CHAPTER FIVE

Quit India Movement (1942-45)

The war had adversely affected British fortunes at strategic positions in the world and was threatening India at her very doorsteps.¹ In the midst of their anxieties, the British Government thought it necessary to enlist the support of the Indian people because one of reasons for their debacle in South-East Asia and Burma was absence of a support of the subject people there. The United States also was trying to persuade Britain to come to a settlement with India.² It was under such circumstances that the British Government could not “stand” as Churchill felt, “in a purely negative attitude”, and came out with another proposal as regards the Indian constitutional development.³ On 11 March 1942, Churchill announced that the War Cabinet had taken a unanimous decision regarding Indian policy. This, he stated, had been done with a view to rallying “all forces of Indian life to guard their land from the menace of the invader”. He also said that Sir Strafford Cripps, who had lately joined the

¹ Events had moved very rapidly and the international situation had changed after Hitler’s invasion of Russia on 22 June 1941, followed by Japan’s successes against the Allies in different areas. On December 7, 1941, the Japanese Air Force made a sudden attack on the American naval base at Pearl Harbour and crippled the United States Pacific fleet. On December 10, *The Prince of Wales*, one of the brand new British battleships, and *The Repulse*, an older battle-cruiser, were sunk by Japanese bombers off the coast of Malaya. On 15 February 1942, the strong British naval base at Singapore, considered to be impregnable, surrendered, more than 75,000 British and Indian troops falling into the hands of the victorious Japanese. In March 1942, Japan occupied most of Java, Sumatra and other islands of the Dutch East Indies. Japanese troops next invaded Burma, brought Rangoon under their control on 7 March and occupied Mandalay on 29 April. Evacuation of Taungu by the British came to be known on 1st April and of prime on 3 April. There was a Japanese air raid on Colombo on 5 April, and bombs were dropped on Visakhapatnam and Cocanada next day. Further, Japanese warships were active in the Bay of Bengal and the entire eastern coastline of India lay exposed to their attacks. By the end of May, the Japanese had succeeded in closing the Burma Road and stopping the passage between China and the outer world.


Government after working successfully as British Ambassador in Russia during a critical period, and had become a member of the War Cabinet, would soon proceed to India to have “direct discussions” with representatives of all parties and communities.

**Failure of Cripps Proposals**

On 23 March 1942, Sir Strafford Cripps reached Delhi. He brought with himself the British Cabinet’s proposals embodied in a Draft Declaration. It proposed to take up steps for the creation of a new Indian Union having the same status as the other Dominions. The constitution was to be drawn up by a body consisting of representatives of both the British India and the Indian States and which was to be set up immediately on the cessation of hostilities. However during the war period the British Government were, “to bear the responsibility for and retain the control and direction of the defence of India as part of their world war effort”, and the Government of India were to organize the various resources of India with the immediate and active participation of the leaders and peoples of India.

Subsequently, Sir Strafford Cripps held meetings and discussions with Mahatma Gandhi, the Congress President Maulana Azad, and some other leaders, most of whom including Rajendra Prasad remained at Delhi for more than two weeks during the negotiations.⁴ Nehru and Azad represented and acted as spokespersons of the Congress with Cripps.⁵ Rajendra Prasad came to Delhi as member of the Working Committee to assist in the deliberations. At night, both Nehru and Azad would apprise the members of the Working Committee and seek their opinions. Gandhiji was not satisfied with the proposals and said so plainly at the time of his interview with

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⁵ Gandhiji had to leave for Sewagram after a few days of talks owing to the illness of his wife, Kasturba.
Cripps.\(^6\) The Cripps plan was released to the Press within a few days and it was considered by a meeting of the Congress Working Committee at Delhi. The Cripps plan sought a compromise between the Congress demand for a Federal India and the Muslim League’s demand for a separate territory for the Muslims. It accepted the dominion status as the goal of constitutional development of India and provided for making of a Constituent Assembly to frame the constitution after the end of the war. As a concession to the Muslim League, it also gave the provinces the right to secede from the federation. For the immediate measure, a few additional Indian members of the major political parties had to be nominated on the executive Council of the Viceroy. Above all, it made clear that power would continue to rest with the Viceroy.

The Cripps proposals, however, failed to provide any solution to the constitutional deadlock in India. Its proposals were rejected by “every single party or group” in India, including some of her moderate political leaders. Gandhiji is reported to have described the pledge about future settlement of the constitution as “a post-dated cheque on a bank that was obviously failing”. The Congress Working Committee passed a resolution on 10 April that “though future independence may be implicit in the proposals.... the accompanying provisions and restrictions are such that real freedom may well-become an illusion”. The principle of non-accession of the Indian Provinces and the States was considered “a severe blow to the conception of Indian unity”. It opened out, remarked Jawaharlal Nehru, a “vista of an indefinite number of partitions both of Provinces and States”. The Congress was also opposed to another principle according to which “ninety millions of people in the Indian States” were to have no voice in framing the constitution, as it would mean “a negation of both democracy and self-determination”. The proposals relating to the immediate

present were also considered to have some serious limitations. The Congress wanted
an Indian Defence Member in the National Government, though the Commander-in-
Chief would continue to exercise complete authority over war operations and the
armed forces. Its leaders explained to Sir Strafford that “it was not their intention to
do anything to upset present arrangements, but what they wanted was, firstly, to make
the Indian people feel that the army was theirs. They wanted to give the national
background, the psychological appeal necessary for a popular war”. The Congress
expressed its anxiety for a National Government which would function with full
power as a Cabinet with the Viceroy acting as constitutional head. Nevertheless, the
only change offered was the transformation of the existing Councils of the Viceroy by
the appointment of additional Indians. Rajendra Prasad felt that the failure of the
Cripps Mission was largely due to the lack of support of the Viceroy and the British
cabinet. The issues, on which the Mission floundered, he thought, were the issues of
the limited powers to Indian Councillors over the Departments of War and Defence
and secondly the so-called transferred departments where real power was not to be
transferred to “our hands”. 7 Nevertheless, there was an immediate reason also,
according to Rajendra Prasad, for its rejection:

But the immediate reason for its rejection of the Cripps Plan was
that the Plan did not contemplate any transfer of real power
immediately into Indian hands while it expected Indians to
render all possible help to the war effort, which, in effect, would
have meant that the Indian Councillors would doing little more

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7 Ibid., pp.525-526
than collecting money for the War Fund and helping the recruitment campaign. \(^8\)

The talks broke down not because the Congress was not forthcoming or its leaders were demanding stars and moon. It broke down also not because of Hindu-Muslim differences, which the British as usual tried to put as an excuse. The British charge, according to Rajendra Prasad, was “completely baseless because the stage for discussion on the composition of the Viceroy’s Executive Council, when there could have been differences on Hindu-Muslim representation, was never reached”. \(^9\) The talks broke down, according to Rajendra Prasad, on the issue of immediate transfer of real power into the hands of Indian Councillors. “We never for a moment thought in terms of Hindu and Muslim representation in the Executive Council”. \(^10\) The Congress insisted on an immediate creation of an All India Government with full executive powers to act as a cabinet. Cripps was not willing to make yet another attempt to reach a settlement since he insisted that the draft proposals were a package deal, which must be accepted or rejected as a whole. \(^11\)

When Sir Strafford Cripps’ negotiations with the Indian leaders abruptly broke down on the question of immediate transfer of real power into the hands of Indian Councillors, he started from Delhi for London on April 12, leaving India in a state of agonised uncertainty. India was in an extremely embarrassing situation. It had become a battleground of rival and foreign troops. Its national integrity had been assailed, and her people were bitter and sullen but helpless and inert. Rajendra Prasad felt

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\(^8\) Ibid., p.527.
\(^9\) Ibid.
\(^10\) Ibid. This is also borne out by the fact that Viceroy Linlithgow categorically refused to give into Nehru’s demand for an Indian defence Member of the Council in place of the Commander-in Chief. Memorandum on the Indian political situation, by the Secretary of State, 28 January 1942, *Transfer of Power* (hereafter *TP*), Vol. I, No. 43.
enormously upset over the entire attitude of the Government: "The Japanese were advancing fast and British forces were unable to check them. Large contingents of British and American forces and the latest armaments were being rushed to India, but India was not fully prepared to meet the menace".\footnote{Rajendra Prasad, \textit{Autobiography}, p. 527.}

On the other side, Britain was hopeful about a better turn for them in the war situation from the middle of April 1942. Churchill observed:

\begin{quote}
We were in no way drawn from our main purposes, and were not deterred from new and vigorous offensive action. It had been a harassing episode, but it was over. From this time on we began to grow stronger.\footnote{Churchill, The Second World War, Vol. IV, p.165. cited in K. K. Datta, \textit{Rajendra Prasad}, p.199.}
\end{quote}

