CHAPTER ONE

Rajendra Prasad: President Of The Congress (1934-35)

Changing Configuration of Political Forces and Background of Rajendra Prasad’s Election as President:

The Congress had scheduled its session for October 1934, almost after a gap of three and half years. During these years it had been rendered organizationally weaker as it had undergone a period of severe repression by the British in the wake of the Civil Disobedience Movement. It was widely thought, and especially by Gandhiji, that at this critical juncture of the freedom struggle, the Congress needed a person as its President who was widely acceptable to all and who could have devoted himself body and soul to the onerous responsibility of the work of its rebuilding and resurrection. The choice of who was going to lead the Congress was, indeed, of utmost importance, especially in the context of the increasingly developing sympathetic tendencies among some Congressmen for constitutionalism and the necessity of revitalizing the Congress as a stronger body capable of forging unity amongst various sections and carrying on the anti-imperialist struggle in the days ahead.

The mood in the Congress was in favour of either Rajaji or Rajendra Prasad as the next President. Many Provincial Congress Committees had already expressed their desire in this regard by the end of 1931, just before the government repression began. To the list of these two probable candidates, two more names – namely, Abdul Gaffar Khan and
Jairamdas – had been added. The issue had to be resolved before the session in October 1934. However, among these four names Rajagopalachari and Rajendra Prasad remained the serious contenders for the post. Rajagopalachari was no doubt a senior most leader and he also had to his credit a number of achievements. He had been, along with Rajendra Prasad and others, in close association with Gandhiji ever since 1922 as a no-changer, and was also their most effective spokesperson. His contributions in the field of Khadi and of prohibition in south India had also been tremendous. He had also been the acting President of the Congress in 1932, when Sardar Patel, the then President, was put behind bars. However, he had lately developed into a constitutionalist and his sympathies for them had been more than obvious. This appears to be the reason why Gandhiji did not desire him to lead the Congress in 1934, and rather found Rajendra Prasad as more suitable for the post of the Congress President at this juncture. “I see nothing wrong”, wrote Gandhiji to Mathuradas Trikumje on 10 July 1934, “in Rajaji’s standing on the same platform with Bhulabhai. But it is best that, even though doing all this, he should not join the Board or enter the Assembly.”¹ This clearly brings out the kind of considerations going on in Gandhiji’s mind at the moment.

Rajmohan Gandhi, the biographer of Rajaji, however, gives a different picture and appears to suggest that Gandhiji’s choice was not determined by Rajaji’s being a constitutionalist.² Nevertheless this does not disapprove the fact that Gandhiji did not believe in the efficacy of the constitutionalism as a method to wrest freedom. D.G. Tendulkar writes: “On April 4, Dr. Ansari, Bhulabhai Desai and Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy met Gandhiji to secure his support to revive the Swaraj Party for participating in the

forthcoming elections. Gandhi had made up his mind of suspending civil resistance for Swaraj. He, therefore, welcomed the revival of the Swaraj Party, though his views on the utility of the legislatures remained as they were in 1920. Gandhi had least faith in the Council entry programme as he stated at the Patna AICC meeting while moving the resolution on Council entry: “The parliamentary work must be left to those who are so inclined…. In its own place, it will be useful. But the Congress will commit suicide if its attention is solely devoted to legislative work. Swaraj will never come that way. Swaraj can come through an all round consciousness of the masses.” The members of the Congress emerging from civil disobedience and prisons needed to be reorganized for its new role but Rajaji appeared more interested in the electoral victory later in the year. To quote Rajmohan Gandhi again: “The Mahatma asked C.R. to oversee the reorganization nationally, but the latter only accepted responsibility for the south, where he wanted to produce a clear electoral victory later in the year. It was with enthusiasm that he looked forward to the test.” No wonder then that Gandhi did not favour him for the Congress Presidentship.

The choice of the Congress President was a crucial one, as the person heading the Congress should have a popular image and had also to be a good organizer. Abdul Gaffar Khan was no doubt a sincere and self-sacrificing leader yet he had little experience of the Congress affairs. Jairamdas was also similarly not well placed in terms of considerations when compared to Rajagopalachari or Rajendra Prasad. His candidature also, therefore, got dropped keeping in mind the seriousness of the time and demands of the occasion. The only serious and suitable contender then left for the post was Rajendra Prasad who

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4 *Speech at the AICC, Patna, CWMG*, Vol. LVIII., p. 11.
Chapter One

had by now emerged as a highly committed and dedicated Gandhian leader on the Indian political horizon, having unquestioned faith and commitment in the ability of leadership of Gandhiji. Also Rajendra Prasad, after his release from the prison, had demonstrated his remarkable ability in skilfully organizing and managing the relief work in Bihar in the aftermath of the terrible and devastating earthquake of Bihar. “Unaided by any adventitious forces or fortuitous circumstances”, wrote Sachidanand Sinha in an article, “he has been able to raise...a sum of over twenty eight lakhs of rupees for the Bihar relief, nearly half of the amount raised in response to the call of the Viceroy of India, with all his great influence, vast resources and tremendous prestige.” He further added that “this crowning achievement alone would entitle Rajendra Prasad to a place in the front rank of the great Indians who, in the twentieth century have served Mother India with devotion worthy of appreciation and admiration.” Writing about him he further elaborated that “Broad minded to a degree, Catholic in the best sense of the term, modest in a remarkable measure, and willing to receive assistance from all desirous to help him, Rajendra Prasad has managed to secure, in the discharge of his arduous duties as the President of the Bihar Relief Committee, the fullest cooperation of the representatives of all schools and of all shades of political thought, which redounds as to his credit as to theirs.” No doubt these were the precious qualities Rajendra Prasad enjoyed, and Gandhiji, possibly getting disappointed with Rajaji’s constitutionalist position, thought that these should entitle him to lead the Congress in 1934. Gandhiji had by now developed fullest confidence in Rajendra Prasad and accordingly he opened his mind to

\[\text{\footnotesize 6 Sachidanand Sinha, 'Rajendra Prasad, The Congress President: A study in Character and Personality', in Valmiki Choudhary, ed., Dr. Rajendra Prasad's Correspondence and Select Documents (hereafter referred to as RPCSD), Vol. 1, New Delhi, 1984, p. 261.}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize 7 Ibid.}\]

81
him in his letter dated 18 September 1934 and settled the matter about who was going to be the next President of the Congress:

It does not seem proper to make Abdul Gaffar Khan the President (of the Congress) this time. He is a good man and full of love for the country. He is sincere and self-sacrificing. But he has little experience of the Congress, and the session this time involves great responsibility. Among the men devoted to truth and non-violence and commanding popularity, I see none but you or Rajagopalachari or Jairamdas. But these two men cannot now be chosen and that leaves only you. Moreover, there is no other choice because of your contribution to the earthquake work. 8

Undisputedly Rajendra Prasad’s relief work in Bihar had proved and demonstrated, beyond all doubts, his skillful organizational and mobilizational abilities and capabilities. 9 But surely this does not appear to be the only reason because of which Gandhiji would have liked Rajendra Prasad to be the President of the Congress in 1934. There appears to another, though unstated, reason for this. It was clear soon after the suspension of the Civil Disobedience Movement that Gandhiji had made up his mind to retire from the Congress. 10 He had already communicated this to Vallabhbhai Patel in September 1934. There he stated that after much deliberation and discussion with friends who had been to Wardha, “I have come to the conclusion that the best interest of the

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8 Mahatma Gandhi to Rajendra Prasad, 18 September 1934, RPCSD, Vol. 1, p. 3.
9 The Bihar relief Committee was a great example of efficient organization and devoted human effort for relieving human suffering. It achieved tremendous success in organizing relief efficiently throughout the Province, aiding and rehabilitating many thousand of sufferers. It was, indeed, a faith in him and his ability that drew a vast sum of money from all over India. See S.M. Wasi, President Prasad: A Biography, Calcutta, 1962, p.79.
10 This is evident from a letter written to Vallabhbhai Patel sometime before 5 September 1934. CWMG, Vol. LXV, p. 403.

