INTRODUCTION

Situating Historical Writings on Indian Nationalism

The history of Indian nationalism has been one of the most contested domains in the historiography of modern India. While there are historians who see in Indian nationalism a creative surge to free the people from the colonial yoke, others see the National Movement for such freedom as both conceptually and ideologically untenable in the Indian context. There are historians who are critical of any concept of a larger idea of the nation. In such a shapeless country as India with its admixture of societies, in their perspective, politics has always been structured around primordial markers like religion, caste, community or factions, and motivated by self-interest. Therefore, it is implied that the idea of a common ‘Indian’ National Movement is alien to such a society.

There is set of historians who tend to see the National Movement in India against colonialism as merely an assertion of the elites. The National Movement for them was not a people’s movement but a product of the needs and interests of the elite groups, who wanted to further their own interests or the interest of their respective groups defined in terms of their “primordial loyalties, ‘prescriptive group identity’” etc. The elite groups, their needs and interests, provided the basis for what came to be defined as the idea of nationalism. Nationalism was thus an instrument and primarily an ideology which the elite groups used to legitimize and further their narrow interests and ambitions. The earlier British administrators like Lord Dufferin, Lord Curzon, and writers like Valentine Chirol and many others had argued in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that it were the frustrated educated middle classes which for its own factional’ or sectional or local interests used nationalism to fight the
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‘benevolent Raj’. The later day historians such as J. Gallagher, Anil Seal, C.J. Baker and some others have expanded this line of argument. Anil Seal developed the notion of the entire National Movement representing the struggle of one elite group against another, for seeking favours from the British.

Their analysis of the National Movement is premised on the denial of the basic contradiction between the interests of the Indian people and that of British colonialism and the centrality of this contradiction in giving birth to the National Movement. They deny the existence of colonialism as an economic, political, social and cultural structure in India. For many of them colonialism was merely a foreign rule, and quite often this rule is seen as a natural succession to the Mughal rule. There is a denial in their analysis, of the fact that the economic, social, cultural and political development of India required the overthrow of colonialism. And it is here that they vehemently argue against any claim that Indian National Movement represented a common site of the Indians to contest colonial rule. As such, to this group of historians, generally known as the Cambridge school of historians, the Indian struggle against imperialism seems to be a mock battle.

One of the basic premises of Seal, Gallagher and others has been the idea of formation of local elites and their role in the formation of an all India elite. They argue that with the expansion of the British administration to the localities and provinces the local potentates started organizing politics by acquiring clients and

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3 Anil Seal, The Emergence of Indian Nationalism, p. 342.
4 Ibid., p. 351.
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patrons, whose interests they served and who in turn served their interests. This led to a relationship close to patron client model. Politics in India thus developed along this patron-client relationship. Gradually bigger leaders emerged who acted as brokers to link together the politics of these local potentates. Eventually all-India brokers emerged as the British rule encompassed the whole of India. In order to operate successfully these all-India brokers recruited province level brokers and contractors. Later all India leaders like Gandhi, Nehru, Patel, and Rajendra Prasad would be seen in these writings as more or less the chief brokers. These brokers would cleverly use existential grievances such as war, inflation, disease, drought and depression, which quite often had nothing to do directly with colonialism, to hoodwink the masses to involve them in this factional struggle.

There is also a bid to deny legitimacy to the people's struggle and thereby the National Movement in which people participated in millions. The notion of empire is kept at centre-stage to argue further that independence was the benevolent handiwork of the British rulers. There has also been argument from some historians from this quarter that the end of the empire came not because of the success of people's movement but owing to the fact the British imperial interests in India had declined and India no longer served its role in the maintenance of the imperial interests. India, therefore, had become a liability over the years. In fact, it has been argued that it was Britain, which had to foot the bill for India's defense during the Second World War.


6 This view has been seriously questioned. On the contrary it has been argued that towards the end of the British rule and especially during the war British imperial control was intensified and the economic exploitation of India increased manifold. See Aditya Mukherjee, "The Indian Capitalist Class: Aspects of its Economic, Political and Ideological Development in the Colonial Period, 1930-47", in
The categories of nation, class, mobilization, ideology, etc., which have been used to analyze revolutionary processes and National Movements in Europe, Asia and Africa have found no place in this historiography. The Indian National Movement, as Seal had already argued, was a mock struggle, a sham fight, for factional supremacy among the local elites. The fact and the reality of colonial exploitation are by implication denied to have any role in political mobilization. By such a denial of the existence of the colonial exploitation and the consequent underdevelopment, the central contradictions in the relationship between the colonial and the colonized, this school also does not admit of any idealism on the part of those who sacrificed their lives for the anti-imperialist cause. Not only was there no idealistic, intelligent and active role given to the mass of workers, peasants, lower middle class in such historiographical treatment, the dawn of independence too has been seen as something bestowed or merely a withdrawal, ‘decolonization”, i.e., as something which happened because India had lost its position in terms of its utility to the empire. Here when the masses were actively struggling for independence many of them concentrate on the developments in Britain. In a study like the present work, an attempt is made to see whether these assertions about an individual leader like Rajendra Prasad describe truly his location.

A number of books and biographies that fall within what one may refer to as the nationalist school of historiography do recognize the existence of colonialism and its exploitative character and treat nationalism as emanating from its evils. Recognizing the central contradiction of Indians with colonialism, they argue that

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Sabyasachi Bhattacharya and Romila Thapar, eds, *Situating Indian History*, New Delhi, 1986, pp. 239-82.

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India was under the process of becoming a nation and the National Movement was the movement of the people. They however tend to ignore and underplay the inner contradictions of the Indian society in terms of class and caste. For the period under our study, they also are entangled in the constitutional negotiations and the positions taken up by the British, the Congress and the other political groups, paying little attention to the mass upsurge taking place in 1940s.

Marxist historians have provided an important corrective to both the Cambridge and the nationalist historiography of the National Movement. Marxist historians have seen the operation of the colonial system and the resultant movement from the Indians as the core of historical phenomenon in modern India. They also at the same time try and locate the class contradictions within the Indian society. They have been successful in bringing to history-writing ‘people’ and their movements, ideas which the Indian leadership had succeeded in bringing to the movement.

The Marxist historians have been able to see the central contradiction between colonialism and the Indian people while at the same time emphasizing the internal contradictions within the Indian society. However, many of them, like R.P. Dutt, have not been able to integrate fully their treatment of the primary anti-imperialist contradiction and the secondary inner contradictions. Characterizing the leadership of the Indian National Congress as being bourgeois, he and many who followed him,

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equated the movement as a bourgeoisie movement capable of solving only the political problem and incapable of solving the social problem, i.e., the secondary inner contradiction. It is for this reason that the role of the Congress leadership is attacked for being either conservative or bourgeoisie. They see the bourgeoisie as playing the dominant role in the movement and they tend to equate the national leadership with the bourgeois or the capitalist class.\textsuperscript{10}

Another significant characteristic of this historiography has been its analysis of the class character of the movement in terms of its forms of struggle, which has led to conclusions open to serious criticism. Many of the Marxist historians have equated violent mass or popular movement with radical and genuine movement while peaceful or non-violent movement as signifying the bourgeois character of the leadership. It is in this frame of reference that the Gandhian movement, one of the largest popular movements is never seen as a radical or revolutionary movement. Further, any efforts at negotiation, talks, or retreat have been shown as the compromising nature of the leadership and the non-revolutionary character of the movement. It is in this frame that the talks or negotiation on the independence question has been shown as compromise by the leadership.\textsuperscript{11} Further, it appears that they are more interested in the activities, in which the Communists played an important role or that which involved the struggles of workers and peasants and which stepped outside the Congress limits of non-violence.\textsuperscript{12}

Explaining the independence in 1947, they tend to see it in terms of a compromise between the Congress and imperial powers. "Under the leadership of Gandhi", wrote A.R. Desai, "the Indian national Congress followed this 'non-violent'\textsuperscript{10} R.P.Dutt, \textit{India Today}.\textsuperscript{11} R.P.Dutt, \textit{India Today}; Sumit Sarkar, \textit{Modern India}.\textsuperscript{12} Sumit Sarkar, \textit{Modern India}.
road to compromise to secure a transfer of power from the British rule and stave off the possibility of the subcontinent following the other militant path of revolutionary class and mass struggle." It was a fear of the radical forces, many argued, that made the Congress go the negotiation way and accept eventually the partition as a price. In this of analysis, the British too preferred a compromise with the Congress rather than surrendering power to a radical combination of political forces. Thus, the transfer of power took place through "bourgeois" path of bargain and compromise rather than the path of revolutionary mass struggle. However these writings tend to gloss over the fact that the Congress, which spearheaded the anti-imperialist National Movement, was not a class specific organization, rather it represented a multi-class movement striving at liberation of the country from colonialism. They also tend to ignore the fact that the National Movement contained within it different strands of people, who shared the ideology of ant-imperialist nationalism but had widely divergent perspectives of post-independence social development and which were reflected in many political trends that coexisted in the movement and at times contended for hegemony. They also had differing perceptions over the strategic path to be followed by the movement and over the tactics, the forms of struggle, their timing and the like.

Notwithstanding the critique, the Marxist historians have added considerable dimensions to our study of economic and social conditions of this period. By associating itself with the economic issues and the struggles of the oppressed, it has

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helped the historian to identify with the mass of the people, who had so far been
regarded more as the objects rather than the subjects of history.

Dismissing all these writings, including the Marxist one, as elite
historiography a new school emerged which is described by its proponents as
subaltern. Appearing to follow the Marxist premises in some instances, the initial
writings of this collective known as subaltern studies, claimed that they were
replacing the old ‘blinkerated’ historiography, which had little to offer by way of an
understanding of the history of the people, with a new people’s or subaltern approach.

They question the ideology of nationalism and tend to locate the basic contradiction in
the Indian society between the elite on one hand and the subaltern groups on the other,
and not between the colonial rule and the Indian people. This interestingly brings
them closer to the imperialist historiography. They assert that the Indian people were
never united in a common anti-imperialist struggle and as such, there was nothing like
Indian National Movement. For them the entire National Movement had two separate
and autonomous domains of politics - one the “elite” and the other “subaltern”. They
see their relationship as characterized by a “structural dichotomy” to the extent that
any effort at “braiding together of the two strands of elite and subaltern politics led
invariably to explosive situations”. Instead of admitting a closer relationship
between the two they see the association of the Congress as efforts to “control and,
and if necessary, suppress the stream of popular politics”. They further argue that

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16 Ranajit Guha, “On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India”, in Ranajit Guha,
Subaltern Studies I: Writings on South Asian History and Society, Delhi, 1982, pp.4-6.
17 Gyanendra Pandey, The Ascendency of the Congress in Uttar Pradesh, 1926-34: A study in Imperfect
of the movement actually diminished.\textsuperscript{18} They thus criticize both bourgeois and working class histories for privileging nation and class over community and lay emphasis on community rather than on the nation.

There seems to be thus a commonality of perception among the scholars of the Cambridge Subaltern camps, in as much as they challenge the notion of the nation and replace it with their attempts to restore "agency" to the voices that they claim have remained suppressed due to modernist and liberal historiographical practices. In their zeal to question nationalism they argue that it was the "nationalist discourse", premised on the same modernist framework as communalism, in its attempt at self-definition, which defined a particular kind of politics as communalism. Thus they see nationalism and nationalist politics in binary relation with communalism and claim that in the final analysis these were responsible for inventing communalism.\textsuperscript{19} They no doubt appear as absolving colonialism from its role of constructing and promoting it for their own ends. No wonder continuing their criticism against nationalism they further advocate for an altered periodization of Indian history in the pre-modern and modern phases.\textsuperscript{20} The writings of Ayesha Jalal and Joya Chatterjee have carried these arguments further.\textsuperscript{21}

It is against this backdrop that the present work seeks to explore and attempt to locate an individual leader like Rajendra Prasad in the context of the Indian National Movement. This is a study of the role played by an individual in the

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., pp. 207-8. Also see Sumit Sarkar, Modern India 1885-1947, p. 183.  
\textsuperscript{19} Partha Chatterjee, Bengal 1920-47: The Land Question, Calcutta, 1984.  
\textsuperscript{20} See Rakesh Batabyal, Communalsim in Bengal From Famine to Noakhali, 1943-47, New Delhi, 2005, p. 33.  
movement for freedom from colonialism. One is aware of the participation of countless people during this movement. What role people who played significant part in the movement is also at the core of the historiographical discussion. While in the Cambridge historiography they are shown to be simply the leader of the caste, a class or a status group, the Marxist sometimes depicts them merely as the spokesperson of a class ideology. We would like to explore their location in a movement which not only transcended class or caste movements but tried to encompass the whole of a nation which it also tried to define in the process of the movement.

Significantly, Plekhanov, an early Marxist thinker wrote the most significant work on *The Role of the Individual in History*. Sidley Hook’s *The Hero in History* too provides a frame to conceptualize the role of individual in historical moments. Plekhanov argued that “great men” (sic; but the gender conscious language was not known till the 1980s) play a remarkable role in historical development and at the same time get influenced by the major social forces operative at their time. In his words, “The effect of personal peculiarities is … undeniable; but no less undeniable is the fact that it could occur only in the given social conditions”. He also added that “individuals often exercise considerable influence upon the fate of society”. He was, however, aware that the ultimately a society was determined by its internal structure and by its relation to other societies.