Nevertheless, this optimism of the British Premier could afford no consolation and relief to Indians, who were deeply upset over the Japanese rapid advances towards Indian borders in the east and the eastern coastal areas. The British had not been able to resist these Japanese advances effectively. The events in South-East Asia and Burma "had shaken confidence", stated a contemporary report of the Bihar Government, "in British ability to withstand an invasion of India".\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, pp.199-200.} "The question before us was "\textit{whether, if and when} Japanese entered India".\footnote{Rajendra Prasad, \textit{Autobiography}, pp. 527-28.} India was prepared to put forth her best efforts to prevent Japanese occupation of the country provided the British recognized had "Indians as equal partners". In Rajendra Prasad's words:

\begin{quote}
We positively abhorred the Japanese who had invaded China and occupied a large part her territory. Japan was as anxious to build
an empire as Britain was to retain it. We certainly did not want to release ourselves from the slavery under the British to go into the bondage under the Japanese.\(^{16}\)

Rajendra Prasad did not want bondage and slavery under the British to be replaced by those of the Japanese and hence, in his view, the best way to meet the same was to fire the flame of freedom and patriotism in the heart of every Indian. To quote him:

\begin{quote}
The British Government having rejected our aid in fighting the Japanese enemy, despite our deviation from the principle of non-violence, we had no alternative but to fight the Japanese in our own way, which was merely to instil courage and confidence in the people. Was it possible for the country to fight a new aggressor when it had failed to liquidate British imperialism or had been unwilling to do anything against it? In these circumstances, we thought that the best way to meet the danger was to enkindle the flame of freedom and patriotism in the heart of every Indian.\(^{17}\)
\end{quote}

Such a campaign meant rousing opposition both to Japan and to Britain. Nevertheless, this was the only course available as Britain refused to yield even the limited freedom that “we were ready to be content with”. The distinction between the two appeared blurred. The issue of trust became uppermost. The one appeared depriving of independence while the other appeared displacing the first and

\(^{16}\) Ibid., p. 528.  
\(^{17}\) Ibid., pp. 528-529.
establishing a new empire India. To Rajendra Prasad there was nothing to choose between the two:

To all intents and purposes, the British were to give us Dominion Status after the successful conclusion of the war. But the Japanese also promised to make us free if we helped them oust the British from the Asian soil. Whom were we to trust? 18

The reaction of the Congress after the failure of the Cripps proposals was along the expected lines of anguish in the circumstances existing. Gandhiji felt upset, especially by the likely consequences of the Cripps offer. He thought that any constitutional offer by the British would inevitably recognize the right of the minorities to secede. He had hitherto postponed taking direct action fearing that the Muslims might be alienated. But now in the context of the Cripps proposals he realised that the situation had finally changed. 19 In tactical terms, Gandhiji thought, that India could be saved if the Congress succeeded in forcing the British to devolve some measure of self-government at this critical time. 20

**Building Tempo for the Final Assault**

In fact, the logic of events was unavoidably driving the country towards another mass movement. The much-needed psychological background for it was being prepared by Mahatma Gandhi's speeches and writings, marked for sometime, by "a new urgency and passion" and "the hint of action" instead of "symbolic protest". As Rajendra Prasad puts it:

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19 *CWMG*, Vol. LXXXVI, p.120.
It appeared to me that we were heading for a clash with the British. There was discontent everywhere in the country. Gandhiji’s writing became more and more pungent. I decided to tour Bihar to apprise the people of Gandhiji’s view and also to prepare them for the coming crisis. It was necessary to hearten the people who were terror stricken by the unhindered advance of the Japanese. I had to tell them what they had to do in case the Japanese forces crossed our borders.21

Beyond all doubts, a perceptible change as regards direct action was obvious in Gandhiji’s thinking since October 1941. Responding to criticisms about the declining enthusiasm for individual civil disobedience and his failure to launch mass civil disobedience he had said then that:

Enthusiasm that is froth is of no use in non-violent action. Showy demonstrations and the like have a value in the initial stages. Continuous feverish activity can only promote violence and therefore retard the steady march of non-violent action ... That fewer are coming is but natural. For it must be recalled that civil disobedience is individual and restricted representatives.... I have no doubt that if I made a general call and relaxed the conditions of enrolment I should be overwhelmed by applications. I have no machinery to examine such applications. I reality it will be mass action which does not admit of individual examination and

choice. That call will not come before the close of the war. There is neither warrant nor atmosphere for mass action. That would be naked embarrassment and a betrayal of non-violence. What is more it can never lead to independence. Mass action at this stage without communal unity is an invitation to civil war.\footnote{CWMG, Vol. LXXV, p.56.}

However, by the month of June 1942 the attitude of Gandhiji had changed, as he said:

> But my attitude has undergone a change. I feel that if I continue to wait I might have to wait till doomsday. For the preparations that I have prayed and worked for may never come and in the meantime I may be enveloped and overwhelmed by the flames of violence that are spreading all around....

> But today we have to go a step further. We have to take the risk of violence to shake off the great calamity of slavery. But even for resort to the violence one requires the unflinching faith of a non-violent man. There cannot be any trace of violence in either in my plans or in my thoughts. A non-violent person has complete faith in God. My Ahimsa was always imperfect and therefore it was ineffective to that extent.\footnote{CWMG, Vol. LXXVI, P. 159-60.}

Now freedom of the country was uppermost in the mind of Gandhiji. He was ready to accept even anarchy in place of the present system of administration:

> The people do not have my Ahimsa. And therefore I have to take risk, if I cannot curb their violence. I cannot remain inactive. I
will certainly launch a non-violent movement. But if people do not understand it and there is violence, how can I stop it? I will prefer anarchy to the present system of administration because this ordered anarchy is worse than real anarchy. I am sure that the anarchy created by our efforts to mitigate this dangerous anarchy will be less dangerous. The violence exerted then would be just a trifle compared to the existing violence. Violence which is due to the weakness of the human nature, is bound to be there. Crores of people in the country have no weapons. Even if they indulge in violence among themselves how long can do it? Ultimately they will have to listen to me even if some of them die in mutual violence. We have to take the risk of anarchy if God wills it. However, we shall try our best to prevent violence. If in spite of that there is violence then it is His wish. I am not responsible for that.24

The All-India Congress Committee met at Allahabad from 27 April to 1 May 1942 to deliberate and take stock of the entire political situation and make its position clear on war. Though Gandhiji did not attend it, he sent draft of a resolution through Miraben, demanding British withdrawal from India and complete non-violent non-cooperation with the Japanese forces, should they attack India. It also called upon the people to take up whole-heartedly the constructive programme, with slogans such as “banish communal strife” and “exorcise the demon of untouchability”.25 There were

24 Ibid., p. 160.
differences of opinion among the members about this draft resolution.\textsuperscript{26} Jawaharlal Nehru thought that the whole background of the draft was one, which would make the world think, “that we are passively lining up with the Axis powers”.\textsuperscript{27} Rajendra Prasad, however, was not in favour of any dilution of the draft of Gandhiji. “We cannot produce the proper atmosphere unless we adopt Bapu’s draft. The Government has closed the door on armed resistance. We have only unarmed resistance to offer. We have therefore to strengthen Bapu’s hands”.\textsuperscript{28} Subsequently a modified resolution, though retaining the substance of Gandhiji’s suggestion, was adopted as the resolution of the AICC, which asked Britain to abandon her hold on India and frankly blamed it for noncooperation of Indians in the war.\textsuperscript{29} It said that:

\begin{quote}
India will obtain her freedom through her own strength and world retain it likewise.... Not only the interest of India but Britain’s safety, and world peace and freedom demand that Britain must abandon her hold on India. It is on the basis of independence alone that India can deal with Britain or other nations.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{26} In the draft-resolution of Gandhiji, there was a paragraph, which became the matter of different interpretations. The paragraph read as, “This Committee desires to assure the Japanese Government and people that India bears no enmity either towards Japan or towards any other nation. India desires freedom from all alien domination. But in this fight for freedom the Committee is of the opinion that India while welcoming universal sympathy does not stand in need of foreign military aid. India will attain her freedom through her non-violent strength and will retain it likewise. Therefore the Committee hopes that Japan will not have any designs on India. But if Japan attacks India and Britain makes no response to its appeal the Committee would expect all those who look to the Congress for guidance to offer complete non-violent non-cooperation to the Japanese forces and not render any assistance to them”.\textit{IAR}, Vol. 2, 1942, p. 204.

\textsuperscript{27} Jawaharlal Nehru further said, “After the withdrawal we are to negotiate with Japan and possibly come to some terms with her. These terms may include a large measure of civil control by us, a certain measure of military control by them, passage of armies through India, etc.”\textit{IAR}, Vol. 2, 1942, p. 201.

\textsuperscript{28} \textit{IAR}, Vol. 2, 1942, p. 201.

