CHAPTER FOUR

Police and the Non-Cooperation Movement: The Varied Trends

This chapter examines the interface of the subordinate police force with the mass-based national movement. There was a strong trend in the Non-Cooperation Movement of the nationalists trying to befriend the police. The nationalists addressed the policemen as bhai and appealed to them to join the movement. The movement succeeded in striking a sympathetic chord amongst the lower rungs of police, the constables, who constituted the bulk of the police force. At the same time, another trend in the Non-Cooperation Movement was that of a strong animosity against the police. The Non-Cooperation Movement, therefore, also became a vehicle for demonstration of popular hostility against the police. The police came under attack in several places. Another trend that manifested very strongly during the Non-Cooperation Movement was that of a protest by the constables, amongst whom a strong discontentment had been building up for some time over the service conditions. In many places, they went on strike. A number of constables even resigned.

How does one look at the coterminus of these varied trends during the movement? Are these trends contradictory or part of the same Non-Cooperation Movement? Why did the nationalists try to befriend the police, who were generally regarded as agents of the state? Does it indicate the existence of another identity of the police to which the nationalists made an appeal? Under what conditions does such an identity assert itself? How does one look at the police protest during the Non-Cooperation Movement when policemen's loyalty was most crucial for the government? Why did their protest sharpen during the Non-
Cooperation Movement? In fact, episodes such as those of police protest have never been at the centre of historiography of nationalism. The study of resistance in national movement has largely focussed on the development of nationalist challenges to colonial rule and more recently on the struggles and insurgencies of subaltern groups, particularly peasants. The writings on police have mainly concentrated on the contribution that they have made to the formation and functioning of the colonial state structure. The resistance of police is yet to be made a part of the contemporary reassessment of the national movement. These are some of the issues taken up in this chapter, which will throw light on certain interesting facets of the national movement.

Discontentment with the Service

This section looks at the job conditions of the lower rungs of the police force. The position of constables was one of extreme subordination. They occupied the lowest tier of the extended police hierarchy, subject to the directives and scrutiny of their institutional superiors. As Indians, they were placed directly or through Indian intermediaries under the direction of European officers. A fundamental distrust of Indians and low regard for their abilities and character ensured that the Europeans occupied a supervisory position. European manpower, which was highly valued, was both scarce and expensive. Its maximum utility was to be obtained by freeing it from purely menial and routine subordinate tasks and assigning to it the responsibility of directing and disciplining the Indians.¹ Thus the police hierarchy had a distinctly racial rationale.

The wages of constables were extremely low. Before 1920, their pay ranged from Rs.6 to Rs.8. In 1920, their pay was raised to Rs.11-14 scale. Even

this revised scale was considered low by the constables. Economic distress made their other grievances more acute. They were also unhappy over the kind of uniforms they had to wear. These were white drill uniforms, which were easily soiled and expensive to get cleaned. Accommodation was another problem. The quarters provided in police lines were often cramped and the family lacked privacy as well as space. Despite government promises, there were constables who lived in dilapidated huts, sometimes due to shortage of quarters. They were forced to take rooms on rent, often at rates that exceeded departmental allowances. In addition to their expenditure on house rents and washermen, constables were subjected to expenses that they regarded as unjust such as charges for water and scavenging in the police lines. In addition, travel, food and accommodation allowances for those serving away from home were very inadequate. Most of the constables were in debt with the exception of those who had some ancestral property and other sources of joint family income.

The prospects of promotion were almost negligible. Promotion from the constabulary to the inspectorate was curtailed in favour of the direct recruitment of sub-inspectors and inspectors. Even the post of Station House Officer, formerly the great prize of a constable's career, was entrusted to the sub-inspectors. How good his record, a Head constable could not become a sub-inspector. This was tantamount to a downgrading of the constabulary, which thereafter became a bureaucratic dead end in career terms.

3 Bihar and Orissa Political Special File no. 115/21, "Purnea S.P's letter to Inspector General of Police, dated 8th March 1921". This whole para is based on this source.
The conditions of employment were miserable. They were placed on duty in cholera and plague infected areas, where they were exposed to a great deal of personal risks.\textsuperscript{5} During the First World War, they were expected to work long hours, perform extra duties, and go without holidays and festival leave.\textsuperscript{6} Many found the wearing of a police uniform irritating.\textsuperscript{7} They even found the discipline imposed upon them as irksome. The parade and drill at the police lines were very tough. Senior police officers also tried to impose discipline upon the force through frequently resorting to a harsh system of departmental punishment, mostly through fines and demotions.\textsuperscript{8} Fines and demotions on a sweeping scale turned out to be counter-productive, forcing many constables to quit police force entirely.\textsuperscript{9}

Their duties were also menial and purely mechanical in character. Neither intelligence nor judgement was required of them. Higher police officials had basic contempt for the work of the subordinate policemen and treated them with disdain. They thought that the constables were tainted by their professional association with crime and violence. The higher police officials believed that the lower rungs of the police were corrupt, cowardly, vicious and mean.\textsuperscript{10}

\textbf{Every Day Protest}

The constables were unhappy with their job conditions. Their discontentment took the form of an open protest in 1921 when they went on strike in a number of places. This was the time when the Non-Cooperation Movement was very strong. However, even before 1921, when open protest took place,
strong discontentment had been building up amongst them and they had been expressing their antipathy to the nature and terms of the employment.

One form of resistance was reluctance of the people, especially the upper caste and educated section, whom the government was very keen to recruit, to offer themselves for recruitment as long as other work was available.¹¹ Constabulary was not looked upon as a worthy prospect by this section, particularly before the First World War. The job was also not looked upon as honourable and remunerative. It was merely a means of staving off unemployment, hunger and poverty. Police officials repeatedly expressed their concern over the unavailability of recruits. The job passed more and more into the hands of less educated and lower status communities.¹² Police authorities preferred to recruit constables from upper caste and class which were regarded as respectable, as they felt this would enhance the prestige of the government and strengthen the authority of the colonial police.¹³ But their ability to attract and retain such men was greatly inhibited by the government’s refusal to pay more than an absolute minimum for its constabulary.

There were other ways through which the constables expressed their dissatisfaction with the service. They often resigned, took sick leave frequently or performed their duties in such a lax manner that they were eventually sacked. There was frequent absenteeism. Resignations and desertions were also rampant.¹⁴ But such resistance was generally individualistic, disorganized and sporadic.

There was no concerted effort by constables to press for the improvement of their

pay and general working conditions. The organized police protest emerged only in 1921.

Conjuncture of Forces Shaping the Police Protest

The grievances of the police were located in their material conditions but it was the conjuncture of certain forces which sharpened the police protest in 1921. After the First World War, the conditions of the police considerably deteriorated. The end of the war saw acute scarcity conditions and soaring prices. The low paid policemen were among the worst hit. The war also led to an increasing burden of work. This further increased the discontentment amongst the police. The political and economic conditions of the immediate post-war years gave the constables an unprecedented leverage over their employers, too.

This was also the period when trade unions were being formed. Labour unrest had increased everywhere. The railway, post, telegraph and dockyard staff, to mention only a few, were resentful and restless. This must have influenced the policemen too, amongst whom trade union consciousness was developing. The constables saw their position similar to that of other poorly paid, ill-housed, over-worked factory hands and municipal workers. This would be evident from the constables' petitions and demands drawn up in 1920-21

By 1921, the police subordinates began to find a collective voice of their own to express their grievances. Till now in the official literature, the police subordinates had appeared merely as statistical and communal categories. But in 1921, the process of formation of Police Association had begun. The Police Association was being formed from the Deputy Superintendent of Police level

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16 Ibid.
17 Bihar and Orissa Political Special File no. 115/1921, “Purnea, S.P.’s letter to Inspector General, dated 2nd March 1921".
downward. The constables were not yet part of Association but in the future there was a plan to associate them too.\(^\text{18}\) On 26 March 1921, a special session of the Provincial Police Association of U.P. was held at Lucknow. This session was attended by delegates from other Provincial Police Associations too. Bihar and Orissa were well represented. This special session was convened to moot the idea for the formation of a British India Police Association, covering all the Provinces and all ranks from Deputy Superintendent of Police level downward. The aims and objects of the Association would be to improve by all legitimate means the pay, status, condition of service and morale of its members, to create and foster an esprit-de-crops amongst the members, to deal with questions affecting the general interests of its members and to safeguard them, to maintain funds for the mutual benefit of the member and for carrying out of the objects of Association and to take all steps that may be necessary in the interests of the Association.\(^\text{19}\)

The context of nationalism was also significant in shaping police protest. Being faced with the intensifying Non-Cooperation Movement, it was difficult for the government to isolate and suppress policemen. Some of the nationalists in Bihar took keen interest in the problems of the police subordinates.\(^\text{20}\) The constables' relationship with nationalism has been studied in detail in a later section of this chapter.