Sidney Hook also posits a strong link between the individual and his role in history. He makes a distinction between an ‘eventful hero’ and an ‘event making hero’. The eventful hero may be the one who fires the first shot after which a battle

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begins and every battle consists of several events in whose midst the eventful hero finds him/herself. The eventful hero could also be like the Dutch boy, who according to legend, saved his city by putting his finger to the dike from where water was oozing out and thereby, the boy saved his city from being flooded that night. On the other hand, an event making hero is an eventful person "whose actions are the consequences of outstanding capacities of intelligence, will and character not accidents of position". A hero becomes an event-making person by not merely doing something great but by virtue of what s/he is. The event making hero is linked to a machine or organization and belongs to a social class but s/he is an instrument of neither. All event-making heroes promise power to the nation or all classes. The event-making hero can use his machine/organization, along with her/his lieutenants and followers, to justify her/his independence from the social class to which s/he belonged.25

Similarly Ernest Mandel also, writing in the New Left Review, highlights the role of the individual in history.26 While emphasizing the primacy of the relationships and the conflicts between the social forces in determining the course of history and underlining history "as a history of struggles between different social classes and their essential fractions", he writes that:

Such a view of history is not based on 'denial' of human individuality nor an 'underestimation' of individual autonomy, character structure, or 'values'. On the contrary, the view that history is basically shaped by the social forces results precisely from a full understanding of the fact that an

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infinite number of individual pressures will tend to create random movements which largely cancel each other out to the extent that they are purely individual. In order for a definitive movement of history to appear—that is, for history to possess a pattern that is intelligible and not merely a meaningless succession of unconnected accidents—common aspects have to be discovered in individuals' behaviour. 27

Further contesting the denial of the role of individuals in shaping history, he feels that this would amount to diminishing the role of the majority of individuals in society as only under circumstances in which the vast majority have been excluded from history-making, can a few 'great men' be endowed with the powers to shape events. In his own words: "When historical materialism posits the primacy of social forces over individual actions in determining the course of history, it does not deny that certain individuals play exceptional roles. If men and women make history, it is always with a certain consciousness, which of course may be a 'false' consciousness to the extent that it misinterprets their real interests or fails to foresee the objective consequences of their actions. It follows in this context that certain individuals in the leadership of social currents can have unusual influence in history, not as a superman but precisely through their relationship to their constituencies". 28 Ernest Mandel sounds most emphatic in his observation when he writes that given global social and material constraints, certain personalities can influence history either by possessing a

27 Ibid., p. 61-62.
28 Ibid., p. 62.
clearer perception than others of the historical needs of their class, or by retarding the recognition of these objective needs. To quote him again:

By their influence they can impose decisions which, in the short run, either further or thwart the interests of the social forces that they are supposed to represent. This is largely independent of their will or of their declared intentions. Hitler, for example, did not intend to destroy the German ruling class’s power over half of the Reich as it existed on 31 August 1939, but such a loss of power and territory was precisely the outcome of the chain of events unleashed by his invasion of Poland the next day.29

In the light of the above discussion, we would not say that the role of Rajendra Prasad can be evaluated without reference to the class he belonged to or the region he hailed from. But we would try and examine whether this leader was a mere instrument of his class or a servile servant of his region. We try to assess the two-way interaction between Rajendra Prasad and his society, while studying his role in the growth and development of the National Movement. I have limited the period of my study to 1934-47, which, indeed, embodied a unique and a significant phase both in the evolution of the trajectory of his political life as well the development and culmination of the Indian National Movement in India’s partition and independence.

Rajendra Prasad was elected the President of the Congress in 1934 when the Congress required a dedicated and committed person to rebuild it after it had weathered the Civil Disobedience Movement. Rajendra Prasad therefore symbolizes

29 Ibid.
in many senses the organizational part of the Congress, which was leading the movement. In this sense, a study of his work is to enter into the deeper layers of the Indian National Movement. Similarly, Rajendra Prasad was one who was deeply committed to Gandhiji’s ideas and hence one could locate him as someone who was, in the language of the Marxist historians, as a conservative partner in the bourgeoisie leadership. Exploring his role with the organization and the masses presents us with the glimpse of the true character of the leadership. In yet another way, an exploration into the work and ideas of Rajendra Prasad could indicate to us the idealism and individual role in the political movement. Therefore, while the role of individual in history has been debated at the conceptual level, there has not been much work on individual’s location in the Indian National Movement from these entire dimensions. Therefore, the study is not only about the relation between an individual and a movement but also about the character of the Indian National Movement. After all Rajendra Prasad was taking many stands based on his deep ideological understandings which have defined the nature of the freedom struggle against colonialism and shaped the agenda of the National Movement for freedom.

**Political Trajectory of Rajendra Prasad up to 1934**

Rajendra Prasad was born at Zeradei, a village in the district of Siwan of Bihar on 3rd December 1884, a year before the formation of the Indian National Congress. He was born in a well to do family having a small zamindari. His father, Mahadev Sahai was a scholar of Persian and Sanskrit and also a practitioner of the Ayurvedic and Unani systems of medicine, distributing medicines free to the poor. His mother, Kamleshwari Devi, was a devout lady who would recite bhajans and tell him stories.

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from the Ramayana, which left a deep imprint on young Rajendra. The village life at Zeradei was characterized by a feeling of communal harmony and peaceful co-existence. Although religion “permeated village life” it was devoid of any communal rancor and disturbances.31 The villagers celebrated the festivals of Ramnavami, Janamashtami, Holi, Diwali and Dussehra. Though few in the village could read or write, many of them assembled in the evenings at the monasteries to listen to the recitations from the Ramayana. The village had also a mosque servicing the Muslims of the area and many festivals like Holi and Muharram were jointly celebrated by the Hindus as well the Muslims. All these made a deep impression on young Rajendra Prasad.

At the age of five or six he was sent to a Maulavi for learning Persian as per the usual practice prevailing then among the Kayasthas of the U.P. and Bihar.32 However his formal schooling began at Zilla School, Chhapra. From there he passed the entrance examination of the Calcutta University and secured first position in the first division. For further education, he went to Calcutta where he joined the Presidency College in 1902. The Presidency College at that time had several distinguished professors who made a deep impression on the adolescent mind. Dr J.C. Bose taught him physics while Dr. P.C. Roy taught chemistry. Though Rajendra Prasad was interested in science, he decided to pursue the Arts course for his graduation because he did not fare well in mathematics. He maintained a brilliant career, coming first in every examination. His simple, amiable, straight-forward nature and his unassuming manners won the hearts of fellow students, who elected him the Secretary of the College Union.

32 K.K. Datta, op. cit., p. 4.
This was also the period when his political leanings too had started. He joined the Dawn Society, founded by Satish Chandra Mukherjee. The aim of the organization was to help the students in their studies, equip them with knowledge of current affairs, and build their character. It also rendered social service from time to time. The Society organized lectures on a variety of subjects, which enhanced, as he would write later, “our knowledge of the world as well our country and influenced our thoughts a great deal”. Association with the Dawn Society and Satish Chandra Mukherjee had a profound impact over him and channeled his activism towards social and political issues. “Examinations no longer”, he admitted later, “held my attention and my imagination was caught by public and social affairs”. The whole thing fired his imagination and activities in somewhat nation building activities.

Even when he was in school he had organized a debating society where students used to meet every Sunday, read papers and make small speeches. But now, under the influence of the Dawn Society, his activities in this direction increased further. He established a Bihari Club in Calcutta which worked on the lines of the debating society he had formed earlier. He took part in the College Union and was elected Secretary. He also became instrumental in running a magazine brought out by the Union. It was around this time that his inclinations towards public activity became crystallized and it would be no exaggeration to say that his association with Satish Chandra Mukherjee proved to be seminal. In his own words:

My inclinations towards public activity since early age were now crystallized. I had been a newspaper reader and whenever the annual sessions of the Indian National Congress were held,
I used to follow the proceedings avidly. I had always attended public meetings addressed by men like Surendranath Bannerjee. But it was the Dawn Society and the association with Satish Chandra Mukherjee that gave the tendencies present in me an aim and direction. I began to think in terms of the future.\(^{35}\)

The urge of nationalism had already sprouted in him by now. He was just twenty years old and doing his B.A. when he had become familiar with many public organizations of the time and regularly attended their various meetings. He also attended the meetings held to protest against the partition of Bengal as there was no restriction on such activity by the students. He heard Surendra Nath Bannerjee, Bipin Chandra Pal, A. Choudhary and Aurobindo Ghose and was influenced by them. Subsequently, when at a meeting held on 7 August 1905 which decided to boycott foreign goods and propagate Swadeshi, he was very pleased because by this time he had already adopted that principle and he gladly joined the bonfire of foreign cloth organized at his hostel. Interestingly, on his own testimony, he had nothing to offer in the bonfire as he was already practicing Swadeshi by then.\(^{36}\)

This was the period when a new political consciousness had dawned over the country, particularly among the students and youth. Many gave up their studies and many others joined the Bengal National College, established in the wake of the Swadeshi movement. His old associates of the Dawn Society, including his mentor, Satish Chandra Mukherjee joined this college. Rajendra Prasad, however, did not

\(^{35}\) Ibid.  
\(^{36}\) Ibid.
follow them impulsively as the aim of the institution was not very clear to him and his methodical mind was not prepared for a sudden change in his plans. As the anti-partition and Swadeshi movement had not raised the question of students leaving the colleges he thought that he was then only an outside sympathizer of the movement and not an active participant in it. Therefore there was no need for that bold step then. He reminisced about this incident: “I have been somewhat indecisive by nature from my childhood and to take a bold step in a hurry has been always difficult for me”.

Nevertheless because of this he felt withdrawn from his studies and became somewhat indifferent to examinations.

The Swadeshi agitation had deeply agitated the minds of students from Bihar who were studying in Calcutta, including Rajendra Prasad. In order to do something they published a poem which they circulated widely after getting it printed. The Bihari Club was destined to play a significant role in organizing the students of Bihar as it soon visualized a plan of organizing a conference of entire students of Bihar. It assigned Rajendra Prasad with this responsibility and it was because of his initiatives and efforts that students of Patna formed a reception committee and made the necessary arrangements in this regard. The conference opened in the hall of the Patna College and Rajendra Prasad explained the aim of the conference. The conference proved to be very successful in bringing the students of Bihar under a common banner. It set up student’s committees in places where there were colleges and schools and got them affiliated with it as a central body. A representative body of all the students of Bihar was to be formed with its headquarters at Patna. This body was to be the executive body charged with the task of carrying on the activities of the conference and controlling and coordinating the work of students’ committees. Later

37 Ibid., p. 44.
the Bihari Club of Calcutta was also affiliated to it. The Students’ Conference, founded in 1906, held its annual sessions regularly until the beginning of the Non-Cooperation Movement when its activities gradually slackened because all its front-rank workers had joined the Non-Cooperation Movement. It was from the workers of the conference that Gandhiji received support when he first visited Bihar.\(^{38}\)

The Indian National Congress held its session in Calcutta 1906 and Rajendra Prasad enrolled himself as a volunteer there. The Congress had completed two decades of its existence and had emerged as a premier political organization. It however had not been able to develop a mass base, which it would acquire later. There had also developed two groups in it - the extremists and the moderates. Tilak, Lajpat Rai, Bipin Chandra Pal, Aurobindo Ghose and others led the extremists, while Pherozshah Mehta and Gopal Krishna Gokhale led the moderates. Surendra Nath Bannetjee and Madan Mohan Malaviya stood somewhere in between these two groups. As a moderating influence Dadabhai Naoroji had been invited from England to preside over the session. Rajendra Prasad, as volunteer, was put on duty in the Congress pandal from where he was able to hear all the discussions of the Subjects Committee. It was in this session that he heard the speeches of Sarojini Naidu, Madan Mohan Malaviya and Mohammad Ali Jinnah for the first time. He felt naturally drawn towards the Congress but joined it formally only in 1911 when he completed his studies in Law.

Although his association with the Dawn Society and the Swadeshi agitation had aroused a strong desire in him to serve the country, being a practical man, he decided to build his career first. Government service did not appeal to him but the

\(^{38}\) Ibid., p. 50.
glamour of the Indian Civil Service certainly attracted him. As it was necessary to go to England to appear at the Indian Civil Services examination, he secretly made all the necessary preparations for his trip. But then at the last minute he had to abandon the plan abruptly because his family came to know of it and expressed its strong disapproval. Rajendra Prasad could not go against the wishes of his family as causing pain to others for his own sake, by his own admission, was alien to his nature.

After completing his M.A. in 1908 he took up a teaching-job in Muzaffarpur College. But he found the prospects bleak here and subsequently upon the advice of his brother he decided to continue with his studies of Law in Calcutta. The income of the family from the estate had been constantly dwindling, his father had died and the entire burden of the family was being borne by his elder brother. The legal profession thus offered the best prospect for meeting their expectations and supporting the family economically.

When he was struggling to set up his legal career in 1910 in Calcutta a strange thing happened to him, which could have changed the trajectory of his entire life. Gopal Krishna Gokhale, who wanted to enroll some young Biharis for his Servants of India Society, asked Rajendra Prasad to become a member of the Society. With his persuasive words Gokhale made an enchanting impression on his mind. Rajendra Prasad, who had already been feeling the urge of nationalism, was in a dilemma. The call of the country and the call of the family pulled in different directions. After spending sleepless nights, pondering over it, he decided finally to join the Servants of India Society. He communicated his decision through a letter to his brother, who was at that time in Calcutta. In his own words:

A sentimental man that I am, I could not speak to you face to face. I feel the call of a higher and more important character. It may be
ungrateful on my part to leave you in difficulty and embarrassment. But I propose to you to make a sacrifice in the cause 300 millions. To join Mr. Gokhale’s Society does not mean any sacrifice to me personally. For good or for evil, I have had the benefit of such training that I can adapt myself to any circumstances in which I may be placed. My living, too, has been of such a simple nature that I do not require any special equipment of comfort. But I cannot flatter myself that it means no sacrifice on your part. You, who have been forming high hopes, will see your hopes dashed down in a moment. But in this transitory world all passes away—wealth, rank, honour. The wealthier you become, the more you require, and people may think that they are satisfied with gold, those who know anything know very well that happiness comes not from without, but from within. A poor man with his few rupees is more contented than the rich man with his millions....