\textsuperscript{29} In view of the disagreements, there were two resolutions, one by Rajendra Prasad favouring the draft-resolution of Gandhiji and the other expressing disagreement moved by Jawaharlal Nehru. Rajendra Prasad’s resolution was passed by majority; Vallabhbhai Patel, J. B. Kripalani, Shankar Rae Doe, Sarojini Naidu and Pratap Chandra Ghosh voting in its favour. Those who voted for Jawaharlal Nehru’s draft were Gavin Allah Prat, Bhulabhai Desai and Assay Ali. However, on the request of the President the draft of Jawaharlal Nehru was accepted as a unanimous resolution.\textit{IAR}, Vol. 2, 1942, p. 203-204.
The committee repudiates the idea that freedom can come to India through interference or invasion by any foreign nation, whatever the professions of that nation may be. In case an invasion takes place, it must be resisted. Such resistance can only take the form of non-violent non-cooperation to the invading forces and not render any assistance to them. We may not bend the knee to the aggressor nor obey any of his orders. We may not look to him for favours nor fall to his bribes. If he wishes to take possession of our homes and our fields we will refuse to give them up even if we have to die in the effort to resist them. In places where the British and invading forces are fighting our non-cooperation will be fruitless and unnecessary. Not to put any obstacle in the way of the British forces will often be the only way of demonstrating our non-cooperation with the invader. Judging from their attitude, the British Government do not need any help from us beyond our non-interference. They desire our help only as slaves—a position we can never accept.  

Rajendra Prasad was fully satisfied with the Allahabad AICC resolution and held the opinion that freedom of the country would not come through the intervention of or an invasion by Japan. He knew that in case a foreign invasion took place, it had to be resisted and that too non-violently. In his perception, it was of utmost importance to organize a countrywide national challenge to imperialism, whether old or new. "It was not to embarrass the British people that our whole scheme was

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planned but to enable the people to resist whoever wanted to dominate India whether it was the British or the Japanese”. In fact until June 1942, Rajendra Prasad had advised the Congress workers and others, in a conference held in Municipal office at Munger, to co-operate with Refugees Relief Committee, to visit the Air Raid Precaution offices, read its literature, help in its distribution, join its meetings and render other possible assistance to its work. Nevertheless, he also advised that until further orders, they should not formally enlist themselves as A.R.P. members.

Rajendra Prasad came back to Patna from Allahabad after meeting Gandhiji at Wardha. Meanwhile the advance of Japanese forces on the borders of India, in Vizagpatnam, Coconada, and then in Chittagong had aggravated confusion and panic throughout Bihar as in other parts of India. Japanese landings on eastern coastal regions seemed imminent and to prevent them from doing so the Government destroyed or seized the country craft and boats of the rural folk in those areas, particularly in Bengal. The authorities also took possession of the stocks of grains in the villages. In fact, the lives in the rural areas were very distressed. “The conviction grew in my mind”, noted Rajendra Prasad, “that we were in for a conflict with the Government”.

Churchill’s optimism regarding the fortunes of the war did not help the British Indian Government from being panicked. Apprehending landings, by the Japanese, on the coastal regions and to prevent them from making use of landing craft, the Government destroyed or seized the country craft and boats of the rural folk in these areas, particularly in Bengal. These boats formed the linchpin of the inland
distribution system in many areas and their requisition and destruction contributed critically to the economic deprivation in these areas.\textsuperscript{35} They also took possession of the stocks of grains in the villages so that invaders might not utilize these. Life in the rural areas was very disturbed. "This was the beginning", noted Rajendra Prasad, "of a foolish scorched earth policy which the Government was trying to adopt".\textsuperscript{36} The fear of scorched earth policy added to the alarm and anxiety of the people.

In order to build up a new war front from Chhota Nagpur in Jharkhand to the Sone area in Bihar several roads and airstrips were constructed. Thousands of acres of cultivable lands were acquired thereby causing hardships to the people.\textsuperscript{37} Promises made for payment of compensation to those who had been dispossessed of their lands were not fulfilled. Movements of contingents of British and American troops in Chhota Nagpur and North Bihar put much pressure on trains. Further, the use of trains for purposes of defence and for carrying reinforcements and the wounded for treatment from one place to another made communications difficult for the common people. However, overpowered by a feeling of insecurity, many were running away with great trouble from the coastal regions to Bihar, U.P. and further north. Some relief was organized for them by constructing new roads and rest houses and by providing food and drinking water. Nevertheless, people in general were panic-stricken and bewildered apprehending the approach of doom.\textsuperscript{38} "It appeared as if", noted Rajendra Prasad, "however determined the resistance to the enemy might be, the stage was set for a hurried retreat".\textsuperscript{39}

\textsuperscript{35} Vinita Damodaran, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 213.
\textsuperscript{36} Rajendra Prasad, \textit{Autobiography}, p.531.
\textsuperscript{37} \textit{Fortnightly Report (I)}, 1943.
\textsuperscript{39} Rajendra Prasad, \textit{Autobiography}, p.531.
Chapter Five

Rajendra Prasad decided not to take things lying down. It was time to remove confusion and fight fear. It was important, he thought, to infuse courage and confidence into the minds of the people.\(^4\) In addition, it was necessary, he thought, to explain to them the attitude and programme of the Congress.\(^4\) Therefore, he undertook the tour of different areas of Bihar from the last week of April and through entire June 1942.\(^4\) However, his bad health did not permit him to carry on a vigorous campaign in this regard. He had to be contented with limited number of programmes and activities. In his words:

I decided to tour the whole of Bihar. My health was no longer good enough to allow me to make eight or ten speeches a day. Therefore, I decided to limit my programme and visit only one or two places in each district, and address public meetings and Congress workers.\(^4\)

Rajendra Prasad went ahead with his campaign after his health had improved. At the places he visited, he addressed the Congress workers and the public. To them he explained and pointed it out that a struggle ahead was inevitable with the imperialist powers, both Great Britain and Japan. Instead of relying on Japan’s help to secure independence, they should prepare themselves to ward off the menace of Japanese aggression. He also indicated to them about the possibility of an agitation, which “would be some sort of Civil Disobedience, a non-violent struggle, but more

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\(^4\) Ibid., p.537.
\(^4\) Ibid.
\(^4\) The condition of people had been growing from bad to worst. This was reflected in growing incidence of crime rate. By July 1942, dacoities and petty thefts in Bihar had reached a record figure. It was noted by one official that many prisoners were serving only short sentences for petty thefts committed for want of food. *Fortnightly Report (I)*, January 1942.
forceful and intense than any we had so far been engaged in". He appealed to the people and the merchants for help in relieving food and cloth shortage, and to carry on with the constructive work.

During his campaign at Gaya, he came across the woes of the people there who narrated to him their miseries arising due to acquisition of their lands. The Government had acquired their lands and houses for building aerodromes and military quarters. He promised to them that he would request the Government for payment of equitable compensation to them. On returning to Patna, he wrote a letter to the Advisor to the British Government in Bihar to take suitable steps in this matter. He suggested to the Government that, on the expiry of the emergency period, the acquired lands which were levelled, should be restored to the original owners in a condition, suitable for cultivation; and that a kisan should be given compensation, by taking into consideration the quantity, which his land would have yielded during the period he had been dispossessed of it. As for the lands on which buildings were erected and could not be given back, his suggestion was that the Government should pay the full price of the lands to the kisans and the full value of the buildings, which were demolished. The Commissioner of Patna replied to him that Government had agreed with his suggestions. When he visited the district of Manbhum, the Deputy

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44 Ibid., pp. 531-532.
45 A detail discussion on the economic hardships of the people in Bihar during this period is available in Vinita Damodaran, op. cit., pp.201-212.
46 It was very rare of Rajendra Prasad to get agitated and make crowd excited. The Satyagraha in 1930 had just begun and he had to address a public meeting in Patna. The youths of the town had got somewhat excited and few of them had made quite inflammatory speeches. When Rajendra Prasad was up to speaking some young men had started murmuring that Rajendra Prasad could be depended upon to pour cold water over the popular enthusiasm. Rajendra Prasad recollected this incident, much later,: "Having overheard their remark, I said that if popular enthusiasm remained intact in spite of my cold douche, I would consider their enthusiasm to be genuine and healthy, otherwise their zeal would only be like a sick man’s fever and their demonstration would be just the wails of an ailing person". Rajendra Prasad, Autobiography, p.532.
Commissioner of that district also acted according to his suggestions about such problems.48

After completion his tour in Bihar, Rajendra Prasad went to Wardha to attend the meetings of the Congress Working Committee and the All-India Charkha Sangh. The Charkha Sangh was meeting for the first time. India was passing through scarcity of cloths because most of the mills were engaged in production cloth for meeting the requirements of the defence forces.49 The Charkha Sangh decided for expansion of its activities on a larger scale so that the poor could receive relief in the form of employment and consequent production of more handloom cloth could meet the deficiencies caused in the wake of the war.50

The Congress Working Committee, at its meeting at Wardha, passed a resolution on 14 July and reiterated the demand for freedom of India. “The glow of freedom” was necessary to “make India a willing partner in a joint enterprise (with Great Britain and the Allies) of securing freedom of the nations and peoples of the world and in the trials and tribulations which accompany it”. It mentioned that the Congress would “take no hasty step and would like to avoid, in so far as it possible, any course or action that might embarrass the United Nations”, but if its appeal failed then the Congress would be compelled to launch a wide-spread struggle under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. However there were some opposition regarding the proposal to start the Satyagraha movement and, therefore, the final decision in this regard was deferred for the meeting of the Congress at Bombay early in August.51

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48 Ibid.
49 There were very serious incidents of hat looting as reported by the fortnightly reports of the period. *Fortnightly Report (1) and (2)*, July 1942.
The Congress Working Committee though had not taken any hasty decision to embarrass the United Nations yet its message and signals were not difficult for any one to read. The Congressmen had already started discussing about the forms of struggle to be used during the ensuing battle. It was in this context that when Rajendra Prasad decided to meet Gandhiji before leaving Wardha he discussed the matter with him as to what items of agitation should be construed as non-violent. Here he found that some leaders had gathered round Gandhiji and were discussing whether dismantling railway lines and cutting telegraph wires would be regarded as compatible with the creed of non-violence:

Before leaving Wardha I called on Gandhiji to take his leave. I found him surrounded by some friends who put him the question whether cutting telegraph wires and dismantling railway lines could be considered compatible with non-violence. I knew that this question has been upper most in the minds of a few Congressmen ever since the talk of satyagraha began.52

Rajendra Prasad told Gandhiji that such questions had been raised by some in 1930 as well and requested him for a clear guideline about these in the programme to be formulated by him.