82
Congress and the nation will be served by my completely severing all official or physical connection with the Congress including the original membership." But in reality he never intended to completely disengage himself from the Congress. This could have been possible, despite his apparent dissociation from the Congress, only when somebody deeply sharing faith and conviction in his ideas and methods was at the helm of affairs of the Congress. This in turn would have enabled the general policy of the Congress to remain of his shaping. In Gandhiji's own words:

This does not mean that I cease to take any interest in an organization with which I have been intimately connected since 1920 and which I have worshipped since my youth. In spite of all I have recently said about the corruption that has crept into the organization, it still remains, in my opinion, the most powerful and the most representative national organization in the country.... It has today the largest number of self-sacrificing men and women of unimpeachable character.

Another significant development had occurred by this time within the Congress, which also appears to have influenced Gandhiji in settling down on the choice of Rajendra Prasad. Socialism as an ideology had started making its forays into Indian intelligentsia and the Congress could not remain aloof from this. The formation of the Congress Socialist Party in 1934 within the Congress, was proof of this. That Gandhiji

11 Ibid.
14 The Congress Socialist Party was founded in 1934 as a party within the Congress. Jayaprakash Narayan after coming out from prison in April had founded the Bihar Congress Socialist Party in May 1934. Subsequently the Congress Socialist Party was formed at Bombay in October 1934 under the leadership of Jayaprakash Narayan, Acharya Narendra Dev and Minoo Masani. In fact, move towards its formation was
Chapter One

had fundamental differences of opinion with them and he did not like this development was very clear from his writings and statements. While he welcomed the formation of the socialist group, which in his opinion comprised of many respected and self-sacrificing co-workers, in a statement on 17 September 1934, he did not hide his disagreements with them. He stated that he held “fundamental differences with them on the programme published in their authorized pamphlets.” He further stated that “if they gain ascendancy, in the Congress, as they well may, I cannot remain in the Congress.” It was totally unthinkable, he reiterated, for him to be in active opposition to them.

It appears, therefore, that Gandhiji’s decision to bring Rajendra Prasad as the Congress President in 1934 was influenced by a variety of factors. No doubt his antipathies towards the politics of the constitutionalists as well as the socialists were responsible for this but more important was his desire to have a person at the helm of affairs of the Congress who represented his ideals and had deep convictions in his methods of struggle. Writing about Rajendra Prasad to Vallabhbhai Patel in September 1934, he makes it very clear: “Nor by retiring at this critical juncture am I less true to Babu Rajendra Prasad who will in all probability be the President of the forthcoming Congress, who unlike Jawaharlal shares most of my ideals and whose sacrifice for the nation, judged whether in quality or quantity is not to be excelled.”

Indicating how valuable a find Rajendra Babu was for him, he wrote in a slightly philosophical manner, a short note, when he published a letter of an American:

made in the jails during 1930-31 and 1932-34 by a group of young Congressmen who were disenchanted with Gandhian strategy and leadership as well as the sectarian attitude of the Communists towards the Congress and were attracted by socialist ideology.

15 Statement to the press by Mahatma Gandhiji, 17 September, 1934, CWMG, Vol. LXV, p.3
16 Ibid.

84
Chapter One

But I am able to accept it (Non-violence) "as one of the great fundamentals of my faith by my observation of the fruits it has produced in the lives of others. To associate intimately with such men as Rajendra Babu is a privilege for which one may thank God. I have seen that he and several others whom I might mention, who have accepted the principle of non-violence in their own lives, have been able to purify themselves from all the greed, the lust, the self-seeking, the hatred, the fear which obsess so many who have caught a vision of a glorious future but are obstructed by these enemies within the gates from fighting successfully with the enemy without." 18

Jawaharlal Nehru, in his precise manner of frank observation writes about the esteem with which he saw Rajendra Prasad:

Looking like a peasant, a typical son of the soil of Bihar he is not impressive at first sight till one notices his keen frank eyes and his earnest look. Peasant like, he is perhaps unsophisticated from the point of view of the modern world but his outstanding ability, his perfect straightness, his energy and his devotion to the cause of Indian freedom are qualities which have made him loved not only in his own province but throughout India. No one in my province in India occupies quite that universally acknowledged position of leadership as Rajendra Prasad Babu.

Chapter One

does in Bihar. Few others, if any, can be said to have imbibed more thoroughly the real message of Gandhiji.\(^{19}\)

There was however talk of people insisting on Gandhiji remaining in the Congress. But Gandhiji was resolute and also quite clear about his choice of Rajendra Prasad. In a statement to the press, he said: "It is wholly wrong to think, as some have done, that the recent visit of Sardar Patel and Babu Rajendra Prasad was for the purpose of pressing me to remain in the Congress. They had never any doubt as to the correctness of my position."\(^{20}\) Accordingly he wrote to Rajendra Prasad on 18 September, 1934, persuading him to take up the responsibility of the Congress Presidentship.\(^{21}\) In the light of the desire of Gandhiji, Rajendra Prasad felt it difficult to decline the suggestion although he was placed in a precarious situation on the domestic front.\(^{22}\) Mahadev Desai also persuaded him in this regard on behalf of Gandhiji.\(^{23}\) Sensing the hesitation in Rajendra Prasad, Gandhiji affectionately wrote to him: "You have illness in the family as also your financial problem. But are you a family man any more? In other words, you serve the family only so far as it is a part of the people at large." Rajendra Prasad was also aware about the pressures pouring in from the different quarters. By the month of September 1934 as many as fourteen of the Provincial Congress Committees had forwarded the name of Rajendra Prasad

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21 Gandhiji to Rajendra Prasad, 18 September 1934, RPCSD, Vol. 1, p. 3.
22 After the death of his elder brother, the burden of the entire family affairs, which was in a mess had fallen over his shoulders.
23 S.M. Wasi, op.cit., p. 83
for the Presidentship of the Congress.\textsuperscript{24} Rajendra Prasad had no way out and he bowed before the wishes of Gandhiji. In his own words:

Gandhiji was keen on my accepting it. But in the circumstances in which I found myself I did not deem it proper to accept the honour.