If I had any ambition in my life it has been to be of some service to the country. Ambition I had none except to be of some service to the Mother. What prince or the commoner is there who has the influence, the position or the honour of a Gokhale? And is he not, after all, a poor man? 

But events were not destined to move the way he had planned. He found his brother in a state of utter helplessness although he said nothing to him. Subsequently upon his advice both of them went home in Bihar to get the approval of the family members for

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his decision. The family did not approve of the idea and Rajendra Prasad could not finally join the Servants of India Society. The idea of renouncing the family and devoting full time for the cause of nation had to be abandoned for the time being. But after this unsuccessful attempt at renunciation, he devoted himself thoroughly to his studies and completed the Bachelor of law in 1911.

After this, he started his legal practice in Calcutta in which he had to encounter some initial hardships. However his personal integrity, devotion to hard work, and a sound knowledge of law came to his rescue and soon he earned a name for himself. Sir Ashutosh Mukherji, Judge of the High Court, was so impressed with him that as Vice-Chancellor of the University, he offered him the post of Professor of Law. It was a recognition of his abilities. He devoted himself now to both teaching and practicing law and started preparations for the Masters of Laws, which he completed by 1915. Two years later he also completed the Doctorate. He shifted his practice to Patna in 1916 when a High Court was established there. But the fifteen years that he spent in Calcutta were, indeed, remarkable in his life, as it had entirely metamorphosed him from a village boy to an urbane nationalist gentleman.

He formally joined the Congress in 1911 as he had finished his studies by now. He was elected member of the All India Congress Committee. There was lull in the political activity as the undoing of the partition of Bengal had brought calm and extremists had been silenced. As the extremist leaders, including Tilak, were serving jail sentences, the moderates had been dominating the Congress. The sessions of the Congress had also been a tame affair with little space or activity for the masses. The political atmosphere continued till 1914, when the World War broke out and Indians

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40 The Congress session at Patna in 1912 struck Jawaharlal Nehru as having the more of a appearance of a social gathering than a political assembly. See K L Panjabi, Rajendra Prasad: First President of India, London, 1960.
once again started stirring. Meanwhile, when the Congress had little to offer as an activity and was split between extremists and the moderates, Rajendra Prasad continued his association with the Bihari Students' Conference. He attended every session of it and was elected President of its session at Munger in 1913 where certain recommendations of the Nathan Committee for a University in Bihar were opposed.

There were some objectionable features in the Patna University Bill, which were calculated to keep the Senate and the Syndicate under official control, there being no provision for inclusion in them of representatives of the people. Rajendra Prasad, then Assistant Secretary of the Bihar Provincial Association, along with others, opposed the objectionable features. He launched a vigorous campaign against it by writing in the newspapers, bringing out pamphlets, addressing meetings and enlisting support of the Legislative Council members of other provinces. There were protests from other quarters also. As a result, the government made necessary amendments in consultation with the members from Bihar before introducing it in the Imperial Legislative Council. This was the first time when Rajendra Prasad had openly gone on the path of agitation against a Government measure and the success here not only emboldened his spirit but also crystallized his resolve to fight imperialism with determination. In his own words:

This was the first occasion when I worked openly against the Government and organized a mass agitation successfully. From then on, I began taking active part in the Congress activities. Although I had been a member of the A.I.C.C. since 1911, while I was in Calcutta I had hardly rendered any service worthy of mention. But when I came
to Patna, much was expected of me by the people of Bihar and I thought I should not fail them. 41

Meanwhile Tilak, after serving the term of six years of imprisonment, had resumed his public life by the middle of 1914. He remained as defiant as ever though more cautious in public utterances. He initially concentrated all his attention on seeking readmission for himself and his followers into the Congress as he was convinced that the sanction of this body, which had come to symbolize the Indian National Movement, was a necessary pre-condition for the success of any political action. The Indian National Congress had yet to recover from the combined effects of the split at Surat in 1907, the heavy repression of the government and the disillusionment of the moderates with the constitutional reforms of 1909. The moderates were increasingly becoming irrelevant. After Gopal Krishna Gokhale's death in February 1915, Tilak was admitted into the Congress and remained a dominant figure in the Congress till his death. The Muslim discontent and their distrust of the British had also meanwhile increased because of their hidden sympathy for the Caliph and their suffering due to economic conditions. The common suffering and common distrust of rulers brought them closer to the Congress. In 1915, both the Congress and the Muslim League held their annual sessions in Bombay and after protracted negotiations reached a settlement for a joint action. Subsequently, at the time of the next session of the Congress in 1916, an agreement known as Lucknow Pact was reached. Tilak and Annie Besant both played a significant role in this.

According to the Lucknow Pact the Congress agreed to the continuation of the separate electorates. The Congress and the League joined together to press for

constitutional reforms, giving the people a larger share in the government of the

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country. They urged that India should be made an equal partner in the Empire with
self-governing dominions and that the central and provincial legislatures should have
a majority of elected members. The Lucknow Congress also demanded constitutional
reforms towards self-government though it did not go as far as the Home Rule
Leaguers wished. By 1916 both Tilak and Annie Besant had already started their
Home Rule Leagues, and many Moderate leaders who were dissatisfied with the
inactivity into which the Congress had lapsed, joined the Home Rule agitation. The
participation of the Moderates was hardly surprising since the Home Rule Leagues
were after all only implementing the programme of political propaganda and
education that they had been advocating for so long.\(^{42}\)

It was at this Lucknow session of the Congress that Rajendra Prasad for the
first time saw Gandhiji. Gandhiji had by now a reputation of leading successfully a
non-violent resistance of Indian indentured labourers in South Africa. The non-violent
resistance by the labourers was successful and this was a great triumph for Gandhiji
and his method of Satyagraha. Rajendra Prasad did not find Gandhiji taking much
interest in the proceedings of the Congress as if he was taking stock of the situation.\(^{43}\)
All these years, after joining the Congress, Rajendra Prasad had remained a
conscientious observer of the developments. The delegates from Bihar at the
Lucknow Session wanted the Congress to adopt two resolutions, one on the Patna
University Bill and another on the question of indigo planters of Champaran.\(^{44}\) They,
led by Braj Kishore Prasad, went to meet Gandhiji. Rajendra Prasad could not go with


\(^{43}\) Rajendra Prasad, Autobiography, p. 81.

\(^{44}\) For a detailed discussion on the system of indigo cultivation in Champaran see Jacques Pouchepadass,
Land, Power and Market: A Bihar District under Colonial Rule, 1860-1947, New Delhi, 2000, pp. 424-
32.
them as he was not aware of their programme. He had also not much idea about Gandhiji except that he had done something big and noble in South Africa. But Rajkumar Shukla, who was among the delegates, had an instinctive faith in Gandhiji and it was mainly he who persuaded Gandhiji to visit Champaran.\textsuperscript{45} Reminiscing about it Rajendra Prasad wrote:

Rajkumar and others from Bihar knew of Mahatma Gandhi’s reputation and achievements in South Africa; they therefore, wanted to enlist his support. Some of them met him, narrated to him the tale of woe of the Champaran cultivators. He was all attention to what they had to say but when they asked him to sponsor a resolution on the question, he refused, saying that he must first visit the area to study the situation for himself before he could do any such thing.\textsuperscript{46}

Not aware of what had transpired between Gandhiji and Rajkumar Shukla, and that Gandhiji had plans of visiting Champaran, Rajendra Prasad again came across Gandhiji at the time of the All India Congress Committee meeting in Calcutta on 7 April 1917. Though Gandhiji was sitting next to him neither of them made any effort to talk to each other. This was possibly because of Rajendra Prasad’s modesty and shyness of his nature:

In fact I was sitting next to Gandhiji but never made any effort to speak to him. I am by nature shy and bashful. I remember that the Committee, particularly the President, pressed him to accept Secretaryship of the Congress but he flatly refused. I felt that when so

\textsuperscript{45} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 82.
\textsuperscript{46} \textit{Ibid.}
many people made a joint request it was not proper for him to reject it, but I kept silent.47

It was not until Gandhiji's visit to Champaran that Rajendra Prasad came into contact with him. After Calcutta AICC meeting, Gandhiji accompanied by Rajkumar Shukla proceeded to Champaran. On the way he reached Patna on 10 April 1917 and was taken by Rajkumar Shukla to Rajendra Prasad's house. As Rajendra Prasad had gone to Puri after the Calcutta AICC, not knowing anything about Gandhiji's plan, his servant put Gandhiji in the outhouse thinking of him as an ordinary client. Later when Mazharul Haque, who had a previous acquaintance with Gandhiji while studying for the Bar, came to know of it, he offered his hospitality to him. Gandhiji proceeded the same day to Muzaffarpur where he stayed with J.B. Kripalani. There he met the Commissioner and the representatives of the Planters' Association. The Commissioner not only advised him to leave immediately as he was not wanted, but also threatened him with arrest in case of no-compliance with it. The representatives of the planters told him that he was an outsider, and so he had no business to come in between the planters and their tenants. Undeterred by these intimidations and threats, Gandhiji proceed to Motihari to organize the work of the enquiry. The local pleaders offered to help him in his enquiry and gave him all assistance. On 16 April while he was on way to a village he was served with an order, asking him to leave the district as his presence might lead to serious disturbances. Gandhiji did not comply and following this he faced prosecution. It was at this juncture that Gandhiji sent a long telegram to Rajendra Prasad informing him about the turn of events and asking him to come to Motihari. In compliance with Braj Kishore Prasad's wishes Rajendra Prasad

47 Ibid.
along with Braj Kishore Prasad, Anugrah Narayan Sinha and Shambhu Saran rushed to Motihari to meet Gandhiji.

Rajendra Prasad was aware about the Champaran issue as he had, from time to time, helped Rajkumar Shukla in the court cases in this matter. But when he rushed to Motihari on the call off Gandhiji he “did not have the foggiest notion that on reaching there we would face the possibility of imprisonment”. He and his co-workers found it odd that an outsider was ready to take up the cause of the poor cultivators of Champaran, whom he had never seen before, whereas they as natives of the area who professed to be interested in the welfare of the sufferers remained passive. He started reasoning that Gandhiji also had a family. What would happen to his family if he was sent to jail? The jail was a horrible place no doubt. Yet Gandhiji was prepared to go to it. Would it be wise to abandon a man who has suddenly appeared from nowhere to help the people of Champaran? Was it not his duty to follow the same course? These thoughts kept him and his co-workers restless from within for quite some time. His conscience did not allow him to remain unconcerned and the more he thought about it, the firmer grew his determination to court imprisonment. While coming to Champaran he had not even remotely visualized this possibility of courting arrest. He had thought very casually at the time of coming that whatever work, meaning court cases, was to be done would be done. He had not thought at all seriously of going the agitation way and also had not harboured plans of becoming a full time public worker since his unsuccessful attempt at joining Gopal Krishna Gokhale’s Servants of India Society in 1910. He had been a leading lawyer then in Bihar and had a lucrative and flourishing practice. But now, under the magical spell of Gandhiji, a sort of metamorphosis took place in his entire thinking. Not

48 Ibid., p.85.
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surprisingly, therefore, he along with his other co-workers, resolved to court arrest and follow Gandhiji to jail, in case the situation so demanded.\textsuperscript{49} The feeling of hesitation and idea of the responsibilities of family, which had so far shackled him, could no longer put any obstacle in his way. Dread of jail and its discomforts gave way to a willing commitment for a fight against injustice. Along with other co-workers he got himself enlisted as a volunteer. Gandhiji, facing the possibility of arrest, divided the volunteers into groups, each under a leader to continue the investigation and go to jail if necessary in a particular order. The first group was to be led by Mazharul Haque, the second by Braj Kishore Prasad and the third by Rajendra Prasad himself. “Thus within a few hours of our arrival at Motihari”, reminisced Rajendra Prasad, “a change seemed to have come over our lives and we were ready to face imprisonment”. Rajendra Prasad’s understanding of the people, especially the peasants, and their problems became sharper after his association with the investigation work in Champaran. He started moving about the villages and recorded statements of facts by questioning the tenants over and over again in order to get to the truth. In his own words:

We began to realise that public service was not merely holding conferences, making speeches and passing resolutions. By just recording the statements of the villagers and thus coming into close contact with them we acquired an intimate knowledge of their problems and hopes. While this work enabled the villagers to shed their fear complex, we too became fearless. Gandhiji’s methods were thus novel to us. We came to know of happenings which we would

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.
never have considered possible. We felt we were doing real service, the consequences of which were certain to be far-reaching.⁵⁰

The Champaran Satyagraha was the first experiment in Gandhian techniques in India. It had novelty as well as profundity. It had an appeal as well instant acceptability.⁵¹ These qualities of the Satyagraha profoundly influenced Rajendra Prasad. Two instance of this he cites in his autobiography which merit mention here. The first one related to a police officer who on orders had been following all those who had been carrying on the investigation work with the cultivators. In his own words:

We were overshadowed by the police.... Once when one of our colleagues was recording the statements of a batch of villagers, a Sub-Inspector of Police came and took a seat near him. Our colleague shifted to another place and the Sub-Inspector followed him. Enraged, our friend asked the officer to see and hear whatever he liked from a distance. The Sub-inspector complained to Gandhiji, saying: “we have orders to keep an eye on what is going on. We do not disturb your men in their work but they do not allow us to go near them. We too have our duty to perform.”