\(^\text{18}\) Ibid, File no. 263/1921, “Formation of Association of Subordinate Police officers”.

\(^\text{19}\) Ibid, “Proceedings of the First Session of the British India Police Association held at Lucknow, 1921”.

\(^\text{20}\) Ibid, File no. 102/1921, “Inspector General of Police, Bihar and Orissa, letter to Chief Secretary, dated 4 March 1921, Extent to which unrest among the Police has been kept up by non-cooperation”.

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Police Protest

This section traces the stages and forms of constables’ protest. It examines how and why they entered from one stage of protest to another. It also tries to study the nature of their demands and government’s response to their protest.

Discontentment amongst the constables was evident from November 1920 onwards in most of the districts, even though concerted action was missing. Initially, they made submissions orally and in writing to the District Superintendents of Police, with a plea that these should be forwarded to the Inspector General of Police and the government. In these, the constables asked for an increase in their wages. Their pay was Rs.11 to Rs.14 per month. They asked for their pay to be increased to Rs25-40 scale. They asked the government to supply them with food and clothing. They also pointed out their housing problems. One of their demands, apart from medical leave, was also casual leave.21

Senior police officials did not look upon these constables as agitators but merely supplicants because they found these men “polite, nay docile, in their speech and behaviour throughout”.22 In fact, the concern of the government to locate whether they were merely petitioners or agitators is evident throughout the protest. Constables’ language of protest that was couched in deference and loyalty to the government made them appear as petitioners.23

The petitions, which they gave to the higher authorities, went unheeded. This compelled them to protest by resorting to a strike. One comes across the first reference to rumours about the possibility of mass resignations through a

21 Ibid, File no. 1/1921.
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid, File no. 115/1921, “Purnea S.P.’s letters to Inspector General of Police, dated 2 and 8 March 1921”.

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confidential letter written by the Superintendent of Police, Hazaribagh, dated 28 December 1920, and addressed to the Assistant Inspector General of Police. The letter read, “42 more memorials have been received and are being forwarded. There is a wide spread rumour that Ranchi constables have given an ultimatum that they will resign their posts and go in for a strike, if their pay is not increased by January 1921”.24 But, till December 1920, the constables did not take any collective decision regarding the strike and mass resignation.25

By January 1921, the police got more organized. Communications also started amongst them, both within and outside their districts.26 On 2 January 1921, first organized meetings of constables were held in Patna, Chapra and Arrah.27 In Patna, the meeting was held at diara.28 This meeting was attended by 400 constables. A Mahaviri Jhanda was planted at the site of the meeting. The diara was selected as the meeting ground for the purpose of privacy. Holding the meeting at the river bank also had sacred significance because the oath taken between the two streams of the Gange and in front of a Mahaviri Jhanda became a solemn vow for the Hindus. The constables also referred to cow touching in that meeting, which lent further sanctity to the oath. A resolution was passed in this meeting which demanded the pay of the constables to be raised to Rs.30 per month. The constables declared that if their demand was not conceded by 5 March 1921, they would submit their resignations. The resolution was to be followed up by a detailed petition from the constables to the higher authorities. Representatives from Saran, Gaya and Shahabad districts also attended this meeting on invitation.

25 Ibid.
26 Ibid, File no. 115/1921.
27 Information on Arrah and Chapra meetings are not available.
28 Bihar and Orissa Political Special File no. 115/1921, “Patna S.P.'s letter to Inspector General, dated 4 January 1921”. This whole para is based on this source.
After the meeting patias (letters) were sent to many districts recommending that action should be taken on similar lines. The Patna meeting clearly showed that the constables had moved on from the stage of petitioning and had begun asserting their right to protest. In the meeting, they took an oath that if the authorities punished any of them for attending the meeting and for demanding an increase in pay, they were bound by duty to help such men and collectively protest against such action.

About a week after 2 January, a similar meeting of Head Constables and constables was held on Phalgu river bank in Gaya. Writer Head Constable, Damodar Prasad, presided over the meeting. Some days later, a batch of Writer Head Constables headed by Damodar Prasad, Ali Habib, Ram Balak Ram and Mohammad Bashir called on the Gaya Superintendent of Police, Lloyd Williams, with a bundle of 300 signed petitions. They decided that if their demands were not heeded they would resort to a strike.

There was one common theme in all the petitions submitted to the higher authorities and resolutions passed in different meetings. The constables wanted a "living wage". They considered their 1920 revised pay scale (Rs.11 to Rs.14) low. They argued that when it cost Rs.14 to Rs.15 per month to feed one man, the revised pay still did not make provision for their families. They said that even the postal peons and the railway khalasis, who were not even full time government servants, drew Rs.18 and Rs.20 per month respectively. The constables maintained two establishments because they were not given family accommodation at their places of posting. Messing jointly with the other

29 Ibid, File no. 102/1921.
constables could have been cheaper, but the men of the District Armed police and the Ordinary Reserves available in the police lines insisted on separate caste and community-based kitchens. They emphasized the great expense of providing clothing for themselves and their families, and pointed out that much less was done for them in this respect than earlier. They suggested that the government should supply them with food and clothing at cheap rates and restore the grain compensation allowance. They also complained that they were not able to get enough leave to be with their families. Apart from medical leave, they also demanded casual leave. They demanded a pay scale ranging between Rs.25 to Rs.40 a month and daily allowance ranging between 8 to 12 annas (50-75 paise). They urged a reduction in the period of mobilization and non-recovery of hospital diet from pay.  

Thus, if one looks at their demands in the petitions, one finds that the constables sought redressal for specific grievances over pay, clothing and other conditions, that is, they fought for certain basic demands. They did not contest the institutional subordination or the nature of departmental discipline. But the police threat to go on strike at a time of the nationalist agitation, when their support was very crucial to the government, was not looked upon favourably by the government. The Inspector General of Police, with a force already below the sanctioned strength, needed every constable on duty, especially because the Congress, under Gandhi’s leadership, launched the campaign of Non-Cooperation that included a call for resignation of Indians from the army and police.  

Alarmed at the prospect of widespread disaffection among the police, the Bihar government

31 Ibid, File no. 115/1921, “Purnea S.P.’s letter to Inspector General, Bihar and Orissa, dated 8 March 1921”.
32 Fortnightly Report of Bihar and Orissa for the second half of December 1920, Govt of India, Home Department (Political) File no. 77/Feb/1921, NAI.
saw the necessity of conceding some of the constables’ demands. In his letter emphasizing the urgency of the situation, the Chief Secretary wrote to the Government of India that, “it was imperative, however, that whatever further increase might be granted should be given at the earliest possible moment”.33

Thus their threat to go on strike forced on the government a novel appreciation of the political importance of maintaining the loyalty and morale of the constabulary by attending to some of its material needs. Previously their demands were virtually ignored by the government. They were given an extremely low priority in government expenditure. The government was not prepared to allocate the funds necessary to give them accommodation in police lines. They were not prepared to pay them higher wages. Economizing on constables’ pay was an easy way of keeping down state expenditure. As long as there were enough constables to do the job, there was little inducement to face the consequences of state parsimony. It was only in moments of a political crisis, that is, when the government was confronted with the Non-Cooperation Movement, that it was forced to recognize the grievances and make some concessions to ensure the continuing obedience of its subordinate employees. A new scale of pay for the constables was sanctioned in January 1921.34 The revised scale was Rs.15 to Rs.20.35 The government had only partially considered the constables demand for rise in salary. The other demands were not even considered.36

33 Ibid.
34 Fortnightly Report of Bihar and Orissa for the second half of January 1921, Home Department (Political) File no. 42/1921, NAI.
35 Ibid.
36 Fortnightly Report of Bihar and Orissa for the second half of December 1920, Govt of India, Home Department (Political) File no. 77/Feb/1921; Bihar and Orissa Political Special File no. 115/1921, “Purnea S.P.’s letter to Inspector General, dated 8 March 1921”.