Mahadev Desai wrote to me on behalf of Gandhiji, saying that the country wanted to show its gratitude for and satisfaction at the work I had done for the relief of victims of the Bihar earthquake and that I should accept the Presidentship\textsuperscript{25}

Thus it is apparent that Rajendra Prasad accepted the Presidentship of the Congress at the insistence of Gandhiji and the demands of the objective conditions prevailing at that time. The regular election could have been carried out, as per the constitution of the Congress, only by the Reception Committee which was scheduled to meet in Bombay on 29 September. But the necessity of regular meeting was shelved off in the given objective conditions and a special Reception Committee meeting, held in Jinnah hall under the presidency of K.F. Nariman, and unanimously elected him the President of the ensuing session of the Congress in 1934.\textsuperscript{26}

\textsuperscript{24} \textit{The Hindustan Times}, 24 September, 1934.
\textsuperscript{25} Jamnalal Bajaj visited Zeradei, his village and Rajendra Prasad left it to Jamnalal to settle the family debts as best as he thought fit. A part of his estate had to be disposed of in order to clear a number of debts. See Rajendra Prasad, \textit{Autobiography}, p. 386.
\textsuperscript{26} Abidali Jafferbhoy proposed his name and Nagindas Master seconded the proposal. See \textit{The Hindustan Times}, 30 September 1934.
The Bombay Session of the Congress

The Bombay session of the Congress, scheduled for 26, 27 and 28 October 1934 respectively, was the first of its regular sessions after an interval of over three and half years, during which it had to undergo numerous tests and tribulations as discussed earlier. At the beginning of 1932, the Congress had been declared an unlawful organization and the ban had been lifted only in June 1934. During this entire period the Congress had to undergo severe repression and ruthless suppression let loose by Lord Wellington, the Viceroy then. The ordinances had spread their nets wide and the activities of the Congress had been driven underground while the prisons had been over-flowing. When the Government had realized that sentences of imprisonment had little deterrent effect on the Congress workers then it had resorted to the idea of imposing heavy fines on them as it thought that it would be a more effective way to impoverish their families and counter their activities. The Magistrates had subsequently been instructed to substitute sentences to heavy fines for imprisonment. The sacrifices demanded of the Congress workers put such a strain on them and their families that the membership of the Congress had gradually fallen off to about half a million. Thus the momentum of the movement, which it had acquired during Salt Satyagraha, had received a severe setback, rendering the Congress very weak organizationally. Lord Wellington, therefore, could boast in early 1933 that “the Congress is in a definitely less favourable position than in 1930 and has lost its hold on the public.”

27 Last regular session of the Congress was held at Karachi under the Presidentship of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, who was still technically continuing as the President.
28 During this period two unsuccessful abortive sessions of the Congress had been attempted. In 1932 in Delhi under Seth Ranchodlal and at Calcutta in 1933 under Mr. Nelie Sen Gupta.
29 Bipan Chandra, et al., India's Struggle for Independence, p. 289.
Chapter One

Chandra Bose and Vitthalbhai Patel had found the prospects of the national movement gloomy and consequently had been thinking in terms of a “a radical re-organization of the Congress on a new principle with a new method”, and a new leader.\(^{30}\)

Beyond all doubts the scenario on the political horizon around this time appeared as dismal as it had never been before in the past. The ban on the Congress had recently been lifted by the Government and the Congress had now to decide its attitude towards the constitution, being drafted according to the principles laid down in the white paper, and also towards the elections to the Central Assembly.\(^{31}\) It was certainly not a normal situation in which the Congress was going to hold its Bombay session. Rajendra Prasad felt overawed at the prospects ahead and therefore thought it wise to hold prior consultations with Gandhiji on these matters. He also sought his suggestions while preparing his Presidential address.

Rajendra Prasad, as the President elect, was given a rousing reception at the venue of the Bombay session. It seems that the intentions were to generate an aura and announce the beginning of a new era of freedom struggle against the British again. The Chairman of the Reception Committee, K.F. Nariman, had very consciously made elaborate arrangements for the occasion. The Presidential procession, with Rajendra Prasad seated in a carriage driven by four horses, was quite long one and it passed

\(^{30}\) Ibid., p. 281.

\(^{31}\) The British attempts at constitutional initiatives from the Round Table Conferences onwards finally culminated into the Government of India Act 1935. However it had to pass through various stages. The declaration of Communal Award was followed by the issue of a White Paper Proposal containing the various viewpoints expressed at the Round Table Conferences. Subsequently a Joint Select Committee of the British Parliament (JPC) was set up to consider the White Paper and make recommendations to the British Parliament for Constitutional reforms in India. The Joint Parliamentary Committee had subsequently released its report in November 1934 which provided, among other things, autonomy for the provinces, federation at the centre, provision of “safeguards” for the minorities, special power and responsibilities to the Governors as the head of the provincial governments. See The Indian Annual Register (hereafter IAR), Vol. II, 1934, p. 39.
through beflagged gates and arches. It was said that Bombay had never accorded such a reception to anyone.\textsuperscript{32} A lively description of the Bombay session of the Congress available to us describes it in these words: "A golden sun had just disappeared under the waveless sea, late moon was still under the eastern horizon; the stars were twinkling from a darkening sky, when inside a circle of blazing lights India's annual festival of freedom began today on the huge grounds specially laid out on world's sea face."

Similarly, the presidential procession described in contemporary narratives also showed the grandeur which Congress was trying to bring back to the annual session and to the Presidentship. A vivid report of the procession writes:

\begin{quote}
Shortly before seven, the playing of music in the President's camp announced the commencement of the Presidential procession.... A few minutes later, the procession emerged out of the blazing arch. Floodlights concentrated their beams and the procession moved in a stream of light. Volunteers in uniform marched first, playing bagpipes and beating drums. Desh sevikas came behind. They were followed by the leaders who were marching slowly, two abreast. Dr. Ansari, Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, Mahatmaji, Sardar Patel, Abdul Gaffar Khan, Sardul Singh and other leaders marched ahead. Rajendra Prasad escorted by Mr. K. F. Nariman, with a simple garland round his neck marched to the centre of the procession. Other leaders brought up the rear.
\end{quote}

The Hindustan Times carried the reporting of the Presidential procession \textit{Ibid.} Also, The Hindustan Times, 24 October 1934

90
Nariman, in his welcome speech, described Rajendra Prasad as the foremost leader of Bihar who was "a peasant in his garments but a prince among the public workers." To quote him:

The unanimous vote by which he has been elected to guide the destinies of the nation during the coming year is a testimony to the esteem and affection in which his countrymen from one end to another hold him. In his own province the name of Rajendra Prasad is a name to conjure with. The call to national leadership has come to him in the midst of a trying time. His own family has suffered shocking bereavements. And he himself is the victim of a nerve racking illness...If in the midst of these ordeals he has cheerfully responded to the nation's call and taken his place of responsibility, it is only an indication of his unbending devotion to duty and his utter readiness to shoulder every burden in the cause of India's freedom.\(^{33}\)

**Outlining a Blueprint For the Future**

Rajendra Prasad's presidential address, printed in Hindi, English and Urdu had already been circulated among delegates and visitors.\(^{34}\) In his address, delivered in Hindi, he presented a simple but unvarnished account of the trials and tribulations through which the entire country and the people had undergone during the preceding three years and a

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\(^{34}\) Rajendra Prasad delivered his Presidential address in Hindi and preferred not reading the entire text, so laboriously prepared. He knew "people did not like printed addresses" and therefore, referred to only select portions of his printed speech. Rajendra Prasad, *Autobiography*, p. 393.
half since the Karachi session. He was more concerned with the recent history so as to “elucidate the present and enable us to lay out a programme for the future”. The Gandhi-Irwin pact was to open a way to permanent peace between Britain and India. But, as he argued, the subsequent developments after the departure of Irwin did not move in that direction. Lord Willington had come and there was undisguised resentment in the official circles at what was regarded as surrender on the part of Lord Irwin. When Mahatma Gandhi returned from England, he said he found himself faced with a situation which seemed to have been very carefully and meticulously prepared. An excuse was found in what was wrongly described and advertised as a No-Rent Campaign in the United Provinces, but which was nothing more than suspension of payment, pending negotiations which had been going on between the Government on the one side and the Congress leaders on the other, to secure a settlement on an equitable basis on the very serious question of remission or suspension of rent on purely economic grounds, which had become necessary on account of unprecedented economic depression. To Rajendra Prasad, therefore, the Congress overtures of peace were turned down and Working Committee had no other option except to resort to the Civil Disobedience.  