Gandhiji at once called for our friend and asked him if was working alone or was with other people. The latter replied that he had with him many Kisans who were narrating their complaints. Gandhiji asked, “Are you doing anything in secret?” The other replied in the

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 93.
⁵¹For a scholarly discussion on this see Jacques Pouchepadass, Champaran and Gandhi: Planters, Peasants and Gandhian Politics, Delhi, 1999.
negative. Gandhiji wondered why he was trying to conceal anything from the Sub-Inspector. Our colleague replied that he was not trying to conceal anything but his nearness disturbed him. Then Gandhiji made a characteristic remark: "If you were not disturbed by so many cultivators crowding around you, why should you be disturbed by the presence of another individual? Why don't you look upon him as also one of the ryots?"

This embarrassed the Sub-Inspector who had gone to Gandhiji to show himself off but Gandhiji had reduced him to the level of ryots! He said nothing and marched out. After this we never minded if a policeman came near us and sat.\textsuperscript{52}

Another instance related to a planter who came to Gandhiji and boasted that conditions in his estate were ideal and that the cultivators had no grievances. He wanted Gandhiji to see things himself. Gandhiji consented and took Rajendra Prasad with him. What happened is a foregone conclusion but what Gandhiji did was again a demonstration of Satyagraha, which made people free from fears. It would again not be out of place to quote Rajendra Prasad who happened to be an eye witness to the whole thing:

\begin{quote}
When we were walking through the countryside to the villages where we were invited some of the ryots met us and said that the sahib (the planter) had tutored many kisans to praise him before us. Gandhiji suggested to him that if people had any grievance, they should not be afraid of coming before the planter and ventilating it. We had already
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., pp.93-94.
looked into the statements made by the people of the area and Gandhiji, was therefore, fully aware of real conditions. At the planters place, everything appeared to be set for the farce to follow. A few hundred men had collected. Even the Sub-Divisional Magistrate was present by invitation. Two or three cultivators came forward and said their piece. They had no grievance and were quite happy. Suddenly from the assembled crowd voices rang out simultaneously exclaiming, "They are telling lies; they are only repeating what they have been told to say". Gandhiji asked them to remain silent and said their turn would come. So after the planters' men had finished their performance, Gandhiji called for the interrupters and asked them what they had to say. They came forward boldly and repeated the very statements they made to us before. One man went further and complained against the Magistrate, and said that the planters and the Magistrates were one and the cultivators could expect no justice from them. Turning to the Magistrate and referring to a particular incident, he put him a question. For answer, the Magistrate immediately got up and walked out. That was the end of the meeting.

His drama misfired, the planter came out with another brilliant idea! On the following day, he got a small bungalow of his set on fire with the intention of implicating all the ryots on the charge of incendiarism. But that plan also misfired.\(^{53}\)

The second ruse of the planter not only got miscarried but it also brought to the fore the power of the Satyagraha. The whole thing became known and the matter got reported to the Government. The Magistrate who enquired into the matter noted that there was utter anarchy and it appeared as if the British Government had ended. These kinds of reports made the Government machinery move. Meanwhile the Governor of Bihar sent for Gandhiji and in his letter said that owing to the presence of Gandhiji, anarchy and lawlessness were spreading fast and hence it wanted to remove him from Champaran. But before any orders were issued he would like to meet him. Contrary to the expectations of Rajendra Prasad and others this proved to be a turning point in the Champaran Satyagraha. The Government appointed a commission of inquiry to go into the whole issue, and nominated Gandhiji as one of its members. Having collected evidence from 8,000 peasants, Gandhiji had little difficulty in convincing the commission that tinkathia needed to be abolished, and peasants should be compensated for the illegal enhancement of their dues. As a compromise with the planters, he agreed that they would refund only twenty-five percent of the money they had collected illegally from the peasants. Gandhiji explained that even this refund had done enough damage to the planters’ prestige and position.\(^{54}\) Though what the commission offered to the ryots was far less than their demands nevertheless the main achievement of the year-long agitation was far reaching. The planters lost their foothold in Champaran and they were rendered too weak to be tyrannical or even aggressive any more. Profits were impossible for them except through coercion but with the changed consciousness of the ryots, force was a useless weapon. The ryots had become courageous and conscious of their power. The planters were not slow in realizing this and within a couple of years they disposed off their possessions and left

\(^{54}\) Bipan Chandra, et al, p. 179.
Champaran. It took almost a year for the Champaran Satyagraha to succeed but it proved beyond all doubts the efficacy of the Gandhian technique that he was to apply throughout India on a wider scale at a later date.

Gandhiji's stay in Champaran, his technique of Satyagraha and association with public workers from Bihar for almost a year produced a profound effect. Rajendra Prasad was strict observer of caste rules and would never eat any food touched by a non-Brahmin, which created complications and restricted his contact with the villagers. Gandhiji was of the opinion that this kind of culinary separatism would not help public work. People having the same objective belonged to the same caste. As a result, Rajendra Prasad and others had begun eating in a common mess. After removal of the cook Kasturba Gandhi used to cook for everybody. Their life style also underwent a sea change. They washed their own cloths, utensils, carried water and dispensed with their servants, and travelled third class in trains.\(^5^5\) This was not a lesser achievement in the given circumstances. In the words of Rajendra Prasad:

\[\text{But valuable lessons were learnt. We all worked as a team, in perfect unison, carrying out the behests of the leader. He taught us a new lesson in public affairs. Though he wanted to put an end to the atrocities of the planters, he bore no ill will against them and no bitterness against the adversary. Nor did we harbour any resentment or malice.}\(^5^6\)

Around the same time in 1917, Annie Besant and Bal Gangadhar Tilak started the agitation for Home Rule. It had started with branches all over India and the entire


country was swept by a wave of an unprecedented awakening. The Allied propaganda of war for democracy and self-determination had also aroused the expectations of Indians that they would get a fair deal after the war. The British Government realized the necessity of doing something to stem the rising upsurge. E.S. Montagu, the Secretary of State for India, consequently announced the promise of constitutional reforms in India on the floor of the British Parliament. The blessings of the self-government were to be conferred on India through gradual democratic process. The British Parliament was to be the final arbiter about the timing and measure of the self-government to be introduced. This naturally aroused a wave of enthusiasm and Annie Besant, after her release from prison, was elected President of the Calcutta Session of the Congress in 1917. Rajendra Prasad attended this session, along with a large contingent of delegates from Bihar, especially from Champaran.

Soon after the Calcutta session of the Congress, Montagu-Chelmsford report on reforms was published and it was followed by a countrywide discussion on it. The reform proposals provided for elected majorities in the Central and Provincial Legislatures, but retained the official blocs nominated by the Government. The Viceroy was also authorized to exercise the overriding power of veto in respect of any legislation. In the provinces the system of diarchy was introduced by which certain subjects were reserved for the Governor. Subjects such as Education, Health and Local Self-Government were entrusted to the ministers selected from the majority parties in the Legislatures. The general reaction was that the reforms fell far short of expectations. Rajendra Prasad also held a similar perception regarding it but then he preferred giving a trial to it. In his opinion, the report was fair because in the given circumstances it was not possible to put more pressure on the British Government to secure more concessions and secondly, Indians had not come up to a level wherefrom
they could carry on the administration if it were transferred to them too early.\textsuperscript{57} He felt, therefore, that Indians should take what was already given to them and then press for more concessions. The Congress also, in its special session held to discuss the reform proposals, found it "disappointing and unsatisfactory" and decided to accept it with certain reservations.

While Indians had expected self-government and lifting of draconian war-time ordinances after the War was over, the British had other designs in their mind. They did not intend to effect any change in their oppressive policies and in February 1919 they came out with the Rowlatt Bill, which was designed to perpetuate their draconian regime. The Bill incorporated certain measures after the expiry of the Defense of India Act, after the termination of the War. It allowed retention of the emergency powers exercised by the Government during the War. The provincial governments were given powers of internment without trial and juries were dispensed with in cases of trial of political prisoners. The publication of these Bills aroused consternation and alarm in the country, as they constituted a serious threat to the freedom of the people. Gandhiji's appeal to the Viceroy not to proceed with them fell on deaf ears. Gandhiji called for nationwide protest against the Bills in the form of hartal or a day of mourning on 6 April 1919. He called upon the people to observe a fast, in order to strengthen their determination, hold prayers and public meetings. The response to Gandhiji's call was phenomenal and it received a nationwide support. On the appointed day, all work came to a standstill and the country observed an unprecedented hartal. In towns, all means of communication were suspended. Even in the countryside, the peasant put away his plough. Rajendra Prasad, who by now had started thinking about Gandhiji "that it was my great good luck to have come in

\textsuperscript{57} Rajendra Prasad, \textit{Autobiography}, p. 102.
contact with such a truly great man"⁵⁸, organized the hartal and took out a procession in Patna so effectively that without any disturbance of peace it was over. As stipulated by Gandhiji, he signed the pledge of non-violence and agreed to defy such laws as might be suggested by the Satyagraha Committee and to suffer gladly any punishment such action might entail.

Rowlatt Satyagraha could not remain free from violence elsewhere. Delhi observed hartal on 30 March because of some confusion about dates and there was considerable violence on the streets. This seemed to have set the pattern in most other areas that responded to the call. Protest was generally accompanied by violence and disorder. Punjab, which was suffering from the after effect of the severe war-time repression, forcible recruitment and ravages of disease, reacted particularly very strongly and both in Amritsar and Lahore the situation became very volatile. Gandhiji tried going to Punjab to pacify the situation but the Government arrested him on 10 April and deported him to Bombay. Bombay and his own native Gujarat, including Ahmadabad, were up in flames. In Amritsar the arrest of two leaders on 10 April led to an attack on the town hall and the post office; telegraph wires were cut and Europeans including women were attacked. The army was called in and the city was handed over to General Dyer. Then at Amritsar on 13 April, the day of Baishakhi, in Jallianwala Bagh, General Dyer committed the ghastly act of opening fire on a meeting of unarmed persons, and killing a large number of them. He had not thought it fit to issue even a warning to the people nor was he deterred by the fact that the ground was hemmed in from all sides, which left little space for escape.⁵⁹ The brutality of Jallianwala Bagh massacre stunned the entire nation, that would respond

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 105.
soon. For the moment the repression was allowed unabated. People in Amritsar were made to crawl on their bellies before the Europeans.

Gandhiji's arrest and deportation had aroused protests in Patna where meetings were held to protest the atrocities of the Government. At one such meeting, Rajendra Prasad and many others took the vow of Satyagraha. Rajendra Prasad opened a registration office at his house for those who wanted to take this vow.\textsuperscript{60} The Bihar Provincial Association, the Bihar Provincial Congress Committee and different Bar Associations condemned unequivocally the atrocities.\textsuperscript{61} But after the violent incidents, Gandhiji felt deeply anguished and decided to suspend the Satyagraha on 18 April 1913. He thought that the people were not yet prepared to stick to non-violence. This, however, did not mean that he had lost faith either in his non-violent Satyagraha or in the capacity of the Indian people to adopt it as a method of struggle.

Following the repressive measures let loose by the Government there was a wave of indignation all over the country. This further strengthened the resolve of people to resist British imperialism. The Muslims, agitated over the Khilafat issue, were already indignant. Turkey had been dismembered and the Caliph had been reduced to a nonentity. There was a feeling that a common fight alone was the answer to the challenge of British might. Rajendra Prasad, who was traveling with Gandhiji by train to Bombay when Gandhiji decided to suspend the Satyagraha, was deeply agitated. These events further hardened his determination to fight for the freedom of the country.

These events took affected Rajendra Prasad deeply, once he resumed his practice at Patna. After the Champaran Satyagraha, he had been nurturing the idea of

\textsuperscript{60} K.K. Datta, \textit{Rajendra Prasad}, p. 53.
\textsuperscript{61} \textit{Ibid.}
entering the Bihar Legislative Council in the first elections to be held under Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms. The preceding events had aroused deep indignation in his mind, which strengthened his determination to fight for freedom of the country. He felt that he must play an active part in this. The concept of Satyagraha appealed to his gentle nature. No wonder that he readily announced his intention of joining the Non-Cooperation in April 1920 at a big public meeting held at Patna though the Congress had not yet approved of it nor had chalked out the programme. Of course Gandhiji had made his proposals in this regard. But this did not prevent him from announcing his decision to join the movement if it was launched. He was determined now to make any sacrifice. He knew that it would mean giving up his lucrative practice at the Bar and abandoning the idea of seeking election to the Legislative Council. It is important to mention here that he had not reasoned it out before he was asked by Shaukat Ali to deliver a speech. At this meeting Shaukat Ali, after explaining the programme of Non-Cooperation, had asked people as to how far people were prepared to implement it. Now the die was cast, and Rajendra Prasad unfalteringly decided not to look back any more. He did not consult his brother or family members anymore and had decided at the spur of the moment to throw in his lot with those who were willing to take a pledge to sacrifice everything for the cause of the nation.

Meanwhile discontentment against the British rule had reached a crescendo. The Rowlatt Act, Jallianwala Bagh massacre, and martial law in Punjab had exposed the real intentions of the British. Montagu-Chelmsford reform, with diarchy, satisfied very few. The Indian Muslims were incensed at the treatment of the Caliph and they felt betrayed. The promises of generous treatment to the Caliph after the war had not been honored. They held the Caliph of Turkey as their spiritual head and they were naturally upset when they found that the Caliph would retain no control over the holy
places it was his duty as Caliph to protect. The Hunter Committee, appointed to look into the disturbances of Punjab, proved again to be another eyewash. The House of Lords had voted in favour of General Dyer and the British public had demonstrated its support by helping the Morning Post collect 30,000 pounds for General Dyer. All excuses in favour of the British Government were fast running out.