I immediately told Gandhiji that during the 1930 agitation when Gandhiji and many other leaders had been jailed and Pandit Motilal Nehru was acting as President and I had gone to attend a meeting of the Congress Working Committee, people had raised the same question and, in fact, had actually cut telephone and

telegraph wires in a few places, but it was stopped as we discouraged the practice.\textsuperscript{53}

The whole discussion took place in an informal and casual way and those present, according to Rajendra Prasad, interpreted Gandhi's views "to mean that the violence or non-violence of an act would be determined by the fact whether it endangered anyone's life and the doer acknowledged full responsibility for his act so that others did not suffer for it".\textsuperscript{54}

It was now necessary to acquaint the people of Bihar with the contents and significance of the Wardha resolution. It was equally necessary and important to ascertain their views also. Rajendra Prasad had not been keeping good health for quite some time but urgency of the nature of the matter required his urgent attention. He, therefore, convened meetings of the Bihar Provincial Congress Working Committee on July 21 and 22 and informed the members of Bihar Provincial Congress working Committee about what had transpired at Wardha and sought their opinion. The BPCWC unanimously expressed their approval of the said resolution.\textsuperscript{55} Subsequently he convened a meeting of the Bihar Provincial Congress Committee on July 31, "to sound Congressmen on the proposed satyagrah to be discussed in Bombay". Here he addressed them and made a forceful speech explaining the nature and significance of the contemplated movement.\textsuperscript{56} He was thus, preparing the psychological background

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., pp. 535-36.
\textsuperscript{54} Gandhi replied that the question of non-violence or violence did not arise in respect of cutting steel or wood, which we did so often in our daily lives. However, it was a different thing altogether to cut telegraph and telephone wires and to remove rails or fishplates. Whether a particular act was violent or non-violent depended on the motives behind that act, the manner in which it was executed and the results flowing from it. If as result of it, people died and the innocent were made to suffer, it would constitute violence, but we could also imagine a situation in which the act would be non-violent. \textit{Ibid.}, p. 536.
\textsuperscript{55} K. K. Datta, \textit{op. cit.}, p.204.
\textsuperscript{56} \textit{Ibid.}
for the forthcoming battle ahead before the contemplated meeting of the Congress in Bombay. Subsequently members of the All-India Congress Committee from Bihar left for Bombay. However, Rajendra Prasad’s indisposition kept him back in Patna and he himself could not proceed.

Rajendra Prasad was conscious about the inevitability of the movement and was likewise equally apprehensive of the Government’s intentions in this regard. He knew about the rumours that the Government was planning to arrest the leaders even before it could be started and that at Patna the old camp jail, not in use for sometime, was being made ready for accommodation of the political prisoners. Rajendra Prasad decided to frame a programme of action at least for Bihar. To quote:

...I was afraid that the people would be left without a programme and so I thought that I should formulate some programme at least for my province. I was reminded of what Gandhiji had told us earlier that in case all leaders were arrested and no programme had been imparted to the people, every Congressman should look upon himself as a leader and, consistent with the principles of Ahimsa, decide on his own plan of satyagraha and carry it to its final consummation as this was to be the last phase of our freedom struggle.\(^\text{57}\)

He discussed this matter with his co-workers, who were then at Patna, he gave detailed suggestions for it to Deep Narayan Singh, then Secretary of the Bihar Provincial Congress Committee, and Mathura Prasad, and advised them to write out a draft programme. Anugraha Narayan Sinha, who also had not gone to Bombay, joined

them. Rajendra Prasad went through it and finalized it with certain amendments. Then he gave the same to Sakhi Chand Jaiswal for printing with specific instructions to keep it secret so long as he himself or anyone authorized by him did not permit publication and propaganda. He had formulated it with the idea that if all the leaders were arrested, the people would act according to it. This plan of Satyagraha was fundamentally similar to the earlier Satyagraha but it was more intense in nature. Gandhian emphasis on utmost efforts for attainment of freedom, by not discarding non-violence, had however been retained.\[58\]

While he was busy in preparations for the forthcoming battle with the British, he received a report from Delhi that the Government would not arrest the leaders on August 8 or earlier but would watch the course of events before taking the final step. On behalf of the Congress, it was said that Gandhiji would have talks with the Viceroy and the movement would be launched if these failed. Therefore, Rajendra Prasad thought that they could wait until 11 August, the expected date of the return of the Bihar delegates from Bombay. It provided him with a temporary sense of relief. The atmosphere became somewhat relaxed but keeping in view of the fluidity of the situation, he preferred remaining at the Sadaqat Ashram only at Patna.\[59\] His sense of relief was not to live for a longer duration.

**The ‘Do or Die’ Resolution**

The Congress Working Committee held its meeting in Bombay on 5 August 1942 and adopted, what has been popularly called the ‘Quit India’ resolution. It set the stage for

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58 The newspapers of the times talked of the Government’s determination and preparation to arrest all the leaders at the time of the AICC meeting in Bombay with a view to suppressing the agitation at the very start.

59 Subsequently Anugraha Narayan Sinha went to Rae Bareli to see his ailing brother there and Deep Narayan Singh went to Muzaffarpur to fulfil some of his engagements.
the historic moment when turns of events were destined to take a crucial turn. After two days of this, the AICC held its meeting in Bombay, and in its momentous session of seven and 8 August, endorsed the resolution of the Working Committee, saying, “immediate ending of the British in India is an urgent necessity, both for the sake of India and for the success of the cause of the United nations”.\(^6\) It further stated that the continuation of the British rule was degrading and enfeebling India and making her progressively less capable of defending herself and of contributing to the cause of the world freedom. The ending of the British rule was a vital and immediate issue on which depended the future of the war and the success of freedom and democracy. A free India would assume this success by throwing all her great resources in the struggle for freedom and against the aggression Nazism, Fascism and Imperialism.\(^1\) India in bondage would continue to be symbol of British Imperialism and the taint of that imperialism would affect the United Nations. The peril of imperialism and the war necessitated the independence of India and the ending of the British dominations. No future promises or guarantees could affect the present peril. They could not produce the needed psychological effect on the mind of the masses. Only the glow of freedom could release that energy and enthusiasm of people that would transform the


\(^1\) The resolution also stipulated a clear position, regarding the provisional Government and subsequent federal structure involving all communities, in case of a withdrawal by the British: “On the declaration of India’s independence a provisional Government will be formed and free India will become an ally of the United Nations, sharing with them in the trials and tribunals of the joint enterprise of the struggle for freedom. The provisional Government can only be formed by the cooperation of the principal parties and groups in the country. It will thus be a composite Government, representative of all important sections of the people of India.... The provisional Government will evolve a scheme for a constituent assembly which will prepare a constitution for the Government of India acceptable to all sections of the people. This constitution, according to the Congress view, should be federal one. With the largest measure of autonomy for the federating units and with the residuary power vesting in these units....” It is important to note that hereafter all the talks and negotiations carried by the Congress with the British were based on the position stipulated in this resolution. *Ibid.*, p. 210.
nature of war. The resolution, therefore, reiterated “with all emphasis the demand
for withdrawal of the British power from India.” To quote:

The AICC would yet again, at this last moment, in the interest of
world freedom, renew this appeal to Britain and the United Nations. But the Committee feels that it is no longer justified in
holding the nation back from endeavouring to assert its will
against an imperialist and authoritarian Government which
dominates over it and prevents it from functioning in its own
interest and in the interest of humanity. The committee resolves,
therefore, to sanction, for the vindication of India’s inalienable
right to freedom and independence, the starting of a mass struggle on non-violent lines on the widest possible scale, so that
the country might utilize all the non-violent strength it has
gathered during the last 22 years of peaceful struggle. Such a
struggle must inevitably be under the leadership of Gandhiji and
the Committee requests him to lead and guide the nation in the
steps to be taken.