He painted the policies of the Government as highly immoral. The Government expected that they would be able to crush the whole movement within a fortnight. Thousands courted imprisonment and suffered lathi charge, firings, heavy fines, confiscation of property, and beatings on an extensive scale. New offences were created and in some cases collective and vicarious punishments laid down. Expressing disapproval of these, he unequivocally condemned the violence on the part of the

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35 Presidential Address of Rajendra of Prasad, RPCSD, pp. 233-4.
Government in the name of countering terrorist menace and which resulted in complete suspension of all political activities of a progressive type.\footnote{Ibid., p. 235.}

While attacking the Government for its repressive methods, he did not condone the violent methods of the revolutionary groups either. He did not spare at all those who believed that freedom could be won by violent methods alone. He called them "impatient enthusiasts" who had taken to a wrong method\footnote{Ibid.} and argued that it would have been better if they had accepted the creed of the Congress. He observed:

Now the Congress had never concealed its view regarding the terrorist movement. It has condemned without hesitation and in an unequivocal language all the terrorist outrages, and under the great influence of Mahatma Gandhi has done all it could to create an atmosphere against the cult of terrorism.... Apart from other considerations, the Congress condemns terrorism because it hampers the country's freedom struggle and bends to create forces which will lead to further disruption and trouble and because it is essentially wrong and un-Indian.\footnote{Ibid.}

He held the policies of the Government, which served the interests of the Great Britain alone responsible for the economic depression and the consequent distress it caused for the peasantry. The situation was highly intolerable. In his words:

The country has been passing through a period of deep economic depression which has been intensified by the
government policy of managing Indian affairs in the interests not of India but of Great Britain. The past few years have seen great distress of peasantry, unable to pay the heavy land revenue and rent and suffering great privations. They have witnessed curtailment of expenditure on nation-building departments, great slump in industry, export of more than 200 crore of distress gold, dislocation of trade and a tremendous increase in unemployment, the extent of which, even in the best of normal years, British Government have never dared to ascertain owing to its vastness. These years have been remarkable for heavy additions of the already over burdened tax payer and the poverty stricken population for carrying on an extravagant and top heavy administration and partly of suppressing and crushing the movement for freedom.39

He expressed deep disappointment and anguish over the white paper “which had been condemned by almost unanimous public opinion in India as highly disappointing and unsatisfactory”. He said that it fell far short of the expectations of the people. The Congress demanded independence which meant and included complete control over the army, finances, foreign relations and internal administration of the country. “The white paper is nothing” he said, “if it is not a negation of all these items and if it does not bar even a gradual progress towards any of them.”40 It did not “take us anywhere near what
our moderate countrymen aim at viz., dominion status, not to speak of complete independence which is the Congress goal.\textsuperscript{41} Describing the reforms as illusory in nature that placed India “under a virtual dictatorship”, he said, “I am using no language of exaggeration if I say it is mere camouflage and a fraud to say that law and order is being transferred when the special responsibility in this respect is reserved in the wide and all pervasive terms as is done under the white paper proposal.\textsuperscript{42}

The suspension of the Civil Disobedience Movement, Rajendra Prasad clarified, “was declared not with reference to any declaration of policy by Government, but with reference to the peculiar moral and spiritual character of our struggle.”\textsuperscript{43} It had to be suspended in the very interests of the movement and those of the country. The principal reason was, he argued, our own weakness and our object is nothing less than the liberation of the country. He cautioned against any let up and observed that if the people really wanted freedom they must recognize that the need of the hour is for a bigger or more inspiring programme, but for the determination to achieve what little we may set before ourselves.\textsuperscript{44}

Regarding the yarn franchise and much discussed Khadi clause, proposed by Gandhi, he declared:

I may say without being guilty of national vanity that there is no other flag in the world which expresses in itself purer and loftier

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid, p.239.
\textsuperscript{43} He explained the reasons thus: “firstly, the Congress workers had been gradually and perhaps unconsciously led into adoption of methods of secrecy which reduced what would have been an open battle of wits. Secondly, it must be admitted that the attack of the Government on a vulnerable point succeeded. People were not prepared to lose liberty and even life, and when heavy fines and confiscations started on a whole sale scale, gradually demoralization set in and ultimately broke the backbone of the movement”. Ibid, p.247.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.
ideals. It rules out in one sweep the three-fold curse of modern humanity, viz., imperialism, capitalism and industrialism. The spinning wheel and Khadi are not only the living link between the classes and the masses, they are symbols of the country’s determination to resist all forms of exploitation by non-violent means. They represent an era of purification of politics and private life. Remove the Khadi clause and you will snap the living link between the cities and the villages.  

“What was really wanted”, Rajendra Prasad said, was “inexhaustible patience, unending determination and unending sacrifice” for the attainment of the goal for India which was “nothing short of independence.” Independence, he thought, could be attained by only one method which was that of “active, dynamic, non-violence mass action” or Satyagraha which may “fail once or twice” but in spite of temporary setbacks was bound to succeed some day. In his own words:

The method, too, is crystal clear. It is active, dynamic, non-violent mass action. We may fail once, we may fail twice, but we are bound to succeed some day. Many have already lost their lives and all. Many more have sacrificed themselves in their struggle for freedom. Let us not be deterred by the difficulty which confront us nor

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45 Ibid., p. 246. Emma Tarlo in her celebrated work Clothing Matters: A Dress and Identity in India, highlights the linkage between social identity and clothes. The Khadi dress in that sense became a symbol of national identity during India’s freedom struggle. Emma Tarlo, Clothing Matters: A Dress and Identity in India, New Delhi, 1996

46 Ibid., p. 248.

47 Ibid.
diverted from our straight course by fear or favour. Our weapons are unique and the world is watching the progress of the great experiment with interest and high expectations. Let us be true to our creed and firm in our determination. Satyagraha in its active application may meet with temporary set-backs but it knows no defeat. 48

His address was, indeed, a blueprint of the future course of action the Congress was supposed to take. He subsequently conducted the entire proceedings of the session with firm resolution and sense of impartiality, strictly observing the established constitutional procedures of the Congress and not giving any chance or occasion to complaint from any quarter. It would be worthwhile to mention an interesting incident in this regard. At one stage Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya wanted to speak for the second time on his amendment to the resolution on the Communal Award. It was really difficult to dissuade him from doing so and for Rajendra Prasad it was, indeed, a moment of testing his resolve and impartiality. He stuck to his gun and not yielding to Malaviya he did not allow him to speak for the second time. He firmly pointed out that he was not entitled to that according to the rules. 49 Gandhiji, who was not present at the meeting then and had heard its proceedings through a loudspeaker, jokingly asked him the next day as to how he could prevent a man like Malaviya from speaking. Gandhiji had all the admiration for him over this matter but Rajendra Prasad in all seriousness replied “that my decision was as President of the Congress, and not as Rajendra Prasad.” 50

48 Ibid., p. 249.
49 The Hindustan Times, 27 October 1934.
50 Rajendra Prasad, Autobiography, p. 393.
Issues at the Session and Attempts to Reinvigorate the Organization of the Congress:

The Congress session considered the constitutional proposals of the Government threadbare, as embodied in the white paper, which included Ramsay Macdonald's Communal Award.\(^{51}\) Whereas autonomy had been proposed for the provinces there had been a proposal for a loose structure for the federal government at the centre, with heavy weightage being given in favour of the princes and the minorities. The idea of responsible government had been relegated and reduced to a mockery only by retaining the provisions like discretionary powers, reserve powers and safeguards for discharge of special responsibilities vested in the Viceroy. There was a prolonged discussion at the session but no consensus of opinion emerged and the matter was left unresolved, the Congress neither accepting nor rejecting it. The Congress certainly did not endorse it.