All along Gandhiji had maintained good rapport with the Khilafat leaders as he felt that the British had committed a breach of faith by not keeping their promises as regards the Caliph. He attended the Khilafat Conference in November 1919 as a special invitee and subsequently in February 1920, suggested to the Khilafat Committee to adopt a programme of non-violent Non-Cooperation to protest the Government's behaviour. On June 9 the Khilafat Committee accepted the suggestion of Non-Cooperation and requested Gandhiji to lead it.

The Congress also had become skeptical of any possibility of political advance through constitutional means. Home Rule League movement had lost steam and relevance, and the liberals had parted company from it. Congress was disgusted at the Hunter Committee Report's findings, which brought to light the brutalities committed in Punjab. In these circumstances it decided to accept Non-Cooperation. The AICC met on 30 May 1920 at Banaras, at which Rajendra Prasad was also present, and agreed to convene a special session of the Congress in September to consider its course of action. Gandhiji was engaged with writing in his Young India and other papers explaining the programme, and he started touring the country in order to mobilize the support of the people. Rajendra Prasad was also engaged in propagating the idea of Non-Cooperation. He presided at the meeting of the Bihar Provincial

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63 Ibid., p. 185.
64 Ibid.
Conference at Bhagalpur and made a bold plea for the acceptance of the programme. Despite some opposition he was able to convince them to support it. Till this time in meetings and newspapers, the Punjab massacre and the Khilafat were stated to be the only causes of the projected Non-Cooperation. For the first time a demand for Swaraj was also added, at the insistence of a senior leader, Braj Kishore Prasad, to the demands for justice in the Punjab and for restoring the Khilafat of the Muslim world. The idea behind adding Swaraj was to impart stability to the movement. This was a very significant contribution of the leaders of Bihar and it was to become an important plank of the Non-Cooperation Movement later and subsequently of the entire freedom movement. Prior to this only the Gujarat Provincial Political Conference had adopted a similar resolution on Non-Cooperation.

Gandhiji formally launched the Non-Cooperation Movement on 1 August 1920, after expiry of the notice he had given to the Viceroy. In his letter of 22 June he had asserted the right recognized “from time immemorial of the subject to refuse to assist a ruler who misrules”. At this juncture the Congress suffered a great loss as Tilak passed away on 1 August 1920, and the day of mourning fell on the day of the launching of the Non-Cooperation Movement. People all over the country observed hartal, took out processions, kept fast and offered prayers. In the first week of September the Congress met in its special session in Calcutta under the Presidenship of Lala Lajpat Rai and accepted Non-Cooperation as its own programme. Though Rajendra Prasad, due to his engagement in an important case, could not attend this session, a large contingent of over three hundred delegates from Bihar attended it.

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66 K.K. Datta, op. cit., p. 56.
68 See K.K. Datta, op. cit., p. 49.
The Congress held its regular session in December at Nagpur where C.R. Das moved the resolution on Non-Cooperation leading to its formal adoption. The programme of Non-Cooperation included the surrender of titles and honours, boycott of government affiliated schools and colleges, law courts, foreign cloth, and even included resignation from government services and mass Civil Disobedience such as the non-payment of taxes. National schools and colleges were to be set up, panchayats were to be established for settling disputes, hand-spinning and weaving was to be encouraged and people were asked to maintain Hindu-Muslim unity, give up untouchability and observe strict non-violence. Gandhiji promised Swaraj within a year if the programme was fully implemented. Thus the Nagpur session of the Congress committed itself to a programme of extra-constitutional mass action.

Rajendra Prasad as a sequel to this gave up his practice as lawyer except for “Hariji’s case” since he had already committed to it. As for the other cases pending with him, he returned the remuneration taken or entrusted the case to friend, and in some cases the clients left him. He also resigned from the membership of the Senate and the Syndicate of the Patna University. With regard to the boycott of the Government and Government-aided schools and colleges, he held some initial doubts regarding its success. At the time of the anti-partition movement in Bengal he had seen not much of enthusiasm for boycott of Government institutions because people educated in their national counterparts did not have alternative avenues of employment. Therefore he felt that too much emphasis on this front might not get adequate response from parents and students, and the whole movement would fizzle.

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69 Rajendra Prasad could not attend this session also because of his illness. See K.K. Datta, *op. cit.*, p. 52.
out just because of that. But these initial anxieties disappeared when Gandhiji visited Bihar early in December 1920 and addressed meetings at several places explaining the Non-Cooperation programme and met students in special gatherings where he emphasized the need for boycott of schools and colleges controlled by the Government. Rajendra Prasad set aside his doubts and along with some other co-workers, opened a National College at Patna in a rented house in January 1921. Not only this, he also took over its responsibility as Principal. In course of time he shifted this to a site that came to be known as the Sadaqat Ashram, where Bihar Vidyapith was also started in order to coordinate the functioning and activities of all national institutions that had been started in the province. Mazharul Haque and Braj Kishore Prasad became Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor respectively of this Vidyapith. In February 1921 Gandhiji himself inaugurated the functioning of the Vidyapith and the National College from there.

The Non-Cooperation Movement began progressing fast and steadily in Bihar. Rajendra Prasad had fully dedicated himself to its cause. He toured the province and addressed meetings at several places explaining the meaning and objective of the movement. People were also full of enthusiasm and wherever he went he elicited a favourable response in its support. In his own words:

Public meetings were the order of the day in Bihar. There was not a little corner of the province where the Congress message did not penetrate. Congress workers were active every day, explaining the Congress programme. The whole province was agog. I toured the

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72 K. K. Datta, op. cit., p.50.
entire length and breadth of Bihar in 1920 and for the first time I saw the whole province and made innumerable contacts.\textsuperscript{73}

Though he had considerable experience in the art of speaking by virtue of his profession as a lawyer, so far he had none in public speaking. In this regard he was greatly benefited by addressing large public gatherings. The shyness and hesitation now disappeared and he became quite adept in public speaking as well:

I became adept at public speaking. Hitherto I had not had much opportunity to address public meetings though my practice at bar had given me considerable experience in the art of speaking. Now I had to address meetings every day and I got over my natural shyness and began to address with utmost confidence. I spoke in Bhojpuri in Bhojpuri areas; in other places in Hindi. I even remember to have addressed meetings in Bengali in Purulia but that was probably much later. Meetings of 5,000 or 10,000 were quite common.... But meetings of 20,000 or over, I had to make special efforts to be heard, loudspeakers not being then in vogue, with rather unhappy results for my stomach.\textsuperscript{74}

The Provincial Congress Committee, as stipulated by the Nagpur Congress, was reorganized. Rajendra Prasad was the Secretary of the reorganization committee which suggested this restructuring. To disseminate the message of the National

\textsuperscript{73} Rajendra Prasad, \textit{Autobiography}, p. 127. \\
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid.
Movement he edited a Hindi weekly *Desh* and became instrumental in launching *The Searchlight*, a bi-weekly newspaper from Patna which was soon to become an organ of the Congress. His commitment for the national cause had now become complete. He had forgotten any rest and divided his time between the college, the journal and the villages for mobilization for the movement. The programme of Non-Cooperation had been progressing quite satisfactorily and people in large numbers were doing their utmost to implement the different items of the programme. According to a Government report "the situation was most serious in the Tirhut Division where Muzaffarpur was the storm centre. Between the 25 January and 5 February 1921 no less than 56 Non-Cooperation meetings were held in this district alone."\(^{75}\) However, the meaning of the remarkable enthusiasm roused among the people by propagation work was not lost on the Government. The Congress had been, therefore, extremely careful to keep the people’s exuberance within bounds. The provincial Congress Committees, therefore, had issued a special directive laying emphasis on non-violence. The theme of every speech and every pamphlet was non-violence. In the words of Rajendra Prasad:

> The masses were getting bold and the prestige of the Government among the people was declining fast. The government waited for an opportunity to scotch the agitation. One act of violence was all that it wanted so that it might strike with all the force it could command but that was exactly what the Congress wanted to avoid.\(^{76}\)

\(^{75}\) Quoted in K. K. Datta, *op. cit.*, p.52.
With the steady and rapid progress of the Non-Cooperation Movement the Government felt threatened and reacted by letting loose its repressive machinery. It began a countrywide campaign for crushing the movement. In Bihar, all the Magistrates and Collectors were asked to use all the powers under various sections of the Indian Penal code to curb the movement.\(^{77}\) In yet another instance of its nervousness, it asked members and officebearers of the Municipalities and District Boards to refrain from any act which might be construed as supporting the Non-Cooperation Movement.\(^ {78}\) Rajendra Prasad strongly protested against these circulars by writing letters in the *Searchlight*. Armed with such instructions, the District Magistrates and Sub-Divisional officers used repression in a variety of ways. Many were asked to furnish a security or else face imprisonment. Meetings and processions were indiscriminately banned. On learning that Rajendra Prasad was scheduled to address a meeting at Arrah, the District Magistrate there passed an order restraining him to address any meeting or joining a procession between 9 in the morning to 5 in the evening. Rajendra Prasad came to know of this only when he detrained at the railway station.

Despite Government repression, the Congress did not advise Satyagraha. Instead, in April 1921 it asked people to concentrate on raising a Tilak Swaraj Fund, enrollment of membership to the Congress, and introduction of spinning wheels in cities and villages. Rajendra Prasad and other leaders got down to implementing these guidelines of the AICC. They worked hard and by virtue of their hard work, people's support and their enthusiasm, they collected over seven lakh of rupees for the Tilak

\(^{77}\) K. K. Datta, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

Swaraj Fund by June 1921. They also successfully enrolled large number of members to the Congress rolls and introduced more Charkhas for the Khadi work.

The oppressive measures of the Government, however, failed to dampen the spirit of the struggle and by July 1921 rather a new challenge was thrown to it. Mohammad Ali declared at the All India Khilafat Conference held at Karachi on 8 July that it was “religiously unlawful for the Muslims to continue in the British army”. As a result, he along with others was arrested on 14 September. Battle lines had been drawn and so, on 4 October, Gandhiji in response to it issued a manifesto prepared by the Congress Working Committee and signed by forty-seven leading Congressmen including Rajendra Prasad, and repeated in that whatever Mohammad Ali had said. He also added that “it is the duty of every Indian soldier and civilian to sever his connection with the Government and find some other means of livelihood”. The Congress was determined not to be cowed down in the face of the repressive measures of the Government. Consequently the AICC authorized provinces to undertake on their own Civil Disobedience including non-payment of taxes in November. Gandhiji thought of experimenting with the new campaign himself in Bardoli in Gujarat and appealed to all to observe peace. But because of the mob excesses in Bombay when the Prince of Wales landed there, he postponed the Bardoli campaign. The Congress Working Committee meeting in Bombay reiterated the need

79 Rajendra Prasad, Mahatma Gandhi and Bihar, p. 47.
80 Quoted in Bipan Chandra, et al, op. cit., p. 188.
82 The AICC laid down certain conditions in this regard according to which the individual must know hand-spinning, must have entirely discarded the use of foreign cloth and adopted only hand spun or hand woven garments, must be a believer in Hindu-Muslim Unity and unity among all the communities, must believe in non-violence as absolutely essential for the redress of Khilafat and the Punjab wrongs, and the attainment of Swaraj and if a Hindu, must by his personal conduct show that he regards untouchability as a blot upon nationalism. K. K. Datta, ibid.
for peace as an essential condition of Civil Disobedience and advised the provinces to organize Sevak Dals, pledged to the strictest observance of non violence.

The Government reacted by taking recourse to more ruthless oppression. They declared the Congress Sevak Dals unlawful, banned public meetings and arrested most of the prominent national leaders. Only Gandhiji remained outside jail. Rajendra Prasad was also not arrested even though he declared himself to be a member of the Sevak Dal. He condemned the Government repression and encouraged the people to enroll as members of the Sevak Dals, which had been declared unlawful. The movement was inching towards a crescendo. The Government despite its best efforts could not prevent a complete hartal when the Prince of Wales visited Patna on 22 and 23 December 1921. The Prince of Wales visit was greeted with hartals everywhere he visited.

Meanwhile, Gandhiji was under considerable pressure from the rank and file and the leadership of the Congress to start the phase of mass Civil Disobedience. The Ahmadabad Session of the Congress in December 1921 reiterated its determination to continue the programme of non-violent Non-Cooperation with greater vigour than hitherto, and vested with Gandhiji the sole authority on the issue. The Government showed no signs of relenting and had ignored the appeal of the All parties Conference held in mid January 1922. Gandhiji' letter to the Viceroy, announcing his intention to launch mass Civil Disobedience unless the Government lifted the ban on civil liberties and released the political prisoners, was also sidelined. The Viceroy was unmoved and consequently Gandhiji announced his decision to start mass Civil Disobedience in Bardoli taluq of Surat district in Gujarat. The other parts of the country were to cooperate by maintaining total discipline and quiet, so that the entire attention of the movement could be concentrated on Bardoli. Meanwhile, things were destined to
move in a different way because of the Chauri Chaura incident on 5 February 1922 in Gorakhpur district of U.P. The Congress and Khilafat workers had taken out a procession. Irritated by the behavior of some policemen a section of the procession attacked them. The police opened fire. At this, the entire procession became violent and attacked the police and when the latter hid inside the police station, they set fire to the building. Policemen who tried to escape were hacked to pieces, and thrown back into the fire. In all, twenty policemen were done to death.\(^{83}\) This incident profoundly affected Gandhiji who summarily decided to call off the movement on the ground that people were not yet ready for it.\(^{84}\) The Congress Working Committee met at Bardoli and on 12 February 1922 endorsed Gandhiji's decision and suspended mass Civil Disobedience till there was perfect non-violence in the country. Rajendra Prasad was initially shocked at this decision but after meeting Gandhiji he was convinced about the efficacy and uprightness of the decision:

Gandhiji was greatly agitated over the incident and was of the view that the people had not understood the utmost importance of non-violence. As long as they had not imbibed the significance of ahimsa it would be dangerous to go ahead with the Satyagraha movement, for what happened in Chauri Chaura could happen in other places as well.