The committee appeals to the people of India to face the
dangers and hardships that will fall to their lot with courage and
endurance, and to hold together under the leadership of Gandhiji
and carry out his instructions as disciplined soldiers of Indian
freedom. They must remember that non-violence is the basis of
the movement. A time may come when it may not be possible to
issue instructions to reach our people, when no Congress

62 Ibid., p. 209.
Committees can function. When this happens every man and woman who is participating in this movement must function for himself or herself within the four corners of the general instructions issued. Every Indian who desires freedom and strives for it must be his own guide urging him on along the hard road where there is no resting place and which leads ultimately to the independence and deliverance of India.\(^{64}\)

The Congress thus announced its war cry for the vindication of India’s inalienable right to freedom and independence, and also its intentions of starting of a mass struggle on non-violent lines on the widest possible scale under the leadership of Gandhiji. Gandhiji made a long speech on this occasion in which he said:

I, therefore, want freedom immediately, this very night, before dawn, if it can be had. Freedom cannot now wait for the realization of communal unity. If that unity is not achieved, sacrifices necessary for it will have to be much greater than would have otherwise sufficed. But the Congress must win freedom or be wiped out in the effort.\(^{65}\)

He also mentioned that before launching the movement he would try to meet the Viceroy and make an effort at compromise. He told that:

…the actual struggle does not commence this moment. You have only placed all your powers in my hands. I will now wait upon the Viceroy and plead with him for the acceptance of the

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\(^{64}\) *Ibid.*, p. 211.

Congress demand. That process is likely to take two or three weeks. What would you do in the mean while? What is the programme, for the interval, in which all can participate? As you know, the spinning-wheel is the first thing that occurs to me.... I will tell you. Every one of you should, from this moment onwards, consider yourself a free man or woman, and act as if you are free and are no longer under the heel of this imperialism. 66

Gandhiji described it an open rebellion and warned, “in the present struggle, we have to work openly and receive the bullets on our chest, without taking to heels” 67 and also ruled out any possibility of bargain as he said:

You may take it from me that I am not going to strike a bargain with the Viceroy for ministries and the like. I am not going to be satisfied with anything short of complete freedom. May be, he will propose the abolition of salt tax, the drink evil, etc. But I will say: ‘Nothing less than freedom’. 68

66 Ibid., pp. 391-92.
67 Ibid., p. 394.
68 Gandhiji had also prescribed specific instructions for different sections of people. Government servants would not yet be asked to resign, but they should openly declare their allegiance to the Congress, soldiers were also not to leave their posts, but they were to refuse to fire on our own people. The princes had been asked to ‘accept the sovereignty of your own people,’ instead of paying homage to a foreign power.’ In addition, the people of princely states were asked to declare that they part of Indian national and that they would accept the leadership of the princes, if the latter cast their lot with the Indian people and students were to give up studies if they were sure they could continue to remain firm until independence was achieved. Regarding peasant’s he had proposed that peasants who had courage and were prepared to risk their all should refuse to pay their land revenue. Tenants were told that the Congress holds that the land belongs to those who work on it and to no one else. In a zamindari, area if a zamindar wants to side with the Government no tax should be paid to him. Ibid.
Further giving the message of “Do or Die” to the people he observed that freedom should be their mantra and they should chant it. To quote:

Here is a mantra, a short one, that I give you. You may imprint it on your hearts and let every breath of yours give expression to it. The mantra is: ‘Do or Die’. We shall either free India or die in the attempt; we shall not live to see the perpetuation of our slavery. Every true Congressman or (Congress) woman will join the struggle with an inflexible determination not to remain alive to see the country in bondage and slavery.69

Gandhiji also declared that the actual struggle did not commence at that moment and that before stating the struggle he would meet the Viceroy and plead with him for the acceptance of the Congress demand and that process was likely to take two or three weeks.70 The AICC subsequently prepared instructions to Provincial Congress Committees and others. The chief task was to keep up the enthusiasm witnessed in urban India on the day of arrest of Gandhiji and other leaders and top work up rural India on a similar pitch of activity with a view to make the culminating point of the struggle simultaneous all over. The village people had to be encouraged to declare at public meetings and elsewhere that they are free and that the laws, taxation, and the police and the other arrangements of a foreign government no longer bind them. All this had to be done together with the declaration of freedom, in order to rouse the people. “In the present circumstances, this can be nothing else than the non-violent raids of thousands of people on the symbols and centres of British authority, the Thanas and the Tehsils. These must be put out of action. The police and

69 Ibid., p. 392.
70 Ibid., p. 391.
the other government servants should be invited, in the first instance, to accept the authority of the people or, in their refusal to do so, should be dispossessed both of their weapons and their governmental positions. The culminating point would be reached when the government machinery would not only be paralysed but would be shattered. However, these instructions were not actually issued because of the preventive arrests but they illustrate the intentions of the movement.

However, the Government was not at all interested in talks with the Congress as it had no intentions of accepting the Congress proposals. It had no intentions to either wait and watch the movement formally launched. Its understanding of the entire situation was obvious, as stated in a report of the Home Department. "It was to be a struggle, a fight to the finish, in which the foreign domination must be ended, cost what it may; it was to be an unarmed revolt, short and swift, sure to plunge the country in to a conflagration-a grimly accurate forecast!- in which Mr. Gandhi was prepared to go to the extremest (sic) limit, including, if necessary, the calling of a general strike; the struggle was to include everything that a 'non-violent' mass movement could do, including strikes and stoppage of railways, and possibly interference with the British troop movements; and full use was to be made of existing grievances against the British; former Congress methods such as courting imprisonment were to be eschewed as too soft for the present occasion: finally every man and woman was to consider himself free and act for himself."
Chapter Five

**Government Repression and the Mass-Upsurge**

The Government acted swiftly before the Congress could do anything and early on the morning of 9 August 1942 arrested Gandhiji and other members of the Congress Working Committee. It had been preparing for this strike for a long time after the outbreak of the war, and in fact, since 1940 had been ready with an elaborate Revolutionary Movements Ordinance.\(^74\) On 8 August 1940, the Viceroy, Linlithgow, in a personal letter to the Governors made his intentions clear: "I feel very strongly that the only possible answer to a 'declaration of war' by any section of Congress in the present circumstances must be a declared determination to crush the organization as a whole."\(^75\) Gandhiji had avoided falling into the trap set for him by refusing to make a rash and premature strike. He had carefully built the tempo through the Individual Civil Disobedience Movement, organizational revamping and a consistent propaganda campaign, which we already have discussed. The Government was no more willing to allow him to follow his strategy. Anticipating the quit India resolution it had already issued instructions to the provinces for arrests and suppression.\(^76\)

Rajendra Prasad, who was unwell at Patna, as pointed out earlier and precisely for that reason he had not been able to attend the historic AICC session in Bombay, heard the news of arrest of Mahatmtma Gandhi and members of the Working Committee over radio on the morning of 9 August. Before he could react to the news of the latest developments, the Government acted suddenly and arrested him the same day. As his health did not permit a long distance travel, it put him up at Bankipur jail in Patna. The action of the government did not surprise him but what surprised him was its swiftness:

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\(^{75}\) *Ibid.*

On the morning of August 9, Mathura Prasad, my secretary, had gone to the city, and I was lying in bed at Sadaqat Ashram, reading the newspaper reports of the proceedings of the Working Committee, when Archer, District Magistrate, followed by the Civil Surgeon, Major Murdock, put in his appearance. Archer inquired of my health and programme. I at once understood the object of his visit. When I asked him to what I might attribute the honour his visit, he told me that, he had asked the Government for instruction and that the Government had referred the question to the Civil Surgeon who had been asked to report whether in his opinion it was safe to take me to a far-off place. That was why he had brought the Civil Surgeon with him. The Civil Surgeon examined me and decided that I was not fit to undertake a journey. Meanwhile, my wife and sister, who had been informed of the possibility of my arrest, came to see me. At mid-day I was taken to Bankipur Jail. 77

The news of Rajendra Prasad’s arrest spread like wild fire, which provoked immediate spontaneous protests and rallies in the different areas of Bihar. 78 Students of Patna took out a large procession and held a meeting. They delivered speeches supporting Congress policy and programme, condemning the Government’s action in arresting Rajendra Prasad and they appealed to the students in general to join freedom’s battle. In addition, they passed a resolution to organize strikes in colleges

78 Rajendra Prasad, profusely garlanded and amidst the shouts of ‘Quit India’, ‘Gandhiji-ki-Jai’, and ‘Rajen Babu-ki-jai’, was taken to Bankipur jail at about 12.30 p.m.
and schools. Then they took out a procession in the streets and held a demonstration before the Bankipur Jail where Rajendra Prasad had had been lodged. They also marched in front of the Government House where also they held a meeting and condemned the Government’s repressive policy.\(^79\) As elsewhere, in the Patna Medical College also students went on strike. Following them other staff also, including nursing staff, housemen and sweepers went on strike. This caused a great inconvenience to the patients. The Medical College authorities in order to avoid this procured a letter from Rajendra Prasad in which he had urged the nursing staff to join resume their duties for the sake of the patients. Students were however not willing to trust the contents of the letter and so on their demand for verification of the contents of the letter, some of them were taken by the District Magistrate to Rajendra Prasad. Rajendra Prasad verified the authenticity of his letter and only then, the strike of the nursing and house staff was could be called off.\(^80\)