The issue of Communal Award was another contentious issue, which dominated the discussions at the session. Madan Mohan Malviya argued that since the award was inequitable hence it should separately be condemned.\(^{52}\) But it was felt that the rejection of the white paper, which embodied the award, would be more suitable.\(^{53}\) Hence the Congress opposed the proposals contained in the white paper and demanded that the Constitution of India should be framed by a Constituent Assembly representing the people of India. About the white paper, Rajendra Prasad, in fact, had shown his strong disapproval in his address and had emphatically stated that its proposals "do not take us anywhere near what our moderate party aims at, viz., Dominion status, not to speak of

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\(^{51}\) It was the result of six years of labour by the Simon Commission, the Round Table Conferences and the British Cabinet.


\(^{53}\) Ibid.
complete independence which is the Congress' goal.” He had also argued that “in fact, they take the country in some respects, in the opposite direction and leave it in a position constitutionally worse than that not occupied under the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms.”

Gandhiji’s decision to withdraw from the Congress dominated the next day’s session. Rajendra Prasad supported Gandhiji’s view because he held the conviction that whatever Gandhiji wanted to do was not to weaken the Congress and his advice would always be available even when he was outside it. “The Mahatma’s only aim was that on retirement others would be prompted to think for themselves and the impression that whatever was done at his bidding would be removed.” In his Presidential speech, therefore, he had endorsed Gandhiji’s decision to withdraw from the Congress. “Now that leaders like Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Dr. Ansari and Khan brothers have given their hearty assent to the correctness of Gandhiji’s decision, “ he declared, “I do not think it necessary for me to take up your time discussing the pros and cons of the question of his retirement.” He was even not prepared to question the suitability of Gandhiji’s decision because, in his opinion, Gandhiji’s decision proceeded “out of the depth of his devotion to truth and non-violence and it must spur us on to further effort towards those ideals.” Gandhiji declined an appeal to reconsider his decision and assured the Congress that he would always be available for consultation.

Gandhiji, for quite some time, had been pleading for amending the constitution of the Congress so as to make it a “most efficient body and more truly representative.” He accordingly moved a resolution to this effect on the third day of the session, which was

54 RPCSD, Vol. 1, p. 237.
56 RPCSD, Vol. 1, op.cit., p. 245.
accepted despite protests from the Socialists.\textsuperscript{58} According to the changes now made in the constitution of the Congress, spinning of 500 meters of well spun yarn per month or some other form of manual labour as an alternative was made an essential qualification for membership of the Congress. Secondly, no one was to be eligible for election to an office or to membership of any Congress Committee unless he was a habitual wearer of hand spun and hand woven Khaddar. Thirdly, the AICC was reduced to half of its strength and the number of Congress delegates was cut down to a maximum of 2000.\textsuperscript{59}

That the Bombay session of the Congress laid a great deal of emphasis on reinvigoration of the Congress organization, by emphasizing on the constructive programme, is clearly borne out by a careful examination of its proceedings here.\textsuperscript{60} Delegates, attending the session, deeply imbibed the notion that measures like removal of untouchability, encouragement and propagation of khadi, promotion of Hindu-Muslim unity, prohibition and swadeshi only would help the Congress come out of the mood of demoralization and in strengthening and furthering the national movement. Overall the session was marked by a good deal of realistic thinking and a genuine effort to put the Congress Back on the rails.

Once the Congress session was over, Rajendra Prasad announced the formation of a Working Committee consisting of Vallabhbhai Patel, Dr. M.A. Ansari, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Sarojini Naidu, Jamnalal Bajaj, Rajagopalachari, Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan, Sardar Sardul Singh Caveshar, Dr. Pattabhi Sitarammaya, Gangadhar Rao Deshpandey, Jairamdas Daulatram, Jawaharlal Nehru, Syed Mahmud and J.B. Kripalani. He appointed

\textsuperscript{58} Mr. Despande, a socialist from Maharastra, moved an amendment, proposing circulation of the proposals and their consideration at the next session.


\textsuperscript{60} \textit{IAR}, 1934, Vol. II, p. 259.
the last three as the General Secretaries. However, J.B. Kripalani was to be the working General Secretary. He nominated Seth Jamnalal Bajaj as treasurer.\footnote{Ibid.}

The success of the Bombay session of the Congress and the massive response and attention it received from people once again vindicated its roots with the masses. It demonstrated beyond any doubt that the Congress alone was the legitimate and sole representative body of Indians vis-à-vis the British Government. The Congress leadership became more acutely aware that the Congress had to undergo a metamorphosis in order to play its role more effectively. The functioning of the Congress, was therefore, also attempted to be streamlined. The Congress till now had been performing many roles at a time without having its frontal organizations. The functions hitherto performed by the Congress were now taken away from it and new associations and organizations were created to discharge them. Thus, spinning and khaddar became the concern of a virtually independent body: the All India Spinners’ Association; anti-untouchability issues were to be taken up now by the Harijan Sevak Sangh.\footnote{Kalinath Ray, 'The Bombay Congress Critically Surveyed’ in RPCSD, Vol. I, p. 263.} New village associations were to take charge of the work of rural reconstruction and uplift. Spinning, khaddar and anti-untouchability were still there, though they stood differentiated from the purely political side of the work of the Congress. However, the organizations which were specially entrusted with the duty of carrying them out still stood under the control of the Congress. The Congress had accepted Mahatma Gandhi’s retirement most unwillingly and with heavy heart.\footnote{IAR, 1934, Vol. II., p.258.} Yet Gandhiji remained the master of the Congress. He was still the ideal of the average Congressman and the leader of the leaders. While acquiescing in his
decision to retire from the Congress, the Congress had reiterated its confidence in his leadership.

Another significant change effected at this session was regarding the Congress organization itself. Efforts were made to make the Congress more representative and democratic in structure and functioning. Gandhiji had voiced his concern regarding this in the subjects committee before giving the new constitution:

We are indirectly representatives of the nation’s dumb millions. We are their mouth-piece, their voice and their thought. But directly we are representatives only of the electorates. Can anyone among us say whom he represents and whether he is in living touch with his constituents and knows their feelings? Even the tallest among us cannot claim that Vallabhbhai is the uncrowned king of Gujarat, but which electorate does he represent? Whom do I represent? I do not know I challenge anyone to produce the Congress register of electorates. We must have constituencies and electorates, and each member must represent his constituency and be in living touch with it.  

The Congress now gave this idea a practical form in the new constitution. Each of the delegates to the Congress were now to be elected not through an elaborate system of indirect election such as existed but by primary voters, whose number was not to be less than 500 and might be much larger. Consequently, the new constitution substantially

64 Gandhi’s speech at subjects committee meeting, 26 October, 1934, CWMG, Vol. LIX, p. 232.
reduced the number of delegates to the Congress. The present Congress never was, and was never intended to be, anything but a spectacular show. The official life of the delegate was only three days in a year and the chief function was to register the decrees of the Working Committee and the AICC, with the number reduced to 2,000. Another important feature of the constitution was the provision for the election of the President by the delegates themselves, instead of by the Reception Committee, on the recommendation of the Provincial Congress Committees. This was a legacy handed down from a time when the Congress was far from being a democratic body was thus eliminated. The Provincial Congress Committees would have been too small to elect the President. Also the election by the Reception Committee, whose sole business was to make arrangements, for holding the annual session was an absurdity.