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The constables were not happy with the new pay scale. They were determined to struggle. The government's warning also did not deter them from their resolve to protest. The determination of the constables to go on protest was explained in the following way by the Purnea Superintendent of Police:

The apparent finality of the recent orders, a finality that has been much insisted on, led the men to believe that they have no more hope. A large majority were persuaded to join on the grounds that petitions and constitutional methods have failed and that the methods now proposed can be successful only if every man come in. I am certain non-cooperators have been at work and there is a very general impression that government is afraid and too weak to do anything. There was also a strong belief amongst them that the government was willing to give them Rs30/- but the orders sanctioning it had been withheld by the Inspector General.\(^{37}\)

Though the government sanctioned a new scale of pay for the constables, it was not prepared to accept their threat to go on strike as it smelled defiance in it. It wanted to bring home to policemen that their defiance would not be taken lightly. The Inspector General of Police soon after announcing the new pay scale in January 1921 told the Superintendents of Police of different districts that "each constable, who sent the memorial, should be asked to confirm or deny having submitted the memorial. If the constable admitted that he did so, he should be told that if he still desired to resign, he would be discharged from the force, and if he preferred to withdraw his resignation, he could do so provided he apologized for the breach of discipline. The constable was also to be informed that if he resigned, he would not, on any account, be allowed to re-enter the service".\(^{38}\)

The Purnea Superintendent of Police circulated an order stating that the constables decision to go on strike would amount to being disloyal to the government and that they would lay themselves open to prosecution. It would

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\(^{37}\) Ibid, File no. 115/1921, "Copy of a demi-official letter, dated the 2nd March 1921, From Superintendent of Police, Purnea, to the Inspector-General of Police, Bihar and Orissa".

\(^{38}\) Ibid.
amount to their exclusion for all time from government service. He also reminded them that they were servants of government and were not entitled to leave service without giving two months notice. But, the constables were determined to hand in their kits on 5 March. In fact, they came to this decision after fully considering the recent order of Purnea Superintendent of Police. 39

The constables of Gaya went on strike on 8 February 1921. 40 The strike also spread to a few police stations in the interior district of Gaya. 41 Around 160 constables and one Head Constable gave resignations to mark their protest. 42 Gaya Superintendent of Police claimed that non-cooperators were at the back of this agitation. 43 The Muslim constables were also angry because of the Khilafat issue. 44

On 5 March 1921, there were strikes in many other districts. The constables of Patna, Purnea, Monghyr and Champaran went on strike. The constables deposited their kits, that is, their duty charge and refused to take their discharge certificates. In Patna, 235 constables deposited their kits. In Champaran, 33 men of the armed police deposited their kits. In Monghyr, 20 constables were prepared to deposit their kits but eventually did not do so. 45 In Purnea, 77 men deposited

40 Searchlight, 20 February 1921.
41 Ibid.
42 Ibid, 27 February 1921.
43 Bihar and Orissa Political Special File no. 102/1921.
44 Searchlight, 27 February 1921.
45 Fortnightly Report of Bihar and Orissa for the first half of March 1921, Govt of India, Home Department Political File no., 65/1921, NAI.; Searchlight, 11 March 1921.
their kits.\textsuperscript{46} Fifth March was a day well chosen for the strike. The railway employees and jail wardens also fixed this day to go on strike.\textsuperscript{47}

The preparation behind this strike was quite organized. Secret channels of communication were established by the policemen for intra-district and inter-district consultations. Some letters and telegrams intercepted by the government revealed the use of code words.\textsuperscript{48} The Purnea Superintendent of Police got the information that constables in Bahadurganj and Rupauli were secretly corresponding and planning to go on strike from 5 March.\textsuperscript{49} The constables in Katihar on 25 February even recorded an entry in the station diary to this effect.\textsuperscript{50} All this indicates that a combined decision was arrived at to go in for a strike on 5 March. In fact, it was this wide support that gave confidence to the leaders to go on strike. In Purnea, the information that Gaya, Patna and Muzaffarpur policemen were going on strike had strengthened the resolve of the constables to strike.\textsuperscript{51}

The senior police officials considered the discontentment of the constables real. They were sympathetic to the demands of the constables for an increase in pay. They realized that even with the new scale the constables could not maintain their families and had to resort to dishonesty. However, despite their sympathy, they had strong objection to the constables resorting to a strike as a method of protest. These strikes were interpreted as open defiance and contempt for government, as sign of disloyalty to the government, as breach of discipline, as

\textsuperscript{46} Bihar and Orissa Political Special File no. 130/1921, “Copy of a cipher telegram dated 8 March 1921 from Bihar to Home, Delhi and General Officer Commanding, Calcutta”; Searchlight, 11 March 1921.

\textsuperscript{47} Bihar and Orissa Political Special File no. 115/1921, “Copy of demi-official letter dated 2\textsuperscript{nd} March, 1921, S.P., Purnea to Inspector General of Police, Bihar and Orissa”; Searchlight, 11 March 1921.

\textsuperscript{48} Bihar and Orissa Political Special File no. 115/1921.

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid, “Purnea Superintendent of Police’s letter to Inspector General, dated 2\textsuperscript{nd} March 1921”.

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid, “Purnea Superintendent of Police’s letter to Inspector General, dated 3 March 1921”.

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deliberate attacks on authority and as a symptom of a possible insurrection and subversive behaviour.\textsuperscript{52} It was also apprehended that the strike by policemen, who were regarded as an important pillar of the government, during the national movement would be viewed by the people as signs of weakening and crumbling of government’s power. Senior police officials decided to take strong action against all those who went on strike.\textsuperscript{53} The Inspector General of Police sent a circular to the Superintendents of Police of different districts stating that the policemen’s “conduct has amounted to a public scandal and that they have publicly shown contempt for authority, disgraced themselves, their officers and the police generally”.\textsuperscript{54} The circular further stated that any application for a reconsideration of the order of dismissal should be accompanied by an act which points to genuine contrition.\textsuperscript{55} In Patna, the constables who went on strike were dismissed.\textsuperscript{56} But in Purnea where the Superintendent of Police allowed the constables to resume duty unconditionally was reprimanded by the Inspector General of Police for encouraging breach of discipline. The Purnea Superintendent of Police gave the following rationale for allowing the constables to resume duty without giving any punishment:

I had foreseen the difficulty to which you allude and so I think had the constables. Not a man would tender his resignation either in writing or verbally. They argued that they came and deposited their kits merely to call attention to their grievances—‘dukh rone ke liye’. The constables only wanted to strike, but when told that to do so was tantamount to resigning had some difficulty in adjusting their minds to the situation. When at last they realised that a temporary strike was out of the question, the battle was more or less over, and I do not think it would have been in the best interest of Government to have forced an issue before the true issue had time to sink into their minds.

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid, File no. 130/1921.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid, File no. 115/1921.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid, “Office of the Inspector-General of police, Bihar and Orissa, 8 March 1921”.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid, “Copy of demi-official letter, dated the 9th March 1921, from E.F. Hawlins, Superintendent of Police, Patna, to the Inspector-General of Police, Bihar and Orissa”.

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The men were sound at heart and later clearly realised the foolishness of their conduct. They were in what I can only describe as a state of exhaltation — ready for martyrdom and rather courting it..... Among the would be strikers were a large number of men with excellent records and long service that I took such great pains to make them see the error of their ways....It seemed to me, however, a great catastrophe that men with many years of excellent service should be lost to the Government and their future irretrievably ruined through one day’s foolishness and a mistaken sense of loyalty to their comrades.... If I would have treated them with less patience and less sincerity, they would have marched off in body. Discharge of the whole force would have created troubles in other districts.\footnote{57}

The District Magistrate of Purnea did not agree with the rationale provided by Purnea Superintendent of Police that the constables had not resigned on 5 March. He said that their leaving the duty without permission and depositing their kits was tantamount to resigning.\footnote{58}

The issue of loyalty was at the core of senior police officials’ concern. Even in Purnea, where the Superintendent of Police succeeded in persuading the constables to withdraw their resignation, an appeal was made to their sense of loyalty to the government.\footnote{59}

How should such resistance of the police force be viewed? If one examines their demands, one finds that they fought for their basics and did not contest institutional subordination. They also considered that all their actions were in consistent with an attitude of deference to the colonial rulers and loyalty to the Empire. One sees how Purnea Superintendent of Police throughout maintained that “men behaved in a thoroughly admirable manner. They were entirely respectful and never for a moment forgot their sense of discipline. They showed no hint at all of an insubordinate spirit. They all along endeavoured to

\footnote{57} Ibid, “Purnea S.P.’s letter to Inspector General of Police, dated 8\textsuperscript{th} March 1921”.

