any circumstances whatever, in thought, word or deed, many true Congressmen would under certain conditions consider it their highest duty to resort to actual physical violence."⁴¹ He further went on to add that, "by joining the movement on non-violent non-cooperation all I have undertaken to do is, to refrain inflicting or even contemplating violence of any kind, in carrying out the programme of non-cooperation against the Government. The doctrine of non-violence so far as I am concerned has a limited application for the very special purpose for which I have adopted it."⁴²

That the differences between Gandhi and the Swarajists ran deeper, than what seemed on the surface, became clear when Motilal Nehru questioned the success of the triple boycott programme. He said that the limited success achieved from the programme of boycotting Government schools and colleges, Courts and the Councils, has only shown that, "the preaching of high ideals which the people are not ready to follow can only result in positive harm."⁴³ He went on to add that, "the honest thing to do is to admit failure and frankly give up the Triple Boycott. The

⁴¹ Home, Poll. File no. 140 of 1924, p. 1.

⁴² Home, Poll. File no. 140 of 1924, p.1-2.

⁴³ Home, Poll. File no. 140 of 1924, p. 3.

Swarajists would have done it had it not been for their belief that they had no chance of success with the masses against Mahatmaji's teachings."⁴⁴ Refuting Gandhi's argument, that Council-entry is 'tantamount to taking part directly or indirectly in the present system', he argued that the "legislative bodies are merely an ornamental part of the machinery designed to justify the existing system. The truth is that the Government is absolutely independent of the legislative bodies, which do not really sustain the system but are designed to conceal the frauds which the Government is practicing on the world."⁴⁵ Justifying the Swarajist programme he added that, "the Swarajists have entered the Council to expose this fraud, not by taking part in it, but by refusing to take such part."⁴⁶

The no-changers also argued that given the narrow franchise the Swarajist would not be able to secure a majority on their own inside the Councils, and even if they did the unlimited powers conferred on the Viceroy and the Governors under the constitution, would render them powerless to do anything beyond a certain limit. Motilal Nehru immediately replied back that even if "the aerial machinery of the Government goes on unchecked, we can claim that we have taken, out the false and ornamental parts of the machinery and exposed its true character to the world. If it was right to send thirty thousand of our workers to jail simply to establish the fact that the visit of the Prince of Wales was forced upon a discontented people, it was certainly worth something to expose the continuing fraud practiced day by day in the name of the representatives of the people."⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Home, Poll. File no. 140 of 1924, p. 3

⁴⁵ Home, Poll. File no. 140 of 1924, pp 4-5.

⁴⁶ Home, Poll. File no. 140 of 1924, pp. 4-5.

⁴⁷ Home, Poll, File no. 140 of 1924, p.8

As has been discussed before, Judith Brown has questioned the assumption of Non-Cooperation Movement as a monolithic movement led by Gandhi. She also questions the 'myth' that the principle of non-cooperation had immense appeal amongst the masses, and was reverently believed in by the Congressmen.⁴⁸ B.R. Nanda also writes on the same line that, "while the Swarajists paid homage to Gandhi in public, deep down they had a feeling that he was a good saint but a poor politician. They did not like his reduction of political issues to his moral algebra. They did not deny the value of constructive work for the removal of untouchability, promotion of Hindu-Muslim unity, and hand-spinning, but they wondered whether these activities could really add up to an effective political programme."⁴⁹ These differences came out in the open when at the Ahmedabad meeting of the All Indian Congress Committee, a resolution moved by Gandhi that members of the elected Congress organisations must spin regularly for half an hour every day and sent at least 2000 yards to the All-India Khadi Board, was severely opposed by the Swarajists led by Motilal Nehru. The resolution had a penal clause and was objected to as being violative of the Congress constitution. Even after the Swarajists walked out in protest, the resolution could only be carried by 57 votes against 37. This came as a shock to Gandhi who immediately had the penal clause deleted. As a result an agreement was again reached at Calcutta in November 1924, according to which "all Congressmen should subscribe to the constructive programme and the work in legislatures should be carried on behalf of the Congress by the Swarajya Party which was authorized to make its own rules, and to raise and administer its own funds."⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Judith Brown, *op.cit.*, pp. 346-347.

⁴⁹ B.R. Nanda in B.N. Pande, ed., *op.cit.*, p. 127.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 126-128.

The Calcutta agreement caused considerable discontent amongst the no-changers who saw it as a complete surrender to the Swaraj Party, the only concession being the spinning franchise, which was amended in order to make it more acceptable. But, chastened by the experience, Gandhi made over political work of the Congress to the Swaraj Party, which was called as the agent of the Congress inside the Councils.