Facing the Central Assembly Elections

Barely had Rajendra Prasad gathered the reins of the Congress than the general elections to the Central Assembly arrived, which was scheduled in November. The idea of elections to the Central Assembly had attracted many Congress workers who were in favour of reviving the Swaraj Party to carry on the political struggle in the legislatures. Without changing his views on the utility of the Legislatures, Gandhiji had approved of this move, which had subsequently been endorsed by the AICC in May, 1934 and finally endorsed at the Bombay session. There had also been another consideration behind the Congress decision to contest the elections. The result of the elections would surely be an

65 Mahatma's original plan was drastically revised. He had wanted the number of delegates to be 1,000 and he wanted the Congress itself to become the All India Congress Committee for the year. See Kalinath Ray, op. cit., in RPCSD, p.263.
indicator of the popularity of the Congress with the masses.\(^{67}\) Rajendra Prasad, though fully aware of its implications, could not work actively and devote himself for the election campaigns as he fell sick and was forced to abandon campaign activities till December. Nevertheless he did manage to reach some parts in Bihar and carried out canvassing in favour of the Congress candidates.

The election results revealed that the people had reposed their confidence in the Congress, which secured forty-four out of forty-nine general seats. It was, thought Rajendra Prasad, an eye opener for those who had doubted the support base of the Congress. The elections demonstrated that the people were solidly behind the Congress in all the provinces except Bengal. The people of Bengal were sullen because the representation of the Hindus had been reduced from forty-four per cent to thirty-nine per cent. Madan Mohan Malaviya’s Congress Nationalist Party got eleven seats and the independents secured twenty-two seats.\(^{68}\) The nationalists were thus in a position of strength, and combined together they could outvote the Government bloc in a house of 130 members.\(^ {69}\)

**Taking the Congress to the Masses**

In January 1935 the Working Committee meeting was held in Delhi simultaneously at a time when the Central Assembly was also having its session. Gandhiji also attended this meeting and Rajendra Prasad, with his concurrence decided to embark on an all India tour programme\(^ {70}\) which was to begin after the winter. He selected Chakradhar Saran, a

\(^{67}\) Ibid.  
\(^{69}\) Ibid.  
Congress worker from Muzaffarpur to accompany him throughout the tour. Rajendra Prasad's tour as Congress President had two fold objectives. In the first place it would afford an opportunity to reorganize and strengthen the Congress organization. The other object of the tour was to popularize the new constitution of the Congress and to explain to the people the need of the constructive effort at a time when the nation had suspended Civil Disobedience activities. Rajendra Prasad clearly understood that if the Congress was to play its expected role in the next phase of the national struggle, it must build up an organization at once which was efficient and capable of bearing strain. 71

He also decided to observe 7 February 1935 as an all India protest day against the Joint Parliamentary Committee report on Indian constitutional reform. For a long time a demand for this action was being made and Rajendra Prasad thought it an appropriate occasion to give such a call to the nation. Accordingly he issued a statement to the press, and urged people to observe the day as an all India protest day:

There being a general demand that a day should be fixed as a day of protest against the Joint Parliamentary Committee's Report on Indian constitutional reforms, I fix Thursday, February 7, for such demonstrations.

Public meetings should be held all over the country....

The J.P.C. proposals have been condemned by all shades of

public opinion in the country and I appeal to all to participate in this country wide protest to them.\textsuperscript{72}

On the occasion of these demonstrations, he suggested the following resolution to be adopted and asked the report of the meeting to be sent to the office of the AICC:

The public meeting of citizens of ............ condemn the proposed constitutional changes as conceived in a spirit of imperialist domination and economic exploitation and disclosing no intention of transferring real power to the people of India. This meeting places on record its considered opinion that it prefers to continue the struggle for Swaraj under present constitution and calls upon the popular representatives in the legislatures to reject the proposed scheme.\textsuperscript{73}

This appeal had profound effect on the people throughout the country and 7 February was celebrated as protest day, not merely in every town of any importance but also in distant villages in many provinces. The resolution suggested by the President was adopted without any dissentient voice anywhere. In Bombay, in fact, all political parties jointly held a meeting under their joint auspices on this occasion and adopted this resolution.\textsuperscript{74}

\textsuperscript{72} Letter from Krishnadas, Office Secretary, AICC, 29 January 1935. Rajendra Prasad Papers, file no. II/1935.
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{74} The Hindustan Times, 8 Feb 1934.
Attempts to Resolve the Communal Tangle: Rajendra Prasad-Jinnah talks

Rajendra Prasad had scheduled his tour programme after the winter months were over and the weather had become favorable to permit him travelling long distances. In the meantime in the month of February 1935 he made a very important move which was both earnest and serious effort his part for a rapprochement on the issue of communalism which was based on the premise of unity; and an agreed settlement over the communal award. He held prolonged discussions and negotiations with M.A. Jinnah, President of the Muslim League. Talks were quite long and were held from 23 January to 1\textsuperscript{st} March, almost more than a month. Dr. Ansari who had been holding negotiations with Jinnah and had been reporting regularly regarding these to the Working Committee had prepared background for these talks. The Working Committee had subsequently agreed "to explore all avenues of compromise". The Communal Award, thought Rajendra Prasad, had displeased "the Hindus" and this had made everyone feel "that a Hindu-Muslim compromise was desirable."\textsuperscript{75} The basis of negotiations appears to be an attempt to arrive at an agreed settlement between the communities which could replace the so-called Communal Award.\textsuperscript{76}

But before taking up such an important matter Rajendra Prasad had naturally thought it necessary to consult Gandhiji, who advised him to proceed for the talks with Jinnah:

I see no harm in going. I think you should discuss everything but making it clear you have no mandate. You could only convey the purpose of the conversations to the committee and

\textsuperscript{75} Rajendra Prasad, \textit{Autobiography}, pp. 399-400.

\textsuperscript{76} Rajendra Prasad Papers, F. No. XI/35.
its decision. It should be strictly understood that though you
would meet as representatives, the talks must the regarded as
informal till they reach the stage of some concrete proposal to
be discussed by the respective committees. At the end of the
conversations the agreed purpose should be reduced to writing
and no report should be given to the press of the
conversation. 77

Rajendra Prasad went ahead with his talks with Jinnah. 78 One day Jinnah had
talks with the members of the Working Committee at Dr. Ansari’s house. The
negotiations were of a delicate character and could not be carried on collectively by the
entire working committee. Jinnah suggested that Rajendra Prasad and he should conduct
the talks in the first instance. It was also agreed that “if some sort of agreement was
reached, the Working Committees of the Congress and the Muslim League could be
called to discuss the proposals and ratify them.” 79 Rajendra Prasad has himself stated that
Jinnah and he had heart-to-heart talks and, as far as he could see, they liked each other. 80
Jinnah’s biographer Matlubul Hassan Saiyid also says that “there was a little doubt that
the principal participants, Babu Rajendra Prasad and Mohammad Ali Jinnah, were keen

78 At the end of every meeting Rajendra Prasad, as he mentioned in his Autobiography, used to jot down
notes and keep Gandhiji and other leaders such as Sardar Patel, Dr. Ansari, Acharya Kripalani and Sarojini
The notebook or register in which he jotted down the notes of conversations has not been traced and a
valuable and authentic source of information has disappeared.
79 Rajendra Prasad Autobiography, p.400.
80 Ibid.
Chapter One

on carrying those negotiations to a successful conclusion.\footnote{M.H.Saiyid, Jinnah, p.200, quoted in Madhu Limaye, Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru: A Historic Partnership (1916-1948), Vol. II (1932-1942), B.R. Publishing, Delhi, 1989, p.130.} The whole atmosphere can be gauged by the fact that when Rajendra Prasad suggested about doing away with the separate electorate and replacing it with the system of reservation for ten or fifteen years, Jinnah appeared quite agreeable. But he pleaded his difficulties in getting it accepted without this. Nevertheless he expressed his hope that the reservations would not last more than ten or fifteen years.\footnote{Rajendra Prasad Papers, F. No. XI/35.}

The hesitation which had characterized Rajendra Prasad’s approach initially, disappeared gradually and he made it plain to Jinnah that “I was speaking only on behalf of the Congress and that I had no mandate to speak on behalf of other organizations”.\footnote{Rajendra Prasad, op. cit.} Rajendra Prasad thought that Jinnah was “in the right mood for a compromise”. He told him frankly that there was no likelihood of an agreement unless the Muslims gave up the demand for a separate electorate. The Congress was of the firm view that this system was most harmful to the growth of nationalism. Doing away with the separate electorate was, therefore, the basis of the negotiations. Jinnah said that the Muslims who had been used to this privilege for sometime could not be expected to surrender it unless they were offered something substantial in return. There had to be a quid-pro-quo. Rajendra Prasad agreed that the Muslims should receive the same number of seats as the Communal Award gave them. In fact their talks had started with this agreement as its basis, and Rajendra Prasad had no difficulty in accepting this.