\footnote{58} Ibid, “Inspector General of Police’s letter to Chief Secretary dated 24 April 1921, Purnea Constable Strike”.

\footnote{59} Ibid.
make out that their intention in coming to deposit their kits was merely to call attention to their grievances. Most of them tried to make out that they had not come to resign and none was prepared to put in a written resignation. They vouched that they were ready to give their lives for Government but merely asked for a living wage.”  

Rarely did they seek in their resistance a more abstract liberation by which they offered a direct challenge to the dominant ideology of the state. To paraphrase James Scott, their resistance generally constituted “contests within hegemony”, that is, struggles whose claims to justice were grounded in the dominant group’s principles and moral categories. But despite this, even such resistance was quite significant because it is the context and the consequences that render certain actions contestory. Seemingly innocuous behaviours and commonplace actions, within the bounds of legality or legitimate expressions, can have unintended yet profound consequences for the objectives of the dominant social order. In the context of the constables’ protest, what was of great significance was their assertion to voice their demands, and that too, at a time when the government was confronted with the national movement and when their support would have been very crucial for the government. This definitely shook the government as police was primarily seen as one of its main pillars of support. Thus to confine the understanding of resistance to its more traditional sense would mean not to consider the very processes by which power is often tested and eroded by the actions of the subordinate.

60 Ibid, “Purnea S.P.’s letter to Inspector General of police, dated 8 March 1921”.
Police Protest: Context of Non-Cooperation Movement

Policemen went on strike for the first time. It was not easy for policemen, being an important institution of British authority, to go on strike, and that too, at a time when the government needed their support most. Why did the police protest sharpen during the Non-Cooperation Movement? Police official’s account brought out the significance of the context of the Non-Cooperation Movement in fomenting police unrest. The Deputy Inspector General of Police’s note to Chief Secretary, dated 4 March 1921, showing the extent to which unrest among the police was fomented by the non-cooperators, said that “even though the main cause of police unrest was economic, the general excitement and unrest created by the non-cooperation agitation had done a good deal to render the discontent more acute”. The note further pointed out that the “police unrest on the question of pay had been fomented by non-cooperation agitators working in the background in the same manner in which similar unrest has been stirred up in labour areas throughout the province”. It further said that “some of the constables, who had been taking active part in the agitation, had been secretly in sympathy with the non-cooperation movement”.

The constables and non-cooperators were in contact with each other and the latter were taking interest in constables problems, helping their agitation and inducing them to join the national movement. A few such instances are given below.

Many non-cooperators were present at the constables meeting held on the *diara* in Patna on 2 January 1921. Pandit Jewanand, a non-cooperator, addressed

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62 Bihar and Orissa Political Special File no. 102/1921, “Deputy Inspector General of Police’s note to Chief Secretary, dated 4 March 1921 -The extent to which unrest among the police was fomented by non-cooperators”. The rest of this section is based on this source.
this meeting. Even in the Head Constables meeting in Patna on 9 January 1921, Tulsi Singh, a noted Patna non-cooperator, played an active role. Some Muslim constables of Patna went to Mazharul Haq and other nationalist leaders “for advice as to their course of action before and after the meeting held on the diara”.

In Gaya, Writer Head Constable, Damodar Prasad, and others were in touch with Congress leaders like Krishna Prakash Sen Sinha. Damodar Prasad, who had been dismissed, on his return from Patna stayed with Rai Hari Prasad, one of the Gaya non-cooperation leaders. Many non-cooperators joined Damodar Prasad in inducing the constables to resign. They carried their propaganda amongst the police at night.

In Champaran, some constables of the Mothihari Reserve were in contact with the local non-cooperation leaders. They visited these leaders at night. Police Superintendents of both Darbhanga and Purnea gave their opinion that “in the background of the agitation were non-cooperators.” The Champaran Police official reported that in his district the “Purbia members of the Mounted Military Police, who mostly came from Chapra, Shahabad, Ballia, Ghaziapur and neighbouring districts, were sympathetic to the non-cooperation movement”.

Thus, there was relationship between the constables and the non-cooperators. The Non-Cooperation Movement provided the context for furthering the police protest. The ongoing national movement emboldened the constables as their protests could not be easily isolated and suppressed. In fact, it can be surmised that the constables entered collective protest more confidently knowing that they had the backing of a larger movement and a well developed organization. The impression that the government was too afraid and weak to do anything at that time further encouraged them.

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Nationalist Policy vis-à-vis the Police

Why were the nationalists taking interest in police problems? How does one look at the relationship of the nationalists with the police? This can be better understood in the context of broader aims of the nationalist policy. The nationalists wanted to establish a hegemony of their own over what had hitherto been an emphatically colonial constabulary. They wanted to win the support of the subordinate classes so as to isolate the colonial regime.\(^3\) They looked for opportunities to interpose themselves between the colonial state and the subordinate police.\(^4\) The Congress, at its special session in Calcutta in September 1920, adopted a programme of Non-Cooperation which also included a call to Indians to withdraw from the police and army. This gave impetus to the attempts of the nationalists to gain a hold over the subordinate police.\(^5\) The Nagpur session of the Indian National Congress in December 1920 ratified the Non-Cooperation decision and made an appeal to the police and army in these words: “This Congress recognizes the growing friendliness between the police and soldiers and the people, and hopes that the former will refuse to subordinate their creed and country to the fulfillment of orders of their officers and by courteous and considerate behaviour towards the people will remove the reproach hitherto leveled against them that they were devoid of any regard for the feelings and sentiments of their own people”.\(^6\)

In Bihar, the nationalists tried to identify with Indian policemen, especially the subordinate ranks, as fellow Indians even prior to the emergence of the Non-Cooperation Movement. As early as March 1920, the Bihar Special Branch came

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\(^3\) Ibid, File no. 144/1921
\(^4\) Ibid.
\(^6\) Ibid.
across an anonymous letter addressed to the Sub-Inspector of Bankipur (Patna) police station. Similar letters were received in other districts. The letter made the following appeal:

All Hindu and Muhammadan Constables, Chowkidars, Daffadars, Head Constables, Sub-Inspectors and Inspectors are informed that this is not the time to sit quietly. The time has now come for weeping and mourning. Look, O, Hindu brethren see how the government is trying to do zulum in connection with the religious concern of your Muslim brethren. O, Rajas, you will not be able to live, for when Government is interfering with us today, she is sure to do zulum against you tomorrow. Remember this well. It is better that you should stand by your Muslim brethren and help with your property, strength, life, swords and guns without fear, since all of us, both Hindus and Muhammadans, belong to the Indian Army. You have guns and you should always be present to help us. Do you want always to remain slaves and have your heads beaten with shoes? This letter is sent to every District Police Office.

When the Khilafat Movement intensified in 1920, the government apprehended that it could be exploited to cause disaffection among the army and police personnel, particularly Muslims. The Government of India addressed a secret D.O. letter to the Provincial Governments on 12 June 1920 which, inter alia, stated:

It appears also from information that has come to the notice of the Government of India that efforts have been or will shortly be made to organize Khilafat or anti-Government propaganda in rural areas with the object of getting at sepoys and police constables while at their homes on leave, and of causing disaffection amongst the classes from which the army and the police are mainly recruited. I am to request that special attention be devoted to this dangerous movement. Every effort should be made to ascertain whether propaganda of the kind described has been undertaken and to bring to trial those who are conducting or instigating it.

Nationalist involvement with the subordinate police intensified during the Non-Cooperation Movement. Some leaders in Bihar wanted to use the opportunity

69 Bihar and Orissa Political Special File no. 102/1921.
of discontentment amongst the constables to draw them towards the movement. They expressed concern over the wretched conditions of work and inadequate pay of constables. Dip Narayan Singh, a leader of the Non-Cooperation Movement from Bhagalpur, while addressing a meeting in February 1921, asked the nationalists to take advantage of police discontentment to increase their hold amongst them.\footnote{70 ibid, “Letter of Inspector General of Police, Bihar and Orissa, to the Chief Secretary, dated 4 March 1921-Extent to which unrest among the police has been kept up by non-cooperation”.