The movement soon developed into an unprecedented mass upsurge. Within a day or two, a Circular of the BPCC containing a detail programme of activities became available to the people. The circular said that:

After the arrest of Gandhiji and the other leaders hartal was to be observed for one whole day by all sections of the people, Congress workers were to move from village to village to convey to the people the instructions of Gandhiji and the other leaders; meetings were to be held and processions were to be organized in

\(^{79}\) Shri Krishna Sinha was arrested at Patna on August 10, Anugraha Narayan Sinha was arrested on August 11 and Satya Narayan Sinha, General Secretary, Bihar Provincial Congress Committee, and Mahamaya Prasad, President, Saran District Congress Committee, were arrested at the Patna Junction Railway Station on the morning of August 12 on their return from Bombay after attending the AICC meeting. Many others were arrested within a few days. Several ordinances were immediately issued by the Government, and Congress offices and organizations were declared unlawful. On August 10, the police seized the Sadaqat Ashram, the District Congress office at New Kadamkuan, the Kisan Sabha Office at Kadamkuan, and the Congress Socialist Party office at New Kadamkuan.

\(^{80}\) *The Searchlight*, 11 August 1942.
every town and village even in defiance of any ban put on these by Government; vakils and mukhtars were to give up their practice in the courts and the students were to leave the colleges and schools to join the movement; the police were requested not to fire on those who would participate in the war of independence or to disperse them with lathi charges; the people were not to pay chaukidari and union taxes; chaukidars, dafadars, policemen and Government servants of other categories, railway staff, employees of steamers, in post offices, coal mines and factories were to resign their posts; village panchayats were to be formed for helping the people; arrangements were to be made for regular supply of information regarding the movement; and the National Flag was to be hoisted on Government buildings.  

The all out combative repressive measures of the Government produced an instantaneous and spontaneous reaction among the people. The students, throughout Bihar, emerged as the torchbearers of the movement taking the movement to the streets. However, Patna remained the focus of their activities. Two days after the arrest of Rajendra Prasad, on 11 August 1942, they organised a huge rally in front of the Secretariat gate where they wanted to hoist the national flag on the Secretariat building. It was indeed a day of heroic sacrifice on the part of some of the students of Bihar at the altar of freedom. Since early morning, mobile patrols of police and mounted police were guarding the Secretariat building to prevent the students and a large crowd, which had joined them. Police arrested six persons with flag to scare

them away but this failed to make any effect on the crowd of demonstrators. Subsequently the District Magistrate of Patna ordered police firing in which seven of them attained martyrdom.  

The Secretariat tragedy made the situation extremely grave. There was a heightened tension throughout Patna and the action on the part of the Government generated a spell of hatred and indignation against it. A procession of Secretariat assistants and Chaprasis (peons) moved out in a procession, headed by a storekeeper of the secretariat, shouting slogans as a protest against the firing. The procession culminated in a mass meeting where bloody action of the Government was condemned. The incident of firing at Patna further accelerated the pace of the movement. It also enhanced the determination of people in general to fight the alien rule. The movement hereafter spread like a mighty conflagration, taking a violent turn, and appearing to engulf whatever appeared as British. The rapidity with which the movement spread and the undaunted response of the masses it received was beyond the imagination of the authorities. "The wave spread all over North and South Bihar with lightening speed. Roads were dug up and obstructed, railway tracks tampered with, railway stations raided and signals damaged and telegraph and telephone lines were cut in a number of places. Within 3 days there was hardly a railway station intact within 100 miles East or west of Patna. This was followed by numerous attacks on police stations, post offices, irrigation offices and inspection bungalows".

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82 All of these seven students were from Patna proper and were students of class IX to XI.
83 Processions moved in all parts of the city throughout the night.
84 This is how an extract of a letter, from the chief Secretary to the Government of Bihar to the Government of India, described the post 9 August scenario in Bihar. 17 September 1942. Home Poll, F. No. 3/3/42.
Chapter Five

The policy of ruthless repression proved to be counterproductive. Rather it raised furious outbursts of popular indignation throughout. Henceforth the protestors tried to enforce the policy of paralysing the machinery of administration on a large scale. Spontaneous meetings and processions became the order of the day. In one of such meetings held at Congress Maidan, Kadamkuan, People resolved to destroy all communication by cutting railway lines, telegraph and telephone wires, etc. They also decided to take control of Police stations, Courts, Jail and other Government institutions and to burn the records etc., kept there.  

An examination of the contemporary situation of Bihar suggests that people from all the sections were up in revolt against the British administration. Not only students and intelligentsia but also people from all walks of life had joined the battle for independence. Consequently, railway lines were dislocated, telephone and telegraph wires were cut and obstructions of various kinds were placed on the roads. In the process, the thin separation between violence and non-violence also was blurred. However, they always reminded themselves that the real weapon they had to use was only non-violence. These incidents bring out the fact that there was a complete breakdown of the British authority and absence of fear at the popular level. Not only Bihar but also elsewhere as well in the country there was a tremendous mass upsurge. People devised a variety of ways to express their anger. In some places, huge crowds attacked police stations, post offices, courts, railway stations and other symbols of government authority. National flags were forcibly hoisted on public buildings. Elsewhere group of satyagrahis offered arrest in tehsil or district

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85 According to a police report, it was attended by ten thousand people. K. K. Datta, Freedom Movement in Bihar, Vol. 3, p.45.  
86 See Vinita Damodaran, op. cit., pp. 223-29.  
87 Circular no. 1, Bihar Congress Committee, Patna mentioned that without sacrifice, no country has its independence. The countries that are fighting for it have to shed blood like water and throw the wealth in the ocean and in the fire.
headquarters. Crowds of villagers often numbering a few hundred or even couple of
thousand, physically removed railway tracks, and cut telephone and telegraph lines.
Students went on strike in schools and colleges all over the country and took out
processions. They wrote and distributed illegal newssheets. Workers too stuck work.
In Ahmadabad, the mills were closed for three and half months, workers in Bombay
stayed away from work for over a week and in Jamshedpur, there was a strike for
thirteen days. 88

The movement was most intense in Bihar and Eastern U.P. and there it had
taken a proportion of rebellion. 89 Like Bihar in U.P., also students were the
torchbearers of the movement. From about middle of august news reached rural areas
through students and other political activists. Students of the Banaras Hindu
University decided to go to the villages to spread the message of Quit India. They
hijacked trains and draped them in national flags. In rural areas, the pattern was of
large crowds of peasants descending on the nearest tehsil or district town and
attacking all symbols of Government authority. Despite firing and repression, the
movement had gathered momentum. The movement was widespread and quite
intense.

Rajendra Prasad was in the jail and so were the other leaders of the Congress
who could have exercised restraint over the masses and provided a leadership to them,
which was, indeed, the need of the hour. The only source of news of news to him was
the everyday increasing number of newcomers in the jail. In his own words:

There was no ban on newspapers in the jail, but they did not tell
us much. The only source of news was the newcomers....The
next day a big procession marched to the Secretariat. The police

89 Ibid.
opened fire, nine young men were killed and many wounded. About forty young men, who were arrested for taking part in the procession, were brought to Bankipore Jail. It was they who told us off the happenings of the day. The cutting of telephone and telegraph wires had started that day. The telephone system in Patna was paralysed. The people kept marching in the streets the whole night and we could hear the sin even from inside the jail.\(^9^0\)

The Bankipore jail, where Rajendra Prasad had been lodged, was packed to its capacity. The jail authorities, therefore, decided to shift the forty young men to a camp jail. These forty young men had been lodged in a double storied building were, in the words of Rajendra Prasad, “able to carry on a conversation with the crowd waiting outside the jail” and they “told the people of the plan to transfer them to the camp jail the next day.” Subsequently the crowd waited patiently until three next morning when it attacked the first lorry and after releasing the boys set the lorry on fire. The other Lorries consequently could not be taken out and the prisoners were brought back to the barracks.