Jinnah then put forward another demand, namely differential franchise. The adult franchise was not contemplated by the British at that time, although Gandhiji had
declared himself wholly in favour of it at the Second Round Table Conference. The proposed franchise was to be a restricted one. There would be limiting criterions like property, tax and educational qualifications. Jinnah said that “in constituencies where the number of Muslim Voters was less than what their population warranted, the franchise should be lowered for them so as to increase the number of voters in proportion to the population”. Jinnah’s argument was that the Muslims were poor and backward and their capacity to pay taxes was limited, and since these qualifications constituted the basis of enfranchisement, many Muslims would be deprived of the right to vote. Rajendra Prasad studied the figures in reference to the Punjab carefully and found Jinnah’s contention to be correct. He, therefore, thought Jinnah’s demand to be essentially fair, in view of the Congress stand on joint electorates and adult franchise. He had, therefore, no difficulty in accepting it. But when he mentioned it to the Bengal Hindu leaders and the Sikhs, there arose a serious opposition to his line of thinking.

In midst of these talks Gandhiji wrote to Rajendra Prasad that “if the kind of compromise you have outlined in your letter can be brought about I would love it”. But he did not sound very optimistic in this regard when he said “I see little possibility of that”. It is obvious, that though Gandhiji was not opposed to the talks, he was extremely cautious and wanted Rajendra Prasad to make no firm commitment. He also did not suggest that the Congress should make an agreement with the Muslim League directly. The Congress should agree, he thought, if the Hindus and Sikhs agree. This is not surprising. It was Gandhi’s contention that the Congress was a non-communal, non-denominational organization. Therefore, he thought it necessary to carry the Hindus.

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84 Ibid., p. 401.
85 Ibid.
course of the previous decade long negotiations showed that to Gandhi, Hindus meant the Hindu Mahasabha, and above all, Malaviya. By Sikhs, he meant the Akalis.\(^{87}\)

Rajendra Prasad found it extremely difficult to get his commitment over the idea of differential franchise accepted by Sikhs and Bengal Hindus. The nature of the difficulty was, indeed, very intricate as was described in a letter written by Birla to Gandhi:

> Rajendra Babu has evolved a formula for the communal settlement. It has been agreed upon by Jinnah. It is based on joint electorates and no change in the seat and the franchise is to be differential so as to reflect a correct proportion of the two communities in the constituencies. He is in close touch with me and I have advised him to get Ramanand Chatterjee and J.N.Basu here to talk about Bengal rather than go to Calcutta. I fear the atmosphere in Bengal is not good and so it is better to keep the venue in Delhi but the real difficulty would be about Sikhs. Hindus even in the Punjab may be reconciled. But it is a hard job.\(^{88}\)

Rajendra Prasad, in the face of the stiff opposition mentioned above, tried to persuade Jinnah to not insist on the demand of the differential franchise as that was, he

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\(^{87}\) All the subsequent arguments of Jawaharlal Nehru, Kripalani and Rajendra Prasad himself about the Congress being ready to sign an agreement with the Muslim League and only blaming Jinnah's insistence on securing the concurrence of Malaviya and, especially, the Sikhs for the breakdown of talks ignored the history of past negotiations. Jinnah's insistence on obtaining Malaviya's consent was based on the fact that Gandhi himself thought that such concurrence was necessary. Madhu Limaye, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 133.


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thought, "not of much consequence". "The fractional difference", he argued, "in the electorate was so insignificant that it was unlikely to have any appreciable effect on the election results."\textsuperscript{89} Jinnah however had no intentions of obliging Rajendra Prasad on the matter. To quote Rajendra Prasad:

I then requested Jinnah not to insist on this demand as it was not of much consequence.... Jinnah would not agree and I accepted his demand on behalf of the Congress. But he insisted on its endorsement by Pandit Malaviya also because, he said, if Malaviya started an agitation against the Communal Award, the agreement by the Congress would be nullified.\textsuperscript{90}

Just at that time an anti-Communal Award Conference was held in Delhi, which denounced the Award. Rajendra Prasad tried his best to get Pandit Malaviya to agree to the proposals arrived at during his talks with Jinnah. Malaviya insisted that the representation given to the Muslims at the Centre and in Bengal under the agreement, should be reduced. On the other hand, Jinnah was determined not to sign any agreement unless Malaviya was also a signatory. While he was willing to guarantee acceptance of the agreement by all Muslims, he also wanted a similar guarantee not only from Rajendra Prasad but also from Malaviya, representing the Hindus. In a situation like this the talks were destined to break. To quote Rajendra Prasad:

The talks, therefore, broke down, primarily because, although Jinnah had been negotiating with me as the President of the

\textsuperscript{89} Rajendra Prasad, \textit{Autobiography}, p. 401.
\textsuperscript{90} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 401-2.
Congress, he insisted that Hindu Mahasabha should also be a party to the agreement. His attitude had undergone a change. He wants the Muslim-League to be accepted as the only representative of the Indian Muslims while he classified the Congress as a representative of the Hindus. The Congress is not, and has never been, a purely Hindu organization. It has always been a national organization whose doors are open to people of all classes, creeds and religions. I feel sorry that the compromise talks failed because I was convinced that with this failure the situation would steadily deteriorate. 91

No doubt Rajendra Prasad made a very sincere effort, of course with the concurrence of Gandhiji, for resolving the communal question yet from the very beginning something appeared amiss. The Hindu communal elements did not let it succeed. The solution, as discussed above, had almost been arrived at. But it could not be carried through because of the intricate and almost insignificant issues raised by some people of Bengal and Punjab. Had the Congress and the League accepted the agreements worked out by Rajendra Prasad, the destiny of India would have been very different than what it was to be later on.

Concentrates on the Plan of Taking the Congress to the Masses

Winter was over and Rajendra Prasad started on his tour schedule, fixed before he had started negotiations with Jinnah. In the month of March, accompanied by Acharya

91 Ibid., p. 402.
Kripalani, he went to Punjab, where he had a bitter experience. Here the Congressmen were divided into two opposing groups. Their wrangling had been too obvious and caused a great deal of discomfits and inconvenience to Rajendra Prasad. In a procession, the provincial Congressmen could not agree on the route they had to take, which resulted in Rajendra Prasad getting drenched in the heavy rains that caused him to fall seriously ill. "This could have been avoided had the dispute between the rival groups not resulted in the alteration of the route of the procession which had been fixed previously."92 As a result of his illness, he remained confined in bed for quite some days at Lahore and finally he had to abandon his remaining tour programme of the Punjab.