71 Ibid.

72 Ibid.

73 Ibid.

74 Ibid.}

Some nationalist leaders, while addressing meetings in different parts of Bihar, often referred to the police saying that the final stage of Non-Cooperation Movement would be the withdrawal of the police and military from government service. They expressed the hope that the police would eventually leave their jobs and join the movement.\footnote{71} Mohammad Ali, while speaking at a public meeting in Patna on 6 January 1921, said that “if the parents removed their children from schools and people gave up drink, then the police and sepoys would also eventually leave their barracks”.\footnote{72} At another meeting held at Jharia on 5 February 1921, Mohammad Ali again said that “the day schools got vacated, on the very next day the police and army would also leave their service”.\footnote{73} Speaking at Jharia itself on 20 February 1921, J.L. Banarji, another nationalist leader, said that the main support for the running of the British Government was provided by the Indian police, army and magistrates, and once Indians withdrew their support the government would be paralyzed.\footnote{74} At another meeting in February 1921, Chandra Bansi Sahay said that “the nationalist leaders were now busy in the spread of the movement amongst the students and in the opening of national schools for them.
As soon as this task was complete, the nationalists would focus their attention on the police and army, for which task they were making some provisions.\textsuperscript{75}

A large number of leaflets were also distributed by local nationalists in which an appeal was made to the police to join the movement.\textsuperscript{76} The nationalists presented it as the moral duty of Indian policemen to free themselves from service under the British and their slavery and to identify with the cause of national freedom. According to them, nationalism commanded a loyalty superior to that of the colonial state. Policemen were strongly reprimanded for betraying their motherland and countrymen. Below is quoted one such pamphlet, “Police Bhaion Se Namr Nivedan”:\textsuperscript{77}

\begin{quote}
With folded hands we fall at your feet,
And request you give up the path of sin, O Police.
Having fallen in the love for slavery,
You suck the blood of your brothers day and night, O Police.
The deliverance of India was expected from you,
But you did not fulfil that hope in the least, O Police.
Hear attentively, be careful even now, brighten the face of the mother, O Police
For triflings you caused your brothers to be called A.B.C., O Police.
You commit similar sins everyday,
You have caused the country to be deprived of wealth, O Police.
Alas! Alas! O God, how can there be any reform,
No help has yet been rendered by you, O Police.
Fie on your actions, fie on your deeds,
You have drowned the name of your nation, O Police.
In order to please others you do sycophancy,
Yet you become totally dishonest, O Police.
Give up ill-doings, if you follow good path,
Your progeny will be happy in all ways, O Police.
By falling in the love of slavery now,
You will be reduced to beggary day by day, O Police.
Think over the state of affairs during your own life-time,
They are self-evident conclusive proofs, O Police.
The whole country is sacrificing its life for Raj,
Lend your help in this good object, O Police.
Withdraw from the error committed through ignorance,
Give up looting, regard Gandhi as a true Rishi (sage), O Police.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{76} Searchlight, 20 February 1921.
\textsuperscript{77} Bihar and Orissa Political Special File no. 191/1921.
Remove the hand-cuffs from India’s hands,
Remove them, O Police, this is the last request.

In another pamphlet, “Sipahiya”, police were shown as being brutal and were strongly condemned for killing and torturing their own countrymen. Request was made to them in the name of religion not to commit atrocities on their own countrymen, to leave their service, which had made them slaves, and to serve their country.\(^{78}\) To quote the pamphlet\(^ {79}\):

O, my brother Sipahi, you have now committed much sin and ruined the country;
Though sons of Rishis, you have killed lives,
Even now take care, O brother Sipahi.
You serve in posts carrying Rs 5/- or Rs 10/- a month
(And for that) you fire shots at your countrymen, O Sipahi.
O, Sipahi, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Jainism,
All religions forbid the killing of lives.
You kill lives for the sake of bread, give up your services, O brother Sipahi,
Go back home and maintain your children now by taking to agriculture, O brother Sipahi,
For small matters you challan your brethren of the country for nothing, O Sipahi.
Now look to the times, O brother Sipahi,
Act according to the time, O Sipahi.
The country asks you to kick away your service,
Now do the work of the country, O brother Sipahi.

Such appeals to the police made the government anxious. They were afraid that the national movement would influence the police force. The government wanted to know how far national movement had affected the police force. Inspector General of Police asked the Superintendents of Police of different districts to report on the attitude of the police towards the Non-Cooperation Movement. All the Superintendents of Police were of the opinion that the higher ranks of police officials remained loyal to the government and were opposed to

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\(^{78}\) Bihar Special Branch, File no. 144L/1921, Proscribed Leaflet, “Policewa”, CID Record Room, Patna.

\(^{79}\) Ibid.
the movement. However, the Superintendents of Police were not so confident about the loyalty of lower rank police officials, like Sub-Inspectors and Writer Head Constables. The Purnea Superintendent of Police considered some of his Sub-Inspectors and Writer Head Constables disloyal. The Monghyr Superintendent of Police considered twenty percent of his Sub-Inspectors not only disloyal but also sympathetic to the movement, twenty percent thoroughly loyal and the remainder neutral. He also pointed out that a number of Sub-inspectors in the Jamalpur sub-division were in sympathy with the movement. The Darbhanga Superintendent of Police did not trust his Muslim officers, whom he considered “fanatical” on the Khilafat question. He said that some of his Muslim officers were secretly in sympathy with the Non-Cooperation propaganda because they wanted to modify the Turkish Peace Treaty. The treaty that was imposed on Turkey after the First World War abolished the Caliphate, which was highly resented by the Muslims. The Muzaffarpur Superintendent of Police reported that a number of Sub-inspectors and Writer Head Constables “were sitting on the fence and some of them even visited extremist leaders”.

However, all the Superintendents of Police categorically pointed out that the lowest rung in the police hierarchy was not trustworthy. The constables were not considered as reliable as in the pre-war days. The Superintendents of Police said that “the constables revered Gandhi and looked upon him as a divinity”. As far as the Armed police were considered, the Superintendents of Police pointed out that loyalty existed in those districts where the Armed Police was composed of tribals but it was not the same where the Armed Police consisted of “Biharis”.

80 Bihar and Orissa Political Special File no. 102/1921, “Note on the attitude of the Police towards the Non-Cooperation Movement, dated 8 July 1921”. This and the next para is based on this source.
The Monghyr Superintendent of Police reported that two months ago his reply to whether or not the armed police were loyal would have been that they were unreliable and that if ordered to “fire on a mob with the shout of Gandhi on their lips, they might have refused”. But he believed that the situation had improved since then. However, the Muzaffarpur Superintendent of Police was not confident of the loyalty of the armed police in his district. His idea was that “under circumstances such as rioting his men would not disobey an order to fire but he said that if they were called on to answer the call of duty or the call of the nation, they would refuse”. So, there was a strong feeling amongst the police officials that the lower rungs of police could not be trusted to deal with the movement.

The arrest of the Ali brothers in October 1921 again gave rise to fear about the loyalty of the police force. On 4 October 1921, Mahatma Gandhi and other Congress leaders issued a manifesto after the arrest of the Ali brothers appealing to “every Indian soldier and civilian to sever his connection with the government and find some other means of livelihood”. In addition, the proscription of the fatwa issued by the ulema on the Khilafat question deepened the resentment of the police force all over the country. Secret meetings between the non-cooperators and policemen and among the policemen were reported from most districts of Bihar. Many Muslim constables resigned saying that their religious convictions debarred them from serving the government. They said that to serve in the police was haram. A Muslim constable of Ranchi resigned saying that his religious convictions debarred him from serving the government any longer. Writer Head

82 Bihar and Orissa Political Special File no. 541/1921.
83 Ibid, File no. 49/1921. This para and the following three paras are based on this source.
Constable, Ishwari Prasad, of the Hazaribagh Sadar Court resigned saying that to serve in the police was *haram*. He was appointed Tehsildar of the *muthia* on behalf of the Khilafat Committee. Constable Abdul Ghaffar of Darbhanga district resigned saying that the Maulana influenced him to leave government service.