Accommodating prisoners inside jail had become a problem so much so that the A class prisoners, among whom was Rajendra Prasad, were kept in the hospital. A room had been kept for Rajendra Prasad in the Ahmednagar Fort where other members of the Woking Committee had been lodged. However, the Government, because of his poor health and the breakdown of the railways, could not shift him there. Before his arrest, Rajendra Prasad was under the treatment of an Ayurvedic physician. Nevertheless, inside the jail he submitted himself to the allopathic

treatment available in the jail hospital. He did not like to ask for any favour while in jail:

I adjusted myself to my surroundings and to the routine I had been accustomed to while I was in Hazaribagh jail years earlier.... I began devoting my time to spinning, reading, and writing. My health, of course, was not good, though I was not always confined to bed.91

Prison life was, indeed, irksome and boring, for Rajendra Prasad felt deprived of freedom. However, in this condition also one has to adjust and look for some occasions, which one can relish. For these occasions were visit to him of his family members. To quote him:

Members of my family used to visit me often, almost always accompanied by my grandchildren. They were joyous moments when I used to spend a half-hours playing with the children. Arun, my two-and-a-half-year old grandson, became so used to the place that as soon as he arrived, he would run from the jail gates to the hospital ward where I was kept. I used to give him and my granddaughters the sweets they usually demanded but he would go away disappointed when I said I could not go back with him as he desired.92

The Government reacted to this assault on its authority and legitimacy by unleashing a terrible reign of terror. They took recourse to indiscriminate arrests,
merciless assaults, loot, arson, exaction of collective fines and brutal atrocities.\(^9^3\) The army was given a free hand and soldiers were sent out patrolling and burning the villages. The collector of Patna admitted that during the process of coping with the situation many forms of irregular actions were taken by the military. There were instances when soldiers searched the house and took away even jewels and gold ornaments.\(^9^4\) The system of collective responsibility for the upkeep of the railway lines was also started and strictly imposed. In many cases, this crackdown was not seen enough and so collective fines and arrests were favoured as a deterrent. All this spread a generalised antipathy and fear among the people. It has been argued that henceforth the colonial state would rely completely on the army to maintain law and order, the institutions of police and magistracy having shown themselves to be disloyal and demoralized.\(^9^5\) The brutal and all out repression succeeded within a period of six or seven weeks in bringing a cessation of the mass phase of the struggle.\(^9^6\) In the House of Commons on 8 October 1942, Amery observed:

"Enough to say that the firmness of Government, loyally supported by the civil services, police and, whenever it became necessary, the army, has broken the back of the movement which even if it was prevented from perfecting its preparations, was still very formidable......It would be rash to say that we are yet out"

\(^9^3\) According to official estimates, in the first week after the arrests of the leaders, 250 railway stations, over 500 post offices and 150 police stations were attacked and damaged or destroyed. The movement of trains in Bihar and U.P. was disrupted for many weeks. In Karnataka alone, there were 1600 incidents of cutting of telegraph lines, and twenty-six railway stations and thirty-two post offices were attacked. Unarmed crowds faced police and military firing on 538 occasions and they were machine-gunned by low flying aircrafts. Repression also took the form of taking hostages from the villages, imposing collective fines, which were often realized on the spot by looting the people's belongings, whipping of suspects and burning of entire villages whose inhabitants had fled and could not be caught. By the end of 1942, over 60,000 persons had been arrested, twenty six thousand convicted and 18,000 detained. Bipan Chandra, et al, op. cit., p. 462.


\(^9^5\) Vinita Damodaran, op. cit., p. 242.

\(^9^6\) By October-November 1942, the movement became less intense.
Chapter Five

of the woods. Sporadic disturbances are still reported daily. The forces of law and order will, for months to come, have to be unceasingly vigilant and we need all the support that the Government of India and this House can give. 97

The movement however did not completely collapse. Unmitigated repression on the part of the Government drove many of nationalists underground who started working secretly with the aim of removing British authority and the various maladies for which it was responsible. Underground networks were established. An all India underground leadership with prominent members like Achyut Patwardhan, Aruna Ashaf Ali, Ram Manohar Lohia, Sucheta Kripalani, Biju Patnaik and later Jayaprakash Narayan emerged. They saw the role of underground movement as being that of keeping up popular morale by continuing to provide a line of command and a source of guidance and leadership to activists all over the country. They however, did not see their role as that of directing the exact pattern of activities at the local level. The local groups retained the initiative. Those involved in the underground activities received all manner of support from a large variety of people. 98 Many of the groups that sprang up in the countryside had links with the Congress Socialist Party but several other groups had no such political linkages but were instead

98 Businessmen also donated generously. Sumati Morarjee, who later became India’s leading woman industrialist, for example, helped Achyut Patwardhan to evade detection by providing him with a different car every day borrowed from her unsuspecting wealthy friends. Others provided hideouts for the underground leaders and activists. Students acted as couriers. Simple villagers helped by refusing information to the police. Pilots and train drivers delivered bombs and other materials across the country. Government officials, including those in police, passed on crucial information about impending arrests. The underground activities generally aimed at organizing disruption of communication by blowing up bridges, cutting telephone and telegraph wires and derailing trains. Though success in this regard was insignificant, they succeeded in keeping the spirit of the people in situation when open mass activity was impossible because of the superior armed might of the state.
symptomatic of the disturbed conditions of the period. They formed alliances with the socialist led organisations such as Azad Dastas and carried out their activities in the name of the Congress, enjoying support of the local populations. 99

Rajendra Prasad remained in the Bankipur jail, as on the ground of his health, the government could not shift him to the Hazaribagh jail. The plan of transferring him to Ahmednagar Fort also, where the other members of the Congress Working Committee had been lodged, could not materialise owing his serious indisposition. 100 He did not complain about the arrangements made for his treatment and comfort provided in the jail. The Government had however permitted Mathura Prasad and Chakradhar Saran to stay with him from the beginning. Newspapers have stopped publication from Patna after his arrest and subsequently the Bihar Government had begun publication of to a daily, the Patna Times. This was the only newspaper, which he could read in jail. Rajendra Prasad knew about the repressive measures of the Government through it and some other sources.

In February 1943, in order to sustain the sagging morale of the people in view of serious repression by the Government, Gandhiji announced his decision to undertake his 'epic fast' for twenty-one days. Rajendra Prasad learnt about this from newspapers and he became very upset over the matter as Gandhiji was undertaking this fast at the age of seventy-three. He could do little about it and so tried to keep himself informed about it as quickly as possible. He, therefore, “requested the authorities to allow me to arrange with friends outside for my being telegraphically informed of the day to day developments”, which the government did accept.

99 Vinita Damodaran, op. cit., pp. 245-46.
100 In the jail, he got expert medical advice from Dr. T.N.Banerjee, Principal of the Patna Medical College, who often visited him there and sometimes with Dr. Raghunath Saran and Dr. Damodar Prasad, all of whom were his old physicians.
Nevertheless, the telegrams were censored before being made available to him. In his words:

But in each case the telegrams were censored, with the result that there was a twenty four hour delay and the telegrams contained not a word more than what the newspapers had already published. I, therefore, discontinued the arrangement.\(^{101}\)

Gandhiji commenced the fast on 10 February 1943 in jail. He had declared that the fast would last for twenty-one days. This was his answer to the Government, which had been constantly exhorting him to condemn the violence of the people in the quit India movement. This was also a moral protest against the excesses on the part of the Government. However, Gandhiji not only refused to condemn it but also unequivocally held the Government responsible for it.\(^{102}\) Gandhiji’s fast aroused a popular response and provided again an occasion for political activities. All over the country, there were hartals, demonstrations and strikes. Prisoners in jails and those who were outside undertook sympathetic fasts. Public meetings demanded his release and the Government were bombarded with thousands of letters and telegrams from people from all walks of life. Even many of those otherwise unsympathetic felt that the Government was going too far.\(^{103}\)


\(^{102}\) Gandhiji in his letter of 29 January 1943 to the Viceroy said that it was the ‘leonine violence’ of the State which had provoked the people. *CWMG*, Vol.77, p. 56.

\(^{103}\) Three Indian members of the Viceroy’s Executive Council, namely M.S. Aney, N.R. Sarkar and H.P. Mody resigned. They had supported the Government in its suppression of the movement but did not want to be party to Gandhiji death. Indeed, this was a serious blow to the prestige of the Government.
Rajendra Prasad underwent distressing moments during Gandhi's fast. He was relieved only after the fast was safely over. Nevertheless, that was not an end to the agony of Rajendra Prasad. Bengal experienced a terrible famine of 1943 when the entire nation was engaged in a serious battle with the British. The famine took a heavy toll of human lives besides causing unspeakable hardships to the people of the Province. Awful details of this horrible calamity, which he read in the newspapers, moved him intensely. In his own words:

I continued reading the papers until one day I could have no more of it and threw aside the paper. I stopped reading the papers for some time; I could not bear the horror dished out from day to day. I was angry because I was helpless. Public organisations had relief operations and started collecting funds, but here was I rotting in jail. I could nothing but support an appeal for funds issued by P.R. Das in Patna, suggesting that it was the harvesting season in Bihar, it might be possible to collect food grains and send them to Bengal. I learned a few days later that the Government had intercepted that letter to P.R. Das and refused to deliver it.