The only consequence, he said, would be still a more repressive policy

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\(^{84}\) Many historians following the tradition of R.P. Dutt tend see to it as a proof of Gandhiji's concern for the propertied classes of India. They argue that Gandhiji did not withdraw the movement simply because of his belief in the necessity of non-violence. Chauri Chaura was a symbolic of a growing militancy of the Indian masses, of their growing radicalization and their willingness to launch an attack on the status quo of property relations. Frightened at this prospect, Gandhiji called off the movement in order to protect the interests of the landlords, and capitalists, who would have been at the receiving end of this violence. Contrary to this, Bipan Chandra a prominent historian argues that "The movement had already gone on for over a year, the Government was in no mood for negotiations, and Chauri Chaura presented an opportunity to retreat with honour, before the internal weaknesses of the movement became apparent enough to force a surrender or to make the retreat look like a rout". See Bipan Chandra, et al, *op. cit.*, pp. 192-95.
by the Government. Apart from any Government reaction, Gandhiji had no belief in a freedom obtained through a violent struggle. He, therefore, wanted to suspend the Satyagraha.\(^85\)

Gandhiji’s decision to withdraw the movement as response to the Chauri Chaura incident was, however, not liked by all Congressmen. Motilal Nehru, C. R. Das, Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhas Bose had a sense of bewilderment. But Gandhiji stuck to his position. Besides suspending the movement he had also worked out a detailed programme of a constructive work. The constructive work emphasized enlisting of at least one crore of membership to the Congress; popularization of spinning and Khadi; opening of national schools everywhere; organizing depressed classes for improvement of their social, mental and moral conditions; temperance campaign amongst the people addicted to drink; promotion of unity of all classes; and finally collection of contributions to the Tilak Swaraj Fund.

That the Government was in no mood to relent became evident when they arrested Gandhiji on 10 March 1922, in less than a month, after the withdrawal of the movement and charged him for seditious writing in *Young India*. Rajendra Prasad immediately reached Sabarmati to be present at the time of his trial in the court of the Sessions Judge and remained there throughout the period of trial. Gandhiji pleaded guilty to the charges leveled and said that in his opinion Non-Cooperation with evil was as much a duty as cooperation with good. Gandhiji was awarded six years of imprisonment, as Tilak had been awarded in a similar case. Rajendra Prasad burst into tears as he felt that the judgment would deprive him of the company of Gandhiji, who

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had by now become his guide, philosopher and friend. The Bihar Pradesh Congress Committee welcomed the Bardoli decision and adopted the constructive programme as stipulated by Gandhiji. Satyagraha was suspended and the district committees were accordingly directed to implement the constructive programme with all vigour.

When Gandhiji had been arrested and subsequently convicted for six years many had started questioning the wisdom of the entire Gandhian strategy. Rajendra Prasad, however, unflinchingly remained a believer in the Gandhian techniques. Boldly countering the propaganda in favour of Council entry, he devoted himself to the work of popularization of the programme of constructive work which Gandhiji had laid down at Bardoli. At the time of the Gaya session of the Congress in 1922 in Bihar, he forcefully came out against the argument of Council entry. When C. R. Das in his Presidential speech made a forceful plea in favour of Council entry, Rajendra Prasad, along with others, successfully blocked it and consequently the Congress could not make any change in its policy. It reiterated its earlier position on boycott of courts and educational institutions and collection of subscription for the Tilak Swaraj Fund. After this session, Rajendra Prasad became the General Secretary of the Congress and now he was able to propagate the idea of constructive work more effectively.

C. R. Das resigned from the Presidenship and formed the Swaraj Party on 1 January 1923, with Motilal Nehru as Secretary and himself as President. Other prominent members to join it were Hakim Ajmal Khan, Vithalbhai Patel, N. C. Kelkar, Satyamurti and Jaykar. The Congress was now divided between those who

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[86] The period after the withdrawal of the Non-Cooperation Movement and the arrest and conviction of Gandhiji was marked by spread of disintegration, disorganization and demoralization in the nationalist ranks. See Bipan Chandra, et al, *op. cit.*, p. 235.
favoured Council entry, called pro-changers, and those who opposed it, called no-changers. The pro-changers argued that the country was not ready for a programme of Civil Disobedience as laid down by Gandhiji and something needed to be done to keep the struggle going. An important opportunity of continuing it in the Legislative Councils was provided by the elections to be held. No-changers, which comprised of Rajagopalachari, Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabhbhai Patel and Rajendra Prasad, argued on the other hand that the entry into the Council would be futile, and would divert the attention of the Congress workers from the constructive work. Constructive work alone at this juncture could be the foundation of an effective national organization. Rajendra Prasad’s faith in the no-changers policy was so great that C. R. Das remarked that Rajendra Prasad was the only excuse for the continuation of Gandhism. 87

To prevent growth of bitterness and bring the two groups together, a special session of the Congress was held at Nagpur in the last week of June 1923, which permitted the Swaraj Party to enter the legislatures. At the same time it also called upon all Congressmen to redouble their efforts to carry out the constructive programme. It also decided to form a committee consisting of Rajendra Prasad and others to organize an effective campaign of Civil Disobedience. 88 Later the regular session of the Congress held at Kakinada confirmed this. In the ensuing elections the Swaraj Party got forty-two seats out of 101 elected seats in the Central Legislative Assembly. They got a clear majority in the Central Provinces; they were the largest party in Bengal; and they fared quite well in Bombay and U.P. 89

87 K. L. Panjabi, Rajendra Prasad: First President of India, p.58.
88 K. K. Datta, op. cit., p. 87.
Gandhiji after his release from the jail realized the necessity of bringing the two groups together. He had full trust in the bonafides of the Swarajists. He regarded them as “the most valued and respected leaders” and as persons who had “made great sacrifices in the cause of the country” and who would “yield to no one in their love of freedom of the motherland”. The Swarajists also had realized the futility of only Parliamentary work. The real sanctions which would compel the Government to accept national demands would come by only mass action outside the legislatures. This needed unity. Consequently, Gandhiji signed a joint statement with Das and Motilal Nehru in November 1924 and brought the strife to an end. The Swaraj Party was to carry on the work in the Legislatures on behalf of the Congress and as an integral part of the Congress. This was subsequently ratified by the Belgaum Congress in 1924, which Gandhiji himself presided over.

Throughout this period, Rajendra Prasad held strong views against the Council entry, and had assiduously worked for the propagation and popularization of the constructive programme. His commitment to the constructive work led him to far and distant places like Assam and tribal areas of Santhal Parganas in Jharkhand. He also took a brief interlude of Municipal work in 1924, as active work in municipal bodies was not barred by the Congress. He was elected Chairman of the Patna Municipality where he approached the problems with all sincerity and enthusiasm. Because he could not get the cooperation of the Government in his work he felt disgusted and resigned after a year.

Rajendra Prasad’s plan of visiting England in connection with the Indian Civil Services Examinations had been aborted earlier during his student days. Since that

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91 See Bipan Chandra, et al, op. cit.
time he had remained busy in his studies and thereafter, had got involved with different activities in the National Movement. In March 1928, he had his first occasion to visit England in connection with a case he had been fighting for a long time. He had given up his practice at Bar but he had made one exception regarding the case of Hari Prasad Sinha, his friend. Now an appeal had been filed before the Privy Council in London against a favorable verdict in the case by the High Court. In London, he worked hard at the case, going to the libraries, the courts and visiting the lawyers for consultations. He was highly impressed by the senior counsel Upjohn, seventy-five years old, who thoroughly went through the fifteen thousand pages of the literature of the case, and prepared the brief himself without charging extra for reading the literature. This was very much different from the prevalent practice of the lawyers in India. He also found the English lawyers reading and studying their cases in libraries, rather than wasting time in futile gossips as the lawyers in India did.

As the case was settled by way of a compromise between the parties concerned, Rajendra felt free visit some European countries. As an apostle of peace he became interested in anti-war organizations and groups in Europe. He attended a no-war conference held at Sonntagberg near Vienna in Austria where delegates from Germany, Austria, France, England, Holland, Czechoslovakia, Palestine and other countries had come. Many of these delegates became interested in him on learning that he was a close associate of Gandhiji, and asked him a number of questions about Gandhiji and his methods of work, because at that time the Bardoli Satyagraha was going on in India and they had heard about it. Rajendra Prasad addressed the conference, highlighting non-violence and its successful use in Champaran. As the conference resolved that the delegates should visit some places and do anti-war propaganda, he along with some other members of the conference went the next day
to address a meeting at Graz where he was badly heckled by a mob of anti-war campaigners. From Vienna he proceeded to Switzerland where he met Romain Rolland who had done a lot to popularize Gandhiji’s teachings in Europe. He also visited Burnville, Newchattel, Lausanne and Geneva. From Geneva he went to Paris, and after two days stay there he returned to London. In the next couple of days, he also visited Holland, Rome and Venice. He felt quite satisfied at the attention the Indian Freedom Struggle was getting abroad. Deeply impressed by the sense of discipline of the western countries, he returned back to India in the second week of September 1928. 92 Whatever spare time he had during his tour he utilized in meeting people who believed in the principle of non-violence.

Meanwhile in India two important developments had taken place, which had made the political atmosphere surcharged. Anti-Simon Commission agitation had gathered considerable momentum throughout the country and the Nehru Committee had prepared its report as a response to it. It may be recalled that on 8 November 1927, before Rajendra Prasad’s departure to England in March 1928, the Simon Commission, without any Indian as a member, had been constituted by Britain to suggest constitutional reforms for India. Its constitution had deeply shocked the Indian public opinion by throwing a challenge to them. The Congress in its Madras session in 1927 had already condemned and decided to boycott it. It had also decided to take up this challenge by cooperating with other parties in drafting a constitution. "The idea was not to place the new draft constitution before the Commission but to place the demands of all political parties before the people and with their support compel the British to accept them sooner or later." 93 Consequently, a Committee

93 Ibid., p. 266.
headed by Motilal Nehru to frame a constitution for India had been constituted at a conference of all political parties held in Bombay in May 1928. When the Commission arrived on 3 February 1928 it had been greeted with black flags and slogans of ‘Go back, Simon’ everywhere they visited. Meanwhile, when Bihar was getting prepared to join the anti-Simon Commission agitation, Rajendra Prasad had to leave for England for reasons already pointed out.

The Nehru Committee report, published in August 1928, just before the arrival of Rajendra Prasad had recommended Dominion status as the basis of the constitution for India. It had also recommended joint electorates with provisions of reservation of seats for the Muslims where they were in a minority. While the All-Parties Conference held at Lucknow accepted the recommendations with certain amendments, the Muslim League with Jinnah in the forefront rejected it, as they wanted reservation of seats in the central legislature as well as residuary powers to be vested with the provinces. The rejection of the League’s amendments resulted in the alienation of several Muslim Congress leaders, which “marked the defection of an influential section of the Muslims from the Congress and had a very adverse effect on Indian affairs in later years”. Subsequently, in March 1929, Jinnah formulated his fourteen point demands on behalf of the Muslims and declared the acceptance of these ‘minimum’ demands as essential for a compromise.

Rajendra Prasad was satisfied with the Nehru Committee Report’s recommendation for a Dominion Status, whereas other leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Bose were in favour of complete independence. So when Jawaharlal Nehru moved a resolution to this effect in the Madras session of the Congress, Rajendra Prasad opposed it. He thought that “we should not adopt anything for the
implementation of which we are not prepared”, as at that time there was “hardly any preparation or enthusiasm in the country” for complete independence.95 Though the resolution of Jawaharlal was carried through, it came up again before the Calcutta session of the Congress in 1928. Though Gandhiji was in favour of accepting the Nehru Report, he was also willing to accommodate the opposite point. So he worked out a compromise resolution, which stipulated that the Dominion Status would remain the goal of the Congress, provided that the British Government accepted the Nehru Committee Report within a year, failing which the goal would be changed to complete independence. Jawaharlal Nehru and Srinivasa Iyengar reluctantly stuck to the compromise resolution, which was adopted by the Congress. However Rajendra Prasad maintained his doubts regarding its effectiveness:

I was in two minds about the goal of the Congress as decided in Calcutta. I was an admirer of the British Constitution and it was my belief that even a dominion within the Commonwealth had complete freedom to manage its affairs.... Complete independence, no doubt, brings a certain prestige to the country but eventually every country has to seek some sort of relationship or affiliation with other countries in the world if the world is to be saved from perpetual conflict. The British Commonwealth is a realization of such an idea, an association of free countries, and I saw no harm in being a member of it.... Besides when we were not in a position to compel the British Government to concede complete independence to India, I could see no reason to adopt that as the Congress goal and that was why I had

95 Ibid., p. 266-67.
opposed the complete independence resolution at the Madras Congress.

There were occasions when I was deeply hurt at the treatment meted out to Indians in the British dominions and thought then it was no good having any truck with such a Commonwealth. But ... I argued to myself that once India attained dominion status, her nationals in the other dominions would receive equal treatment. Dominion status thus appeared to me to be the right goal for us and complete independence, I felt, would only add to our difficulties. I did not accept Jawaharlal’s view that dominion status was meant essentially for the people of the same race, those who were linked with Britain by social, religious and cultural ties, and that as we had no such ties with the British they would not offer us dominion status nor should we be satisfied with it even if we got it. I was imbued with the views of Gokhale who, when I had met him in Calcutta in 1910, had said that in the British Commonwealth all the members had equal status and an equal share in shaping its policy and that, therefore, when India became a dominion, she would come to have a dominating voice in the affairs of the Commonwealth by virtue of her large population. I was, therefore, of the view that if India got dominion status and equal rights with the other dominions of the Commonwealth, we need not demand anything more.96

96 Ibid., pp. 289-90.
The ghost of Simon Commission had not yet disappeared from India. The return of the Simon Commission, a few days after Rajendra Prasad had landed in Bombay, for touring those places they had not visited earlier raised country wide protests again. Nehru Committee report was being widely discussed and the political scenario appeared surcharged with popular enthusiasm. Amidst this scenario, the police in Punjab reacted brutally in which Lala Lajpat Rai was seriously injured. In another incident in the U.P. a lathi charge was resorted to on the demonstrators in which Jawaharlal Nehru was injured. The Commission thus had earned notoriety and, in the words of Rajendra Prasad, had got associated with police batons. However, when it visited Patna, Rajendra Prasad, who had just returned from Europe, ensured that the protests and demonstrations there remained peaceful. Though the Commission arrived at Patna in an early hour in the winter morning, a large number of protestors came to the station and demonstrated peacefully against it.