A police officer reported that the “Calcutta Police comprising of a large number of constables from Bihar and U.P. were stirred up by up-country agitators, especially by the receipt of letters from their homes telling them to resign from service, otherwise, their families would be put to shame”. Bihar Special Branch received information towards the end of November 1921 that 11 discharged constables of the Calcutta Police would come to Patna with the object of persuading the local police officers and men to resign their appointments.

A number of rumours were floating. One such rumour was that the Court Sub-Inspector of Jamui in Monghyr district and several other Muslims met at the house of a Muslim *mukhtar* “to weep and wail their sorrow on the arrest of the Ali Brothers”. One of the strong rumours in Tirhut Division was that 55 Muslim constables of Saharanpur district had resigned and others would also follow. Another rumour was that a deputation of ten men, each from Raghunathpur and Siwan in Saran district, would press upon the local sub-inspectors to resign or otherwise they would be socially boycotted.

In Jamui and Jamalpur, both in Monghyr district, appeals were made to the police to give up service in response to Mahatma Gandhi’s call. An inspector in Monghyr made an attempt to spread Non-Cooperation amongst the police. In Kharagpur, a Muslim sub-inspector stated on one occasion that it was unfortunate that Indians in the police had to report the speeches of those who worked for the good of the country to the higher police officials. In Monghyr, police wavered as
to whether they should resign following the example of the Calcutta men. A constable of Jamalpur outpost was found wearing a Gandhi cap and later submitted his resignation. In Jamalpur town, there was a move amongst the Muslim constables to resign in a body but it did not materialize. A Head Constable of the Champaran District Armed Police admitted before his Superintendent that he was upset and could not decide how to react to the situation. In Muzaffarpur, a meeting was held on 3 November 1921 where an appeal was made to all Muslims to leave government service. Two constables resigned. The Deputy Commissioner of Hazaribagh expressed concern as to how the preaching of Non-Cooperation affected the police in Chatra. In Chatra, one sub-inspector and six constables resigned. In Giridih, too, police constables resigned. Many constables applied for three to four months leave. In Ranchi, a Writer Head Constable resigned. His son was very active in the Non-Cooperation Movement. Around fifty constables in Bihar gave their resignations. Muzaffarpur and Monghyr districts topped the list of resignations.

Thus, the Non-Cooperation Movement struck a sympathetic chord amongst the lower rungs of the police. The government was clearly worried by the moves of the nationalists to establish moral and political ascendancy over the police. But despite the strong apprehension of the government, the threatened collapse of police morale never quite happened and the colonial state was able to retain effective control over the police. Nevertheless, one cannot overlook the symbolic importance of police resignations. The movement partially succeeded in neutralizing the lower rungs of police. The British could not even play one

84 Bihar and Orissa Police Administration Reports, 1921-22.
religious community of police against the other because Khilafat issue brought a
large number of Muslims into the movement.

The appeal of nationalists to the police force, the striking of a sympathetic
chord amongst the lower rung and the resignation of some constables appears
surprising as police were primarily seen as agents of the state. The police appeared
to the masses as the uniformed embodiment of state power. It was the state which
called them into being, assigned them their rank and duties and gave them their
orders. But this study brings out how such an identity of police obscures more
than illuminates by excluding alternative, possibly intersecting, identities and
relationships. In fact, the sympathy of the non-cooperators towards the police
makes us think anew of their other identity, which has been overlooked in most
studies so far. Thus, one cannot look at the police only in the parameter of a
dichotomy, that is, friend and enemy of the colonial regime or in terms of loyalty
and disloyalty.

The subordinate police cannot be reduced to a mere mechanized and
dehumanized agent of colonial control. The police were also part of society
having strong social ties and affinities. The off-duty constables were engaged day
to day in the social and cultural life of the community around them. These lateral
ties and affinities often inhibited or negated institutional subordination and the
efficiency of the colonial police. Even the very nature of police work, as the
British conceived, precluded the total isolation of the constabulary from the
public. There were many duties that brought policemen, individually or in small
groups, into direct contact with the population. Besides, even when they lived in
the police lines with their families, an important link with the outside world was
maintained. Colonialism could not sever this relationship.
Thus the constabulary was not that effectively disciplined, supervised and isolated from external influence so as to be entirely subordinate to central control. Moreover, the British did not have the capacity or inclination to enforce a more vigorous system of control over the rank and file of the police. They were not prepared to allocate the funds necessary to accommodate all the subordinates in police lines, where they could be kept under closer supervision. Nor was the government prepared to pay wages high enough to attract and retain the kind of policemen, they thought, they wanted or to free them from the temptation of petty corruption.

The ideological integration of the constables with the colonial regime was also not that strong. By virtue of their background, education and limited contact with Europeans even within the force, constables were not so ideologically integrated with western culture. The colonial state had, in this respect, only limited expectations of its police subordinates. It had a very low view of their mental capacities.85 Unquestioned loyalty could not be expected from this section of police force, as it has already been discussed how subordinate their position was and how much discontented and dissatisfied they were with their service conditions. Many constables entered the service on little more than a labourer’s wage not because they subscribed to the objectives of the colonial state but because many of them could not find alternative or remunerative employment.

But, it is only under certain conditions that the other identity of the police asserted. Ordinarily, their identity as state agent primarily predominated. It was under the impact of a strong Non-Cooperation Movement that their social and cultural ties with the rest of society and their nationalist feelings asserted

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85 *Bihar and Orissa Political Administration Report, 1918,* p.18.
themselves and ran directly counter to their official duties. Many Muslim constables responded to the call of the *fatwa* and even resigned. Their loyalty to their religion outweighed their official responsibilities.

**Animosity Against the Police**

The above section examined the nationalist's relationship with the police. It brought out how the nationalists tried to befriend the police and how the movement affected the lower rungs of police. This section looks at another trend, that is, strong animosity against the police. In fact, deep-seated anger and hostility against the police remained a strong undercurrent of the national movement.

Anger against the police had been building up for a long time. The local police were the most visible representatives of state authority, standing at the critical point of intersection between the state and the people.\(^{86}\) It was one of the few agents of the state with whom the masses had direct contact. Through the police the priorities and the principles of colonial administration got institutionalized and enacted. The executive authority of the state was channeled through them. Besides, the role of the police was never restricted to that laid down by the lawmakers. Police power was often used to circumvent or supplement the legal process for the sake of prompt retribution and collective punishment. The more resolutely colonial control was challenged, the greater the willingness of the colonial authorities to authorize police action that went beyond both the letter and the spirit of the law. Police action thus represented the arbitrary and cruel nature of colonial rule and its unaccountability to Indian opinion. *Lathi* wielding policemen beating a defenceless satyagrahi became an emotive symbol of India's freedom struggle. That it was usually an Indian constable who did the beating

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\(^{86}\) This para is based on the introduction of work of David Arnold, *Police Power and Colonial Rule, Madras 1859-1947*, Delhi, 1986, pp. 2-5.
under the direction of an European officer made the role of the police appear both
divisive and brutal.

Apart from regarding the police as the coercive agent of the state, the
people also developed a strong hatred against them because of their unlicensed
petty tyranny and corruption. The persistent zulum and everyday oppression of
police alienated them from the people. The constables were low-paid and had
many similarities with the masses but their role as police clearly set them apart
from the masses. Policemen were aware of possessing a power and a status
superior to that of many of their neighbours. They used the power, which they
derived from their official position, to extort bribes and favours from anyone too
weak to resist their demands.

The constables also, in most instances, showed their deference to men of
great wealth and power. They protected the interests of the richer peasants,
landlords and village heads against the poor peasants and others of the poor
classes. Their loyalty towards the former sections can also be explained because
most of the constables belonged to locally dominant communities of the village.
So the subordinate police, even though cast in a colonial mould as servants of the
colonial state, were most often absorbed into the ancient pattern of subordination
of peons and retainers to feudal landlords and rajas. They assisted the landlords in
collecting rents from recalcitrant tenants. The police assisted the Darbhanga Raj
in containing the peasant agitation in 1919-20. The police in Bihar generally

89 Stephen Henningham, Peasant Movements in Colonial India, p.24.
90 Ibid, p.88.
protected the interests of the planters against their tenants. Whenever the police came to investigate any case in the villages they sided with the planters and their *amlas* against the villagers. For example, the policemen, who had come to investigate a case in a village in Dhanaha in Champaran, where the mounted troopers were accused of looting in December 1921, sided with the planters and their *amlas* against the villagers. The policemen, who came to investigate the riots of Sonbarsa and Chauterwa in 1921, supported the planters. So these subordinate policemen, who rose from the peasantry to a position of power, instead of showing solidarity with the peasants, exploited them for their personal gain or in the service of others.