Rajendra Prasad, from inside the jail, helped several prisoners who had been wrongly framed and sentenced and were victims of ruthless implementation of the

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104 However, the Viceroy and his officials remained unmoved. The Viceroy contemptuously dismissed the consequences of Gandhi's possible death: 'Six months unpleasantness, steadily declining in volume, little or nothing at the end of it.' He even appeared to welcome the possibility: 'India would be far more reliable as a base of operations. Moreover, the prospect of settlement will be greatly enhanced by the disappearance of Gandhi, who had for years torpedoed every attempt at settlement.', Linlithgow in a conversation with Lois Phillips, the special U.S. representative in New Delhi, TP, Vol.3, p. 690.

instruments of repression by the Government machinery. He drafted a mercy petition for a prisoner sentenced to death. The case of this prisoner was very bizarre. Rajendra Prasad reminisced thus:

During a fracas in a village in Patna district over some land a few days after our arrest, a man died. The police gave a political colour to the brawl and arrested eight men and alleged that that the murdered man was killed by Congressmen because the deceased had joined the army against their wishes. A special judge who tried the accused found that he had never been in the army, but fact of murder could not be disputed, sentenced the eight persons to death. According to the Ordinance under which the accused men were tried, the sentence had to be confirmed by a judge of the High Court. The High Court judge acquitted seven of the accused and confirmed the sentence of death on the eighth. An appeal to the Privy Council was rejected. The jail authorities seemed to take some interest in mercy petitions being sent on behalf of the people sentenced to death. I was asked to draft a petition for this man and when it was sent, the Governor accepted it and commuted the sentence. Because the police had classified him as a political prisoner, this man was released along with other political prisoners when the Congress Ministry was formed in 1946. As soon as he was released he came to Sadaqat Ashram to pay me his respects.106

106 Ibid., p. 544.
Rajendra Prasad drafted appeal for another person as well who was sentenced to seven years imprisonment for conspiracy to commit a dacoity. He was alleged to have taken an active part in the robbery and had even run a mile with a rice bag on his back. The man was aged sixty, was lame, and could only walk with difficulty. The appeal could secure this man's acquittal in the Patna High Court. To quote Rajendra Prasad:

Because of some disability he was unable to stretch all the fingers of his hands. How could he have run a mile with a rice bag on his back was beyond my understanding. But the magistrate who came to record his statement in hospital, believing the prosecution story rather than his own his eyes, sentenced to seven years' imprisonment! Then the man one day came to me and, falling at my feet, began to cry. I promised to help him file an appeal. I got of the judgement through the jailor and drafted an appeal.  

These activities brought some amount of consolation to Rajendra Prasad. After all, he was able to do something meaningful for providing some amount of succour to the suffering people even during the period of his imprisonment. Nevertheless, his mind remained largely engrossed with the thoughts of furthering the struggle against the British. In the aftermath of the movement, scores of political workers got imprisoned and sentenced. They had never offered defence in the court. This was in conformity with the creed of the previous Congress movements when defence had not to be offered. Nevertheless, this time the sentences were, indeed, very

107 Ibid., p.545.
harsh. Rajendra Prasad did not consider the earlier approach acceptable any more and emphatically suggested those Congressmen should offer defence. He suggested twin benefits of this strategy. First, “if we started defending ourselves, it might make the Magistrates less unscrupulous”. Secondly, it will also save the Congress from discontent and defiance of its instructions from its rank and file as well. “In the circumstances,” he argued, “the best thing to do was to allow everyone to defend himself.” 108 This was an important departure as far as Congress policy was concerned. As soon as Mahatma Gandhi came out of detention, he realised its efficacy, and directed that defence be offered in all cases. Rajendra Prasad felt highly “gratified” as Mahatma Gandhi’s action had vindicated the fairness of his argument.

Rajendra Prasad like Gandhiji held the view that the Government itself was morally responsible for the disturbances during the movement. This was possibly the reason why he refused to be released from jail. The jail committee during, one of its visits, had asked Rajendra Prasad if he would have liked to be released and his reply was “Not unless and until all the others are released”. The committee wanted to know as to how the destructive programme came to be known and acted upon so rapidly all over the country if the Congress had not planned and circulated it in advance. Rajendra Prasad blamed the Government for the same. In his own words:

I replied that while on August 9 the newspapers had published the Congress resolution of August 8, the Government had issued a communiqué seeking to explain the reasons for its arrest of Gandhiji and members of the Congress Working Committee. This communiqué alleged that the destruction of the means of communications like Posts and Telegraphs and the railways

108 Ibid., p. 547.
formed a part of the Congress programme. On the following day, the Secretary of State for India, Amery, broadcast a speech from London, which was published in newspapers all over the country, repeating the alleged programme of the Congress. I was therefore of the view that as the Congress had issued no programme, the people got the impression they did from these reports that an attack on communication must have been included in the Congress programme and started acting on this information thus broadcast by the highest authorities of the British Government itself.109

It was Rajendra Prasad’s conviction people had resorted to destructive programme by reading the Government communiqué itself in the newspapers. Through newspapers, they came to conclusion that the Congress had adopted a destructive programme and began to act upon it spontaneously. This programme also seemed to be consistent with the ideas which used to occur to a section of people even before. In his own words:

When Phoolan Prasad was arrested and brought to jail on the evening of the evening of the day I was arrested, he told me that me that, hearing of my arrest, some people had come and asked him what the Congress programme was, thinking that I would told him. But he replied he had not met me for long and he knew nothing about it. But the official communiqué had appeared the

109 Ibid., p. 549.
same morning and had attracted the people’s notice. He referred
them to that communiqué for the Congress programme.110

Nevertheless, Rajendra Prasad did not approve of the violence that had taken
place or the underground activities. In his conscience, these people deserved “utmost
praise for their courage and efficiency”. But he thought that if these people had not
gone underground many of them might have been hanged or subjected to severe
persecution. In that case, the innocent would not have suffered and agitation too
would have forged ahead. Leaders would have risen in the public eye and people
would have gladly suffered in complying with their wishes. He therefore questioned
the entire philosophy of the underground work and remained convinced that “one of
the results of underground work was that the agitation could not have a sufficiently
wide basis and the acts of a few persons recoiled on the community in general”. To
quote him:

I, therefore, feel that if those who destroyed railway tracks and
the telecommunication system had done so openly and confessed
what they had done, the people would have exhibited much
greater courage and would have come forward to follow them.
Many innocent men would then have been saved from the
uncertainties and hazards of underground existence. However, it
is all a matter of faith in non-violence. Those who do not believe
in it cannot be bound by it. The people had come forward to the
extent that they did because of the policy of open revolt. If they

110 Ibid., p. 350.
had continued that policy, they would have achieved a great deal.\textsuperscript{111}

In 1944, malaria broke out in an epidemic form in Bihar. The 'Indian Nation'\textsuperscript{112}, published from Patna, carried a campaign in its editorial and suggested the Government to release Rajendra Prasad for organising relief work. A section of public also supported this demand.\textsuperscript{113} Rajendra Prasad however did not like the move and strongly objected to it. He stated that he had no desire to be released until the political demands were fulfilled and his companions released. Subsequently he wrote to the Government also regarding this.

The life in jail was quite monotonous and mind numbing. Rajendra Prasad had become used to it by then and, and therefore, decided to engage himself in reading and writing. He made an exhaustive study of the relevant published literature on the demand for Pakistan and prepared a manuscript on this subject. He wanted to make his views known to the public, particularly the Muslims. Hindu-Muslim divide had always been a tormenting issue in his mind. The Muslims had set their hearts on Pakistan. He, therefore, examined the entire issue in his writing. Here he refuted the two-nation theory and argued, that logically a separate state of Pakistan was not in the interest of the Muslims of India. It was published, under the title of \textit{India Divided}, in January 1946 after he was released from jail.

Rajendra Prasad had started writing his autobiography while he had gone to Sikar in Rajasthan for rest in 1940. At the request of some of his friends, he continued with it further now in jail up to the period of the Ramgarh Congress, and the rest he

\textsuperscript{111} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 553.
\textsuperscript{112} It was a pro Government English newspaper published from Patna.
completed at Pilani after his release. It proved to be an outstanding work popular with the public. It presented panoramic view of political developments in India from the beginning of the national movement up to 1946.

The war had taken a favourable turn for the Allies when Lord Wavell came to India in mid-October 1943, as Governor-General. The allies had occupied Normandy and advanced through Western Europe and Russians marched through the Balkans. Germany had also collapsed and by 7 May 1945, the war in Europe was over. Yet the threat from Japan was still there on the eastern horizon. It was necessary to win over India’s cooperation in the war against Japan, which was coming closer to India’s frontiers. The constitutional problem in India had remained unresolved, and communal differences had widened further, the Muslim League raising new slogan of “Divide and Quit”, matching with the Congress demand of “Quit India”.

On 14 June 1945, the Viceroy, Lord Wavell, announced in a broadcast that orders had been passed for the release of the members of the Congress Working Committee. As a sequel to this, Rajendra Prasad was released from the prison early next morning amidst demonstrations of profound joy by the people. In Rajendra Prasad’s own words:

As I was about to leave, I paused to look back on the events of the three long years I had spent behind prison bars. It was pleasant to think that we had inspired some sort of affection in the hearts of other prisoners in Bankipur....Whenever any of them was in trouble he would rush to seek our help, despite our telling them that we were as helpless as they.”114