However inspite of all the attempts at reaching an agreement, many opportunities were missed owing to the conflict within the Congress. Perhaps the most glaring example of the futility of entering the Councils, with the stated purpose of obstructing the Government in their own domain, was the raising of the salt tax under the budget for the financial year 1923-1924. The salt duty was raised by Rs. 2-8 per mound in order to cover the budget deficit. The move was strongly opposed across the political spectrum. The *Leader* declared that, "the salt tax by its very nature is such that no one can avoid it. The poorest of the poor, if he is to live, must pay it."⁵¹ The Bill was twice rejected by the Assembly but was eventually certified by the Viceroy, who exercised the extraordinary powers conferred upon him by the Constitution to certify it against public opinion. The *Leader*, acidly commented that, "these powers are no doubt vested in him under the Government of India Act, but are meant to be used only in circumstances of grave emergency. No such emergency has been created by the Assembly verdict against the enhancement of the salt duty."⁵² The Members of the Assembly were appreciated for standing firmly against the Government by twice rejecting the Bill. Yet, wisened by the certification, the press echoed the popular sentiment, when it said that, "by certifying the Finance Bill, the Governor General has also certified the failure of the Reforms, so far

⁵¹ The *Leader*, 7 March 1923.

⁵² The *Leader*, 23 March 1923.

as the Indian Legislature is concerned.”⁵³ The *Leader* therefore concluded that the Governor-General “has rendered a great service to the national cause, and we are therefore on the whole glad that he has once more driven home the lesson of the helplessness of the popular representatives in the Indian Legislature.”⁵⁴

The certification of the Finance Bill against public opinion, had an explosive potential and could have been used by the Congress to start Civil Disobedience, or to inflict other damages on the Government. Even the British press acknowledged the volatile nature of the issue. The *Economist* cautiously commented that, “the terms of the Act are being strained, and that the Viceroy and his advisers are playing with fire. Self Government is certainly mocked when on an issue of this kind, the voice and votes of the representative Assembly are flatly disregarded and a tax forced through, which they have specifically rejected.”⁵⁵ It further added, “to overrule the first vote of the Assembly and insist on a second debate, was high-handed enough; to certify the tax after this double rejection is to invite trouble and to justify it.”⁵⁶ But the opportunity made no impression on the Congressmen’s mind. It was owing to the split, and conflict within the Congress ranks that the Congress leaders never once seriously explored an issue, on which Mahatma Gandhi would launch the mighty Civil Disobedience Movement, in his absence. The Government, satisfactorily commented on the situation:

“... If only the Non-Cooperation party had been possessed of any thing like its former vigour, it is quite

⁵³ The *Leader*, 31 March 1923.

⁵⁴ The *Leader*, 31 March 1923.

⁵⁵ The *Leader*, 29 April 1923.

⁵⁶ The *Leader*, 29 April 1923.

possible that the certification of the Salt Tax might have provided it with a fresh lease of life.”⁵⁷

However by the year 1925, there were differences not only between the Congress and the Swaraj Party, but also within the Swaraj Party on the question of acceptance of office. The revolt against the tenets of the Swaraj Party, on the issue of office acceptance, took origin in Central Provinces and Maharashtra. This faction within the Swaraj Party was led by leaders like Tambe, Moonje, Jayakar and Kelkar. They advocated the ideology of Responsive Co-operation, which would involve acceptance of office, and cooperation with the Government on issues of national interest. In the Central Provinces, these differences led to a split in the Swaraj Party and as a result Moonje, Jayakar and Kelkar subsequently resigned their membership to the Legislature, to which they had been elected on the Swarajist ticket.⁵⁸ They were followed by many small leaders like M.S. Anay, an M.L.A. of Berar, who in a speech “asked his audience how they, the members of Legislative Council, could face the electors at the next election when they had done absolutely nothing, and urged the acceptance of office.”⁵⁹ The consequences of the Responsivist rebellion were faced by the Swaraj party in the elections of 1926, when it failed to repeat its sensational success of 1923. However, the communal antagonism and caste consciousness during this period were also major factors that led to their defeat. Chastened and subdued by the experience, the Swarajists failed to offer any real resistance inside the Councils. As a result “the Finance Bill was passed, and

⁵⁷ P. Sitaramayya, *op. cit.*, pp. 429-430.

⁵⁸ B.R. Nanda in B.N. Pande, ed., *op.cit.*, pp. 138-139.

⁵⁹ Home, Poll. File No. 112/1/1923. Fortnightly Report for the second-half of Novemebr 1925 for Central Provinces and Berar.

the Indian Currency Bill was approved in the teeth of the Swarajist opposition. The bid to halve the salt tax also failed.”⁶⁰

In 1926, the Swaraj Party walked out of the Legislatures and Motilal Nehru was already talking about mistakes made, and the extent to which the Swarajists had been successful in achieving the goal for which they had entered the Councils. He confessed that, “the purpose for which the Swaraj Party was formed had not been realized, that the Councils had distracted Congressmen from their real goal, that some of their oldest men had been ‘entrapped’ by the Government in one committee or the other.”⁶¹ The Swarajists especially, Pandit Motilal Nehru had realized by the year 1926 that the policy of working the Councils from within was unrealisable. Given the stage at which the Indian constitution stood, it was impossible to harm or obstruct the Government beyond a point in their own institutions.