The country was inching towards the Salt Satyagraha. Restlessness had increased throughout the country. Revolutionary terrorism had revived particularly in Bengal, U. P. and the Punjab. So in order to counter the prevailing situation the Viceroy, Lord Irwin came out with his declaration on 31 October 1929 that India's constitutional progress as a Dominion Status was implicit in the Montagu declaration of 1917. Subsequently he invited the Indian leaders to meet the representatives of the British Government at a Round Table Conference in London. The representatives of all political parties met in Delhi and agreed to participate in the Conference provided the talks would be on the basis of grant of Dominion Status to India. They also stipulated for a general amnesty to all political prisoners. Gandhiji and Motilal Nehru met the Viceroy on the eve of the Lahore session of the Congress and felt highly
dismayed to know that Dominion Status was still far away. There remained no more
any illusion regarding the British intentions.

It was against this background that the historic session of the Congress,
presided over by Jawaharlal Nehru took place in December 1929 at Lahore and
adopted the resolution for complete independence as the goal of India. Besides laying
emphasis on the constructive programme it authorized the AICC to launch Civil
Disobedience including non-payment of taxes. At midnight of 31 December
Jawaharlal unfurled the Tricolour, the flag of Indian independence, amidst shouts of
*Inquilab Zindabad*. Subsequently events were to move faster and steadily with clock-
like precision. The 26 January 1930 was celebrated as Independence Day and
subsequently the working Committee on 15 February decided to launch Civil
Disobedience. The AICC on 21 March 1930 approved it and authorized Gandhiji and
others, who believed in non-violence as an article of faith, to start the same. Gandhiji
had already on 31 January issued an eleven point demand, which he thought
constituted the substance of independence. Abolition of salt tax was one of the
demands. As the Government rejected the demands, Gandhiji felt free to launch the
Civil Disobedience. When Gandhiji selected the salt tax for this purpose he had
thought that “by breaking the salt laws Indians would be able to develop strength
enough to get other things done by the Government according to their wishes”\(^{97}\).
Rajendra Prasad was, however, skeptical about this form of Satyagraha because salt
was manufactured only in coastal areas and he could not comprehend how the people
all over India would break this law.

Many of us found it difficult to appreciate Gandhiji's argument. We could not understand how the Government could be expected to do something unless it was compelled to do so. How people all over the country could break the salt laws was not clear. While those in coastal areas could break the laws easily ... how could the majority of Indians living in the interior do it? ... Salt laws could be broken only at places where salt could be produced. Further, would the programme enthuse the people? Would the educated classes be interested in it?\(^9\)

As Rajendra Prasad held serious doubts regarding the success of this programme in Bihar he proposed to Gandhiji to take up the chaukidari tax instead of the salt tax as everyone had to pay the chaukidari tax and which was also a source of popular discontent in Bihar. He thought that the opposition to this tax would provide a better basis for agitation and people's spontaneous support. Gandhi did not agree and argued that the campaign would be doomed to failure if started with opposition to the chaukidari tax. In his view, salt tax was the one article through which the State could reach "even the starving millions, the sick, the maimed and the utterly helpless".\(^9\)

Rajendra Prasad accepted the verdict:

I kept silent though I was not quite convinced. I wondered why in Bihar we should break the law by making salt, leaving aside such an obvious thing as refusing to pay the chaukidari tax. But I had faith in Gandhiji's experience of the technique of Satyagraha and his foresight.


Introduction

and capacity to lead. So, as my wont, I placed my views before him and, when he did not accept them, signified my readiness to abide by his.\footnote{Rajendra Prasad, Autobiography, p. 305.}

With a firm determination to challenge the Government Gandhiji decided to break the salt laws after undertaking a march to Dandi, a coastal village about 322 kilometers away from Sabarmati Ashram. He left Sabarmati on 12 March 1930, with a band of seventy two volunteers. Rajendra Prasad, along with many delegates who had gone to attend the AICC meeting of Ahmadabad, proceeded to Jambusar, about a hundred miles from Ahmadabad and accompanied Gandhiji for some distance. He then returned to Bihar where he had to make preparations for 6 April, when Satyagraha was to be launched throughout the country. A wave of enthusiasm for Satyagraha prevailed in Bihar as in other parts of the country. Rajendra Prasad delved minutely into the preparations for the forthcoming Satyagraha. This apart he held and organized a number of meetings throughout Bihar in order to galvanize the spirit of the people. He also requested Jawaharlal Nehru to visit Bihar and address people in the districts of Saran, Champaran and Muzaffarpur. Meanwhile after his long march to Dandi, Gandhiji inaugurated the Civil Disobedience Movement on 6 April 1930 by picking up a handful of salt there, which in turn set the Salt Satyagraha movement in motion throughout the country. Rajendra Prasad himself started moving from place to place to hold meetings and propagate the message of Satyagraha. He also, as President of the BPCC, issued necessary instructions to the district Congress bodies.

In Bihar salt could be produced out of saline earth and that too in a very small quantity and hence Satyagraha was largely symbolic. Still police raided the places
where salt was made, broke ovens and pots, arrested the volunteers and beat others. Wherever Rajendra Prasad went he auctioned the salt so prepared and utilized that amount to meet their expenses. In the course of Satyagraha at Patna, he was almost roughed up. Satyagraha had similarly spread in other parts of the country as well.

After watching for some time, the Government decided to act. On 4 May 1930, Gandhiji was arrested near Dharasana and, without trial, put in the Yeravada jail. His arrest sparked off wide-spread protests and hartals all over the country. In Patna this was greeted with a massive meeting on 6 May, which Rajendra Prasad addressed in a stirring manner. The onset of the monsoon from June meant it was not possible to manufacture salt, so he added few other items within the domain of the ongoing Satyagraha. Manufacture of salt was replaced by programme of boycott of foreign cloth and prohibition after June. He also told people to be in readiness for non-payment of chaukidari tax. By the end of May, he, along with Abdul Bari, visited Bhabhua and Sasaram to encourage foreign cloth boycott and prohibition movements.

During one of such visits to Bihpur, where people were valiantly carrying on the Satyagraha despite the high handedness of the police, he received lathi-blows also of the police. Everywhere the traders cooperated in the work. Most of the foreign cloth dealers, in district towns or smaller towns and bazaars, agreed to place no further orders, packed their old stocks and got them sealed in their areas by the respective Congress Committees. Picketing of shops was rare and became necessary only in few cases. Women also came forward and took part in the movement. In Patna, many ladies moved through the streets requesting people not to purchase foreign cloth.

While the movement was thus progressing steadily, the government had reacted by unleashing a reign of ruthless repression. The repression, however, only increased the determination of people to make the programme more successful. They
remained determined in their resolve despite the devilish police atrocities on Satyagrahis at Bihpur and especially the attack on Rajendra Prasad there. Many of the legislators, choukidars, sarpanchas and dafadars also resigned their posts under protest.

Undoubtedly Rajendra Prasad had emerged by now as one of the most outstanding leaders from Bihar. He was widely respected by the people and the Government circles also acknowledged his charismatic appeal to the masses. Considering his unique position as a national leader of Bihar the Government had proceeded rather cautiously in arresting him. But by the middle of June, however, it decided to arrest him. He was arrested on 5 July 1930 and brought to Chhapra jail, where a tumultuous crowd, after hearing the news of his arrest, gathered which could be dispersed only by firing. Elsewhere also in Bihar his arrest caused a wide spread indignation, which again only emboldened the resolve of people to carry forward the programme of boycott of foreign goods and non-payment of chaukidari tax in a more vigorous manner. In the subsequent trial, Rajendra Prasad did not offer any defence and was sentenced for six months imprisonment.

Rajendra Prasad was lodged in the Hazaribagh jail after his trial and subsequent conviction. The captivity of jail life and its discomforts did not worry him: "We suffered no inconvenience at all in the jail". It rather provided him with an opportunity of sharing jail life with others. He spent his time mostly in reading and spinning and after some time joined the jail workshop to learn weaving. During his six months in jail he wove 200 yards of newar (bed tape), and fifteen yards of cloth. Besides this, he also worked on compilation of a book containing all the articles of Gandhiji, which he wrote at various times in various newspapers. Since such a book

101 Ibid., p. 322.
had already been published with a foreword by him, he thought to publish separate books on different subjects with short introductions. He classified the writings under different heads like Non-violence, Swaraj, Satyagraha, Education, and Khadi and prepared the brief introduction for each. Manuscript was just ready when he was released. It lay unpublished in the Sadaquat Ashram and was lost forever in 1932 when the Ashram was ransacked by the police. These activities apart he also spent time reading some religious scriptures like *Upanishads* and *Patanjali’s Yoga Sutra*.\(^{102}\)

He was released on 14 December 1930.

Meanwhile the progress of the Civil Disobedience Movement had continued unabated in Bihar and elsewhere despite continued repression and counter propaganda in various ways by the Government. The Government’s attempt to stall the movement by holding the first Round Table Conference on 12 November 1930 in London had been unsuccessful because of the non-participation of the Congress in it. The Round Table Conference was adjourned *sine die* on 19 January 1931 without completing its work and the same day Ramsay Macdonald, the British Prime Minister made a statement explaining the position of the British Government regarding a new constitution for India and invited the Congress to assist in it. In order to consider this statement the AICC met at Allahabad, under the chairmanship of Rajendra Prasad, and found it “too vague and general to justify any change in the policy of the Congress”. The publication of this resolution was, however, postponed at the behest of Rajendra Prasad, who had possibly some idea about conciliatory gestures of the Government. Indeed, the Viceroy, Lord Irwin, released Gandhiji unconditionally and also the other members of the Congress Working Committee on 26 January 1931. Subsequently on 17 February, began the talks between Gandhiji and Irwin. Rajendra

Prasad as a member of the Working Committee came to Delhi to be available for consultations. Gandhiji consulted the members of the Working Committee from time to time and finally reached an agreement on 5 March 1931. Gandhiji had accepted the offer of self-government with certain safeguards in respect of defence, external affairs, minorities, etc. With regard to salt, the settlement offered people in certain areas the right to manufacture salt. The pact also provided for a general amnesty for all political prisoners, immediate cessation of repression and the restitution of the confiscated property, which had not been passed on to a third party. The Working Committee also issued instructions to stop Satyagraha.

Rajendra Prasad felt satisfied with the pact and considered it a landmark development because "it was the first time when the British Government agreed to negotiate a settlement with people's representative and organisation of the people". The Working Committee approved the pact and subsequently it was also approved by the Congress session of Karachi in March 1931. Gandhiji was authorized to represent the Congress at the second Round Table Conference along with other such delegates as the Working Committee might select. In order to explain the implications of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact and proposed participation of the Congress in the Conference to the people, Rajendra Prasad prepared a tour programme of entire Bihar. However he found that there was no commensurate desire on the part of the British officials to implement the terms of the agreement. As the British officials felt unhappy about the pact they had now tried to thwart its implementation. They became more repressive after Willingdon succeeded Irwin in April 1931. Therefore, despite the suspension of the Satyagraha, he faced great difficulty in getting political prisoners out of jail. This

103 Ibid., p. 332.
naturally caused resentment and dissatisfaction among the people in Bihar and elsewhere.

The Karachi session of the Congress in March 1931, which endorsed the Gandhi-Irwin pact, was also memorable for its resolution on Fundamental Rights and National Economic Programme. This was the first time that the Congress defined what Swaraj would mean for the masses. Gandhiji attended the second Round Table Conference and without reaching any agreement on the constitutional issue returned back to India on 28 December 1931. The overwhelming majority of Indian delegates to the Conference were hand-picked loyalists, communalists, big landlords and representatives of the princes, a tactic to neutralize the claim of the Congress to represent Indian’s interest vis-a-vis imperialism. Consequently the Congress Working Committee, meeting in Bombay immediately after return of Gandhiji, decided to resume the Civil Disobedience. The response of the Government was in the form of a preemptive strike by arresting Gandhiji and other leaders on 4 January 1932. Rajendra Prasad was arrested on 6 January, two days after Gandhiji’s arrest and was awarded six months imprisonment again. Willingdon boasted that the Congress agitation would be suppressed within two weeks. Indeed, what followed was a terrible state of affairs. All processions and public meetings were banned. The offices of the Congress were taken possession of and sealed, and their funds confiscated. The prisons were full to the capacity. But even in the face of an extremely repressive regime, the Congress workers continued with the struggle with an indefatigable courage.