It was not surprising, therefore, that anti-police riots were frequent, arising either from resentment at the activities of the policemen themselves or because of their implementation of unpopular policies and serving the interests of the government. Long experience of their high-handedness and *zulum* often transformed a dispute from a minor altercation into a violent confrontation and from simple defiance to an attack on the police. Even though anger against the police had been simmering much before the beginning of the Non-Cooperation Movement, it was only during the Non-Cooperation Movement that criticism against the police became much more sharpened and sustained. The significant development of the Non-Cooperation Movement was the extent to which it became a vehicle for demonstration of popular hostility against the police. The

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91 Bihar and Orissa Political Special File no. 69/1922, "Report on the allegations of loot made in the villages of Machha, Pipraha, Bairatwa, Chanderpur and Sihulia; Motherland, 9 January 1922, "Alleged Police Terrorism in Champaran".

92 Bihar and Orissa Political Special File no. 539/1921; Home Department (Political) File no. 315/1922, NAI. Sonbarsa and Chauterwa riots have been discussed in the previous chapter.

93 The first chapter on "Non-Cooperation-An Overview" has brought out people's animosity against the police.
general atmosphere of the Non-Cooperation Movement was one of defiance and strong contempt of the colonial authority. The movement succeeded in eroding the fear of the police. Policemen were frequently subjected to vituperation and insults.

Below are given some instances of hostility against the police during the Non-Cooperation Movement:

In March 1922, a case was reported by a constable of Dagmara police station to the effect that non-cooperators assaulted him and snatched away his pugri saying that what was the use of constables and chaukidars when swaraj has been obtained.94

On 19 Feb 1921, a force of six policemen and 20 chaukidars began investigating a case in the Kateya area in Saran. In Kateya and the neighbouring police circles, 35 non-cooperation panchayats, with a total of 219 members, had been formed and 268 volunteers had been appointed. By these means, the non-cooperation activists had brought 33 villages under their jurisdiction. The police party had been ordered to investigate an allegation that a non-cooperation panchayat had treated a Koeri woman unjustly and cruelly. While the police were interviewing witnesses, a large group of men arrived armed with sticks, lathis and spears and shouting ‘Gandhiji ki jai’. The men ordered the policemen and chaukidars to kneel down and by shouting ‘Gandhiji ki jai’ proclaim their acceptance of swaraj. When the members of the police party refused, the men showered them with clods of earth and attacked them with lathis, forcing them to retreat. The sub-inspector in charge reported that the attacking force was about 2,000 in number and included people from 19 different villages. He listed 32 people as definitely having been among the rioters and this list, which included names which are characteristically Brahman, Rajput, Koeri, Yadav and low status Muslim, indicates that they came from a wide social spectrum.95

In June 1921, in the Bagaha thana in Champaran, the police reported that serious crimes were not being reported. Also in June, the Bhagalpur Commissioner reported that in Purnea police officers were finding it hard to get accommodation while on tour.96

In December 1921, 200 men invaded the Sonbarsa thana, on the northern frontier of Muzaffarpur. Apparently, they had been inspired by the announcement of the All India Congress Committee on 4 November that non-cooperation had reached a stage at which its climatic phase of full

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94 Bihar and Orissa Political Special File no. 213A/1922, “Extract from the confidential diary of the Superintendent of Police, Bhagalpur, for the week ending the 1st April, 1922”.
95 Ibid, File no. 58/1921, “Copy of letter No. 504, dated the 25th March 1921, from the Superintendent of Jail and Civil Surgeon, Saran, To the District Magistrate of Saran”.
96 Ibid, File no. 184/1921, “Bhagalpur Division Commissioner’s report to Chief Secretary, dated 1 June 1921”.

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civil disobedience could be undertaken in selected and carefully prepared areas. After invading the police station, the non-cooperators called on the police to relinquish control and told them that they should leave government service, as by remaining in the service Hindus are eating cow flesh and Muslims are eating pig flesh. The police responded by arresting seven of the leaders. The remaining activists hung about from 4 o’clock till 11 at night before finally dispersing. The District Police Superintendent commented that the demonstration had been made by a mob of high caste men and said that this boded ill for the future.  

There was a confrontation between the police and people in Dhanaha on 27 December 1921. The Mounted Military Police, while patrolling certain villages, met a hostile demonstration, which comprised over 2,000 persons, who alleged that the police had looted their villages. The Inspector and several of his men were struck by lathis and missiles thrown mainly by boys. 

In the Araria thana in Purana, on 5 February 1922, three policemen and several chaukidars arrested three picketers, who allegedly assaulted and robbed a liquor shop customer. While taking the prisoners to the Araria police station, the police party was attacked by a large mob of a thousand people, shouting the usual non-cooperation cries. The chaukidars fled and the crowd surrounded the three regular policemen, inflicted slight injuries on them and forced them to relinquish their prisoners. 

On 10 February 1922, at Tarhaisa haat in the Palamau district, the police, who were attempting to stop the picketing of an outstill, were assaulted by a large crowd and had to fly for safety. An Inspector, Sub-Inspector, a Writer Head Constable and two constables were injured and the outstill was burnt. Several cases were reported from Muzaffarpur and Hazaribagh, during the same month, in which the police were resisted or assaulted in attempting to execute distress warrants. 

On 23 December 1921, 100 sevak dal volunteers paraded in front of the Hajipur police station hurling abuses at the police and shouting ‘sarkar ki nokri karna haram hai’. 

In Dhanaha, in January 1921, the police could take away the people accused for demolishing the pound with great difficulty, amidst hostile demonstration. 

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97 Ibid, File no. 3/1922, “Diary of Muzaffarpur Police Superintendent, 29 December 1921”. 
98 Ibid; Searchlight, 15 January 1922. 
99 Bihar and Orissa Political Special File no. 146/1922, “Extract from the Confidential Diary of the Superintendent of Police, Purana for the week ending 8th February 1922. 
100 Ibid, File no. 85/1922, “Reports of serious disturbance in Palamau, From Deputy Collector to the Chief Secretary, 17 February 1922”. 
101 Ibid, File no. 3/1922, “Report for the week ending 5 January 1922”. 
102 Ibid, File no. 146/1922, “Extract from the confidential diary of the Superintendent of Police, Purana, for week ending 16 January 1922”. 

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In January 1921, the sub-inspector and police were openly defied by one of the parties in a land dispute in Rupauli. The party, which had assembled in large numbers, forced the sub-inspector and the few police to leave the spot. They looted the disputed crops shouting 'Gandhiji ki jai'.

Thus, the above instances bring out how during the Non-Cooperation Movement the full extent of popular antipathy to all that symbolized police power was evident. Police stations were picketed. The humiliation, brutality and torture practised by the police were now turned against them. In many places, they were tied up and beaten with sticks and sickles. Some of the above instances also show that the police station within the walls of which intimidation was widely believed to be practiced, and the very existence of which represented the presence of a demanding, coercive and partisan state was frequently besieged. The attempt to rescue an arrested man from the terrors and isolation of police custody was the occasion for many violent confrontations between the police and people. At such times, it was in opposition to the police that the masses defied authority.

The police were threatened and widely abused, insulted and made the butt of ribald songs, spat upon and boycotted, sometimes also cajoled and appealed to leave their service. The following leaflet “Sipahiya” brings out some of these responses:

Alas Alas! it is difficult to say, why God has brought you into this world, O sipahi.  
My heart breaks seeing my brethren in trouble. Moreover the sipahis issue orders to them  
Having said something partly true and partly false to the dishonest persons and government, the sipahis create quarrels among ourselves.  
Gandhiji and Shaukat Ali call out loudly to the sipahis: Resign the service of the firangia.  
Sipahis lose their izzat for the sake of 2 annas, and are kicked daily.