However, it was not a totally wasted effort. The debate and the churning process that the Congress underwent during this period, led to a more crystallized policy with leaders talking about ‘phases’ in the national struggle, and the need to review the Congress programme from time to time in order to keep the nationalist spirit alive. This crystallization of policy was reflected again in the aftermath of the Civil Disobedience Movement, when a similar situation again arose in front of the Congress. Ironically, this time the Swarajist approach was recommended by a staunch no-changer, C. Rajagopalachari. Perhaps this reversal of roles resulted from the realisation that, “changed circumstances necessitated changed methods of struggle and hence new tactics

⁶⁰ B.R. Nanda in B.N. Pande, ed., op.cit. P. 144.

⁶¹ B.R. Nanda in B.N. Pande, ed., op.cit. p. 150.

involving new orientation, a new tone, and a new way of approaching the masses."⁶²

Thus, inspite of all the conflicts, dissension and damages done, and the opportunities missed, the Swaraj Party had still been able to fulfil the 'historic function' for which it was formed, which was 'to fill the political vacuum' between the two Gandhian struggles of the Non-Cooperation and the Civil Disobedience Movement.⁶³

⁶² Bhagwan Josh, *Struggle for Hegemony in India (1920-47)*, Vol. II, New Delhi, 1992, p. 168.

⁶³ B.R. Nanda in B.N. Pande, ed., *op.cit.*, p. 155.

CONCLUSION

The Non-Cooperation Movement aroused various forms of consciousness amongst the masses. Each form of consciousness, nationalist or communitarian, is predominantly expressed under different circumstances. For instance, when the struggle against the colonial state was at its peak, the energies of the masses were predominantly mobilised in anti-imperialist activities. The withdrawal of the mass movement gave rise to different conditions which seemed to be conducive for the resurfacing and reassertion of communitarian forms of consciousness in terms of community tension, caste consciousness and sectarian clashes referred to by historians as communal riots. The emergence of communal riots, simultaneously co existing with movements expressing the sedimented nationalist consciousness in the aftermath of the Non-Cooperation Movement, as we have discussed in detail in this dissertation, seems to indicate that nationalist consciousness and communitarian consciousness can easily overlap and inter-penetrate with each other, perhaps mutually affecting each other to expand their influence, yet failing to erase each other completely.

In the aftermath of the Non-Cooperation Movement, the internal dynamics between these two forms of consciousness referred above, was mediated by the competition, through the electoral process, for positions of power in the various local self-Government institutions. It is interesting to note that on one hand these institutions were being

used as medium for the purpose of spreading the nationalist ideology and keeping it alive amongst the masses. But, on the other hand, these very institutions were opening up new spaces for the assertion of communal and caste identities. These are contradictory trends, but were co-existing during this period. In the first two chapters of this dissertation, an attempt has been made to bring out the parallel co-existence of these two forms of consciousness; by showing that if resolutions were being passed for the hoisting of the National Flag on Municipal buildings, for propagating the use of *charkha*, *khaddar* etc., then at the same time friction was also being generated between the members of the two communities, who were increasingly being seen as representing their communities on these self-governing Boards and Committees. This friction when percolated to the mass level, was expressed in the form of communal clashes that centred around issues, which in an atmosphere of distrust, were often blown out of proportion. This leads us to question the inherent contradiction between these two forms of consciousness, which is often assumed by scholars undertaking a study of the Indian National Movement.

A study of the period 1923-27 also reflects the turmoil that took place within the Congress. The Non-Cooperation Movement was the first mass movement and the debate that took place in its aftermath, on the question of strategy to be adopted in order to keep up the political interest and morale of the people, shows that a section of the Congress leadership was still undecided about the practicality and effectiveness of the Gandhian programme. The Swarajist approach was not an all out revolt against Gandhi but was to some extent based

upon a certain degree of doubt and confusion regarding the feasibility of the non-cooperation strategy, at least in the non-active phase of the movement.

However, the very fact, that similar questions and doubts arose in the aftermath of the Civil Disobedience Movement, shows that this debate and churning process led to a further crystallisation of policy regarding the course to be adopted once the masses are no longer mobilised, as they were during the active phase of the movement. Perhaps, it was due to this experience and the churning process that the Congress underwent during this period, that the Congress leadership was better prepared to deal with the aftermath of the Civil Disobedience Movement, when the erstwhile no-changers advocated the Swarajist approach. That in the long drawn-out struggle for India's independence, these phases of hope and despair were bound to recur is reflected in the following lines of Jawaharlal Nehru:

“.....India made her choice more than three years ago. She chose the path of non-violence and suffering, of direct action and peaceful revolution. From that there is no going back. There may occasionally appear to be some slackness or some change. But the vision once seen cannot be forgotten and the glory of suffering for a great cause will not be given up.”*

* *The Leader*, 15 October 1923.

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