When the Congress workers in Bihar were busy carrying out the movement, despite the ban on the Congress organizations and excessively ruthless repression,

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Rajendra Prasad was released in June 1932 after six months of incarceration at Hazaribagh jail. Meanwhile the Congress faced a new challenge posed by the announcement of the Communal Award by the British Prime Minister on 17 August 1932, which he made after the failure of the Third Round Table Conference. It provided for separate electorates to the so-called Depressed Classes. Gandhiji, who was in Yeravada jail at that time, pointed out that these classes were part of the Hindu community. Granting them separate electorates would only perpetuate the curse of untouchability. Therefore, in order to fight it out, he decided to go on a fast unto death from 20 September. On hearing this Rajendra Prasad rushed to Poona. The only hope of saving his life was to arrive at an agreed settlement between the communities. Rajendra Prasad, as acting President\textsuperscript{105} of the Congress, issued an appeal to the country: “Hindu society is on trial. If it has any life in it, it must now respond with a great and magnificent act”.\textsuperscript{106} Gandhiji’ fast on the issue deeply stirred the conscience of the people and finally the Poona pact was signed on 24 September 1932, facilitating Gandhiji’s withdrawal of his fast on 26 September. Rajendra Prasad believed that constructive work of this order would strengthen the National Movement. It is worth emphasising that espousal of removal of untouchability by Gandhji was in no way lesser a revolutionary feat in the given context of the time of the Indian Society.

The British intentions behind announcement of the Communal Award had not been hidden from any one. This was yet another instance of the old divide and rule

\textsuperscript{105} In January 1932, Vallabhai Patel was the President of the Congress and after the resumption of Satyagraha again in January 1932, he had decided that unlike in 1930 the vacancies in the Working Committee should not be filled up. He made a list of persons who were to succeed him during his absence and act as Presidents one after another. Rajagopalachari, Rajendra Prasad and Aney worked as acting Presidents between January 1932 and July 1933. See B. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, \textit{The History of the Indian National Congress, 1885-1935}, Vol. I, Madras, 1935, p. 556.

\textsuperscript{106} Quoted in R. L. Panjabi, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 82.
policy of the British. In order to counter it, a very serious effort was made in
November-December1932 by way of calling for a Unity Conference, which was
attended by prominent Hindu, Muslim, Sikh and Christian leaders as well as those
Congressmen who were not in jail. Rajendra Prasad not only attended it but played a
very crucial role in it. After prolonged, arduous discussions and debates the
conference had virtually sorted out all the major difference in the path of a common
agreed settlement. When three weeks had elapsed, the Conference decided to meet
again after a week in Calcutta. Meanwhile, the government played a Machiavellian
role and forestalled the agreed settlement between the communities by conceding
thirty-three-and-half percent representation for the Muslims in the Central Legislature.
The British did not want the Communal Award to be further modified by the
settlement between the communities. Rajendra Prasad felt helpless.

Rajendra Prasad was out of jail for six months and he felt that his place, like
most of other leaders, was inside prison. The occasion came very soon as the
Government itself was looking for an excuse to put him behind the bars again. On his
instructions, as acting President of the Congress, the anniversary of Gandhiji’s
incarceration was commemorated on 4 January 1933. Despite lathi-charge and arrests,
meetings were held at different places. He was subsequently framed in a case,
involving Acharya Kripalani; already under trial, and arrested again on 6 January
1933, and sentenced for fifteen months imprisonment in Hazaribagh jail again. Once
again, inside the jail, he got down to his rigorous life. But this time in the entire tenure
of imprisonment, his health always remained a matter of concern.

The repressive measures of the Government had rendered it impossible for the movement to sustain.\textsuperscript{108} Suspension and then withdrawal appeared on the cards of the Congress. Consequently in July 1933 the Congress meeting at Poona, decided to suspend the mass Civil Disobedience but permitted the individual Civil Disobedience. Gandhiji inaugurated the campaign by sacrificing what was his most precious possession. He vacated the whole Ashram transferring the movable property to certain bodies and land to the Harijan movement.\textsuperscript{109} But before he could start his march on 1 August 1933, he along with 34 other inmates of the Ashram were arrested and sent to prison. Within a few days of his arrest he started a fast unto death over the Government's refusal to continue the facilities in jail granted to him earlier before his release in May. Sensing an imminent danger to his life, the Government relented releasing him unconditionally on 23 August 1933.

Rajendra Prasad, who was serving his prison term, was deeply concerned over the entire developments. He knew that in the face of the severe repressive measure of the Government it was very difficult to continue the movement. He thought that it was the underground work which had kept the Congress alive during these repressive years but the effect of this over the masses had been very adverse and deplorable:

Underground workers kept the Congress alive in the provinces and districts. They maintained the continuity of the Satyagraha movement but this change in the method of work could not but affect the morale of the people and, naturally, its effect on the movement was deplorable. There is a fundamental difference between Satyagraha and an armed fight. In the first it is the leaders who have to enter the fray

\textsuperscript{108} Rajendra Prasad, \textit{Autobiography}, p. 359.
\textsuperscript{109} B. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 562-63.
and sacrifice themselves first, leaving the others to follow them, whereas in an armed fight, it is the rank and file who bear the brunt in the battle, the leaders directing the operations from the rear. The rank and file also expect the commander to keep himself safe in order to guide and direct them. But in Satyagraha the leader is expected to be in the forefront and his withdrawal into the background, for whatever reason, cannot but lead to the cooling of popular ardour for the movement. This is exactly what happened in 1933. 110

No doubt the fire of the Civil Disobedience movement had ceased to be as powerful as it happened to be in its initial stages yet the rekindled spirit of resistance could not be extinguished. Rajendra Prasad’s faith in Gandhiji’s leadership continued unshaken. He knew well that withdrawal of the movement was a temporary truce, and the Congress and the nation had to wage a bigger war on the British imperialism. As he was not keeping well, the government released him on 17 January 1934.

Meanwhile two days prior to his release Bihar had been struck with a catastrophic earth-quake causing enormous loss of lives and wealth. Rajendra Prasad soon after his release, despite his ill health, plunged into the massive work of organizing relief for the victims. The Government of Bihar did not want him to organize the relief work separately so it requested him to assist and cooperate in its own relief work instead of organizing it separately. Humanitarian aspect apart, Rajendra Prasad could not fail to see that by providing succor to the victims through a non-governmental agency he would be surely bringing the Congress closer once again to the people. He, therefore, declined the offer of the government and went ahead with

own plans. He also felt that the relief work by the people would be more effective than that of the government. He had no doubts of support from the public and his expectations were later substantiated by the enormous contributions he received. In a public meeting held in Patna, the Bihar Central Relief Committee was constituted with himself as Chairman. Gandhiji, Jawaharlal Nehru and other leaders visited Bihar and stood by the cause of relief work. Rajendra Prasad set up a central office with Jayprakash Narayan in charge of it. When his health improved, he started touring the affected areas and supervised the work being done there. The integrity and efficiency, the dedication and commitment with which he worked for the quake victims earned him the admiration and respect of not only the people of Bihar but also the entire country.

Meanwhile, as mentioned earlier, because of the circumstances the AICC at its Patna session called off the Civil Disobedience movement on 20 May 1934 and accepted the Council entry programme.\textsuperscript{111} However the Congress at this juncture faced the dual task of reorganizing itself as well as furthering the struggle against the British while retaining the Gandhian leadership in the context of growing leftist ideas within and outside. Rajendra Prasad as the President of the Congress in 1934 faced the challenge of restoring the morale of the demoralized members of the party in the wake of the consistent repressive measures of the Government after it had launched the Civil Disobedience movement, and bringing the Congress back on its feet.

\textbf{The Scheme of Chapterization:}

This study titled “Rajendra Prasad and the Indian National Movement 1934-47” is an attempt to assess the contributions of Rajendra Prasad to the growth and development

\textsuperscript{111} See B. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 567.
of the National Movement during 1934 to 1947 that marked a distinct phase in both the evolution of trajectory of his political life as well as in the history of India’s Struggle for Independence. He was one of the foremost leaders closely associated with Gandhiji, who had unflinching confidence and trust in the Mahatma’s abilities to steer the Congress and the nation in the struggle for independence. In 1934 he became the President of the Congress for the first time and emerged as an all India figure. He was to remain hereafter intensely involved both at the national as well as provincial levels in almost all the important and crucial activities of the National Movement and the Congress as far as its programme, strategy and mobilization was concerned.

There are six Chapters in the present study, covering the period since he became the President of the Congress in 1934 to 1947 when India attained independence. In the first chapter, ‘Rajendra Prasad: President of the Congress (1934-35)’, the attempt has been made to explain as to how and under what circumstances he became the Congress President. What did he do in the context of the requirements of the time to revitalize and resurrect the Congress from the abyss of demoralization and disorganization as a result of the repressive reign of the Government in the wake of the launching of the Civil Disobedience Movement? How did he address afresh the issues of mobilization again? This was also a period in which the base of communalism had not been strengthened the way it would become evident after the 1946 elections. As President of the Congress he entered into a serious and prolonged negotiation with Mohammed Ali Jinnah, President of the Muslim League, to resolve the tangle of communalism. He appears to have almost arrived at a solution which was quite reasonable and acceptable to Jinnah but because of opposition from the Hindu communalists it could not be carried through finally. This chapter has also tried to address this issue. This chapter also shows as to how once entrusted with the
responsibility of leading the Congress, as its President in 1934, during one of its highly critical times in its history, how he lived up to the expectations of Gandhiji and as the President of the Congress not only he ardently advocated and charted the Gandhian path and ideology but also conceptualized new methods and techniques of broadening and strengthening the mass base of the Congress. Many of his works such as raising of funds for supporting the families of the detenus still inside jails, undertaking an all India tour, relief work in the aftermath of the Quetta earth quake and the Jubilee Celebrations of the Congress, were, indeed, mass contact programmes meant to broaden the mass base of the Congress. Highly successful as these programmes were these immensely helped bring back the Congress once again out the stupor it had entered in to after the Civil Disobedience Movement. Through his activities and deeds he propagated and strengthened the belief that independence could be attained only by the method of “active, dynamic, non-violent mass action” or Satyagraha which might “fail once or twice” but in spite of temporary setbacks was bound to succeed in the last.

In the second chapter, ‘the Strategic Debate and the Provincial Elections’, his views and positions regarding the Constitutionalists and the Socialists positions have been examined. This is the period when Socialism as an ideology made its appearance and its presence became increasingly felt within the Congress. It questioned the Gandhian methods and leadership. Rajendra Prasad took up the challenge and saw that Gandhian leadership remained unquestioned. Not having much commonality with Jawaharlal and Subhas Bose and even with the Socialists, he however did not press the point to the extent where the Congress could have split. He also remained skeptical about the efficacy of constitutionalism advocated by the liberals and argued that it might pose a variety of problems for the struggle in the future by way of giving
birth to all kinds of caste and communal considerations and so hinder the struggle against the imperialism. This chapter tries to examine these kinds of issues and show as to how keeping a profound faith in the Gandhian methods he tended to reject these perspectives.

The Congress secured a massive mandate during the Assembly elections in 1937 and secured an absolute majority in six Provinces – Bihar, Orissa, the United Provinces, the Central Province, Madras and Bombay where it went in for forming the ministries. Chapter three, ‘Assignment with the Congress Ministries’, discusses about his role and association with the ministry formation and functioning in Bihar. Being the senior most Congress leader in Bihar he had to take upon his shoulders the responsibility of its functioning as well. Whereas no Congress ministry elsewhere in the provinces could come out with any legislation on the vexed issue of the agrarian question, how was it that the Bihar ministry could accomplish this fact in a short span of time? This was largely due to the approach and persuasive skill of Rajendra Prasad. What was his approach and role in it? These are the kinds of questions which we have focused on in this chapter.

Meanwhile the Congress underwent a major crisis on the question of nomination of President of the Congress for the Tripuri session in March 1939. Subhas Bose had been re-elected President for the second consecutive occasion by defeating Gandhiji’s nominee. Subhas Bose claimed to represent “new ideas, ideologies, problems and programmes” that had emerged with “the progressive sharpening of the anti-imperialist struggle in India”. Rajendra Prasad disagreeing with this argued that these kinds of thoughts and ideas were contrary to professed ideals of the Congress. He, along with Sardar Patel, J.B. Kripalani and four other members of the Congress Working Committee consequently resigned from the Working
Committee of the Congress. Why did he do that? What role did he play in the entire crisis and how, when thrust upon with the responsibility of the Presidenship of the Congress for the second time after Subhas Bose’s resignation, did he steer the Congress again out of this morass? These are some of the questions answers to which have been sought in chapter four, ‘Crisis within the Congress and Preparations for a Final Assault’. This chapter also discusses his role during the Second World War period, as he was one the leaders who held very strong opinion in this regard, and his efforts to keep the organization of the Congress in a trimmed and energetic form.

The chapter five, ‘Quit India Movement’, focuses on his responses to the Cripps offer, its failure and subsequent launching of the Quit India movement. He held very definite views on the war and was strongly opposed to support in Britain’s war effort unless a responsible Government was established in India. What were his views in this regard and also how did he look upon the Japanese threat over India? The issue of communalism had never died down and this was also the period during which it emerged again in a violent form. What efforts did he make to counter the propaganda of the communalists? After the Bombay AICC, where the quit India resolution was adopted, almost all the leaders were arrested. He himself was arrested the same day and sentenced for a prison term of over three years. What did he do inside the prison? These are again some of the issues which are covered in this chapter.

By June 1945 the British came out with the Wavell proposals “to make progress towards a final settlement of India’s future” and released all the political prisoners jailed in the aftermath of the Quit India movement. Independence of the country now appeared as a definite possibility. Hereafter, the period up to 15 August 1947 was characterized by numerous negotiations and consultations involving the
Congress, the Muslim League and the British Government regarding the transfer of power. Rajendra Prasad as member of the high Command of the Congress played a very crucial role in this entire period. The chapter six, ‘On the Way to Independence (1945-47)’, tries therefore to examine in an intensive manner not only his role in all these but also to examine the circumstances and factors that finally led to the partition and independence of the country.