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103 Ibid.  
104 Refer to the first chapter, “Non-Cooperation - An Overview”.  
105 Bihar and Orissa Political Special File no. 32/1921.
Cooks get seven rupees, khansamas rupees ten, it is not understood why is your pay smaller, O sipahi.
We have heard of the past, Oh ye sipahis. They take an oath from you when they employ you.
O sipahis, when you become sipahis you extort money from your father.
You kick your brothers and beat your father with shoes and extort money from your mother.
Hindus and Muhammadans are brothers in India. Whose sons will you be called,O sipahi.
Oh sipahis, Be you Hindus or Muhammadans, Give up service and do cultivation with the farmers;
Oh sipahis, If you are greedy for money, build a cottage for your wife where she will earn money for you to eat.
O sipahis, when you enjoy life with the earnings of your wife, your face will be blackened.
O sipahis, it is against religion to see your face. How many request and prayers I make for you.

The strong hostility and frequent attacks on the police tended to demoralise the police force and greatly undermined the prestige of the government. The Muzaffarpur Superintendent of Police, expressing his anxiety, said that, “his police force had become exasperated almost beyond endurance by the gross insults and abuse that had been hurled upon them frequently”.

In confrontations with the police, their uniforms were often attacked. Most often the uniforms which were stripped from them were burned or paraded in triumph by the masses. Their pugris were also pulled and thrown away. There were several such incidents. One example is given from Damgara in Bhagalpur. One of the shop-keepers, Bhokari Koer, of Bagajan Bazaar in Damgara had a dispute with a constable. The constable had forcibly taken away sweet potatoes from this shop-keeper, and on being asked to pay the price beat the shop-keeper.

After that a large number of villagers surrounded the constable. They snatched

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106 Ibid, File no. 3/1922.
107 The first chapter on “Non-Cooperation-An Overview” has brought out the animosity against the police.

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There were many instances of defiance of authority. Attacks on Europeans were still common. In Patna, the Education Minister who went to open an agricultural exhibition in February was shouted down. In many places, in February, the police came under attack. The arrest and trials of the non-cooperators in courts drew large crowds. In Purnea, in the same month, a crowd of about a thousand people rescued some of the volunteers who had been arrested by the police. The next day, when the armed police again arrested those volunteers, their trial was made the occasion of a noisy demonstration outside the court. In Muzaffarpur, in February, the police were opposed while executing distress warrants. In the same month, some policemen at Madhopatti in the suburbs of Darbhanga were tied up and paraded in the town by a crowd of hundred persons. These policemen had tried to stop non-cooperators from tying up some persons who did not give up drinking. Khublal Sunri, an influential merchant of the locality and a member of the chaukidari panchayat, played a leading role in it. The police station, which was set up in Sitamarhi fair in February, was also attacked. Discontentment amongst the chaukidars and daffadars also continued. The districts where this discontentment was very sharp were Bhagalpur, Monghyr and Purnea.

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8 Bihar and Orissa Annual Administration Report, 1922, p.6; Fortnightly Report of Bihar and Orissa for the second half of February 1922, Govt of India, Home Department (Political) File no. 18/Feb/1922, NAI.
9 Fortnightly Reports of Bihar and Orissa for February and March 1922, Govt of India, Home Department (Political) File nos. 18/Feb/1922 and 18/March/1922, NAI.
10 Fortnightly Report of Bihar and Orissa for the second half of February 1922, Govt of India, Home Department (Political) File no. 18/Feb/1922, NAI.
11 Ibid.
12 Bihar and Orissa Political Special File no. 81/1922.
13 Ibid
14 Fortnightly Reports of Bihar and Orissa for February 1922, Govt of India, Home Department (Political) File no. 18/Feb/1922, NAI.
Picketing of liquor shops also revived in February. A liquor shop in Simri in the Patna district was burnt.\textsuperscript{15} There were several cases of assault on liquor vendors in Muzaffarpur.\textsuperscript{16} In the Santhal Pargana, non-cooperators intervened in excise auction sales.\textsuperscript{17} On the night of 11 February, a crowd of villagers, headed by Maulavi Jalil and Kamal Chaudhari, raided some houses of the local dhunias in Hayaghat village in Darbhanga district because the dhunias had not given up liquor and foreign clothes. During the course of the “riot”, one or two men were beaten up and a few minor things looted.\textsuperscript{18} In Singhbhum, non-cooperators made attempts to picket the Deputy Commissioner’s court at the time of the excise sale in February. The officials arrested the leader under section 108 Cr.P.C.\textsuperscript{19}

Attempts were also made to picket liquor shops in the various fairs. In the Barhampur fair, which was held in Arrah on 23 February 1922, the volunteers picketed liquor and ganja shops. They stopped people from entering liquor shops. The volunteers did not use any force against the customers but tried to dissuade them from drinking. They went round the fair shouting “taking ganja is equivalent to drinking cow’s blood and pigs’ blood”.\textsuperscript{20} Most of the volunteers in this fair came from Chapra, Ballia and Shahabad districts.\textsuperscript{21} The volunteers also picketed liquor shops in the fair in Mahadeo Math in Madhubani. Around 100 volunteers

\textsuperscript{15} Fortnightly Report of Bihar and Orissa for the second half of February 1922, Govt of India, Home Department (Political) File no. 18/Feb/1922, NAI.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid
\textsuperscript{17} Fortnightly Reports of Bihar and Orissa for February 1922, Govt of India, Home Department (Political) File no. 18/Feb/1922, NAI.
\textsuperscript{18} Bihar and Orissa Political Special File no. 81/1922.
\textsuperscript{19} Fortnightly Report of Bihar and Orissa for the second half of February 1922, Govt of India, Home Department (Political) File no. 18/Feb/1922, NAI.
\textsuperscript{20} Searchlight, 12 March 1922; Bihar and Orissa Political Special File no. 81/1922.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
away his pugri saying what was the use of constables and chaukidars when swaraj was obtained. 108

The red turban was particularly offensive to the people. Extract from the pamphlet “Policewa” brings out the strong contempt against their dress:

Putting on uniform and belt he walks in the streets;
The policemen speaks with great pride
The day the red pugree will be taken away,
the policemen will be reduced to nothing.

Why was their dress particularly attacked? Bernard Cohn in his studies has tried to highlight how dress emerged as an important symbol of British power and authority. The study shows that when the British established themselves as the new ruler of India, they constructed a system of code of conduct which constantly distanced them physically, socially and culturally from their Indian subjects and dress was one such important code. The British constructed a new kind of dress for the police to establish their distinct separation from others. 109 The earlier blue dress of the police was later changed to khaki. 110 Apart from khaki, another distinctive feature of their dress was the red pugri. 111 The khaki colour because of its connection with the colonial constabulary has since come to stand for formal organization, discipline and exercise of paramilitary force. Once khaki was chosen as the dress of the police, strict control began to be exercised over its distribution, wear and wash. In 1902, an order was promulgated deprecating the growing tendency in several departments to dress subordinates in uniforms closely resembling that prescribed for the police. The government directed that employees of other departments should not be allowed to wear khaki clothes, along with red

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108 Bihar and Orissa Political Special File no. 213A/1922, “Village Simri, 21 March 1922”.
111 Ibid, 212.
pugris, which must be confined to members of the police force. \(^{112}\) It was the turban and its distinctive red colour that proclaimed the constables and the chaukidars as a composite coercive corps of the state. The pugri also had other significance attached to it. In most parts of rural India, great weight is attached to the pugri as headgear. With some communities, it is the headman alone who may wear the headdress. \(^{113}\) It was a significant gesture, then, to have conferred the pugri on the lowly chaukidar along with the policeman proper. It was this four yard strip of red cloth that the constables flaunted most, and was most often attacked.

Thus, the study of police protest and the relationship of nationalism with the police force throws light on new facets of national movement. The general impression about nationalism is that it was a mass struggle against the British rule. The masses were on one side and the state and its apparatus on the other. The police has been seen as the integrated part of the state, who at every step helped the state to consolidate its power. But the varied trends that emerged during the Non-Cooperation Movement reveal a different picture and to a great extent modify that image. The police, whose assistance the government needed most during the movement, themselves went on strike. Even though the police fought for redressal of their basic grievances, their decision to go on strike during the Non-Cooperation Movement was very significant. As police was one of the main pillars of British power, the message that it gave to the people was that the state power was crumbling. The national movement also struck a sympathetic chord amongst the lower rungs of police. The government also got unnerved by the

\(^{112}\) Ibid.

increasing assaults on the police and defiance of police by the people. This trend need not be seen as contrary to the trend where the nationalists tried to befriend the police. In fact, the varied responses were the manifestation of the same national movement which challenged British authority and its symbols of power.