These were the days when Bengal had still been undergoing a phase of severe repression by the Government. According to a report of the Secretary of Midnapore District Workers’ Association:

The Government has not yet lifted the ban on the 99 Congress committees throughout the District. The premises of the Contai National School, Narajole Raj Kutchary Building and other similar buildings and institutions are under Government occupation.

In the District and Sub-divisional towns curfew order, the prohibition of cycling by Bhadralok Young men and the keeping of the identity cards by all persons between the ages of 15 and 30, as also the order to report all their movements to the police and still in force.

Route marches of soldiers, with occasional house searches still continue. A network of what are called anti-terrorist leagues have been started throughout the district and officials and certain non-officials are holding meetings preaching not merely against the misguided activities of the terrorists, but also against all Congress activities. 93

The internal affairs of the Congress also needed his attention and personal intervention. Therefore, before resuming his tour programme again Rajendra Prasad decided to visit Bengal and acquaint himself regarding the state of affairs there. Here the Provincial Congress Committee was in a very bad shape because of the internal fighting of the Congressmen. Gandhiji had also advised Rajendra Prasad to fix one day for the "Bengal troubles." 94 Gandhiji wrote to Rajendra Prasad:

The Bengal affair today is the most tangled and shameful one.

Nothing can be accomplished by our forming a committee.

None of the leaders of Bengal will cooperate in this and who will listen to the other worker? Yet I feel that we ought to observe an all India day. Other things can be considered when the report from Calcutta comes in. 95

Mahatma Gandhi’s letter to Rajendra Prasad and his advice show the complexity of the Bengal troubles. The problem there was two fold. The repressive measures of the

government had to be fought out and secondly the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee had also to be taken out of the morass of the mutual rivalry, which was detrimental in the path of the resurrection and revitalization of the Congress. Rajendra Prasad, therefore, wanted to sort out the matters amicably.\textsuperscript{96} To quote Rajendra Prasad:

I visited Calcutta with the object of discussing with my Bengal friends the situation in the province particularly in relation to the repressive policy of the Government.\textsuperscript{97}

In his usual way of handling these kinds of issues, he called and discussed the problems and issues with the members of the executive of Bengal Congress and also other Congress workers. Giving them all a patient hearing, he asked them to send their suggestion as the “situation calls for careful consideration and handling.”\textsuperscript{98} He also promised to put the matter into the next working committee meeting. “There can be no question or intention”, he reassured them, “of ignoring or neglecting Bengal and I have no doubt the whole country feels strongly even though it may not always have found it possible to render any help on account of difficulties inherent in the situation.”\textsuperscript{99} He felt agitated and aghast at the prevailing situation there at the plight of the large number of youths of Bengal in detention without a trial or being given any opportunity to clear their character.\textsuperscript{100}

\textsuperscript{96} The Bengal troubles had resulted in Congress Working Committee remaining without any representation from Bengal.


\textsuperscript{98} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{99} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{100} Letter from Krishnadas, 9 May 1935, \textit{Rajendra Prasad Prasad Papers}, File no. 11/35
Rajendra Prasad subsequently brought the matter before the AICC which met at Jabalpur in the last week of April 1935. Taking a sympathetic view on the issue, the AICC adopted a resolution expressing sympathy with sufferers and demanded their release, or alternatively, a fair and open trial in an ordinary court of law.\footnote{Ibid.} The AICC also decided to raise funds for the relief of the distress caused to the families and dependents of the detenus on account of their being deprived of the services and assistance of their bread winners.\footnote{The AICC Meeting was held on 23, 24 and 25 April 1935, Ibid.} Rajendra Prasad accordingly fixed 19 May as a special day for making collections and endorsed the programme by issuing a touching appeal:

\begin{quote}
It is a well known fact that a large number of youths of Bengal are in detention without trial and without any opportunity being given to them to clear their character.... Many of the sufferers have remained in that condition for years and there is no knowing how long they are going to be detained. There are others who though not in prison or detention camps have their movements restricted. Others again have been entered from the province. While on a small scale all this is happening in some other provinces also, the case in Bengal has assumed such large proportion that it has become necessary to agitate this question on a country wide scale.... The AICC has decided to raise funds for the relief of the distress caused to the families and dependents of the detenus on account of their being deprived of
\end{quote}
the services and assistance of their bread-winners.... I accordingly appeal to the country at large to subscribe generously to the fund.... I hope and trust that the collections will be commensurate with the requirements of the work and the deep feelings of sympathy which the suffering of detenus evokes in all parts of the country.103

However, the Bengal troubles were too difficult and they defied any solutions at the hands of Rajendra Prasad. The wrangling and camp rivalries inside the Bengal Provincial Congress continued without any resolution. They continued even after Jawaharlal Nehru had become the President of the Congress in 1936. Undaunted by the experiences of Bengal, Rajendra Prasad decided to resume his scheduled tour again by the end of April, which he had discontinued after his brief illness in Punjab. Just before starting on the tour programme, he called a meeting of the AICC at Jabalpore, which we have already discussed, and then attended a meeting of the Provincial Political Conference at Berar. He travelled throughout the district of Berar which generated a profound sense of enthusiasm among the people at the places he visited. The Jabalpore meeting of the AICC took stock of the entire situation prevailing then in the country and expressed serious concerns at the continuance of Government’s repression. Till now the Government had not lifted the ban against all Congress organizations in the North-West Frontier Province like the Khudai Khidmatgars, the Hindustani Seva Dal, and the Congress Committee of Midnapore district. The AICC also decided to collect information regarding the families of detenus and raise funds to help them. After the AICC meeting

103 Letter from Krishnadas, 9 May 1935, ibid. Also The Hindustan Times, 9 May 1935.
Chapter One

on 24 and 25 April Rajendra Prasad undertook an intensive tour of Karnataka and Maharashtra and in the process visiting distant and far removed villages and towns. In Karnataka, he inaugurated the Karnataka Provincial Conference at Mangalore. Driving in a car along the sea coast of Karnataka, he reached Mysore state and returned from there via Sholapur, Satara, Poona, and Belgaum, Malvan, Ratnagiri, Ahmednagar and some other places addressing largely attended meetings wherever he halted.¹⁰⁴

In Maharashtra, Rajendra Prasad was welcomed with garlands of hand-spun yarn instead of flowers. "I got so much of hand-spun yarn", reminisced Rajendra Prasad in his autobiography, "that I was able to make from it enough Khadi to meet my requirements for several years even after distributing liberally to friends."¹⁰⁵ As decided by the Maharashtra Congress Committee, he was handed over presents in cash at all places he visited. Out of Rs. 24,950 thus collected, he kept a small portion for the AICC and handed over the rest of amount to the Maharashtra Congress for spending it locally. Referring to these tours, Rajendra Prasad observed in the course of an interview:

If the enthusiastic reception given to me and the large meetings not only in wayside villages are any indication of the genuine enthusiasm for the Congress and confidence in its programme, I can say without any hesitation that the Provinces I have visited are full of it.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ The Hindustan Times, 14 May 1935.
Chapter One

The Quetta Earthquake

Rajendra Prasad had decided to continue his tour programme till June but then in its midst only, he received the news of the devastating earthquake which had occurred in Quetta and the surrounding areas on 31 May and on subsequent days. Rajendra Prasad was deeply shocked to learn about the devastation and immediately sent Acharya Kripalani, working General Secretary of the Congress, to visit those devastated areas and organize relief work. He himself issued a moving appeal to the people to come forward and help those affected:

My heart goes out in fellow feeling with our unfortunate brothers and sisters who are victims of nature’s wrath and on behalf of the Congress I offer to them our heartfelt and sincerest sympathies.... In the face of such a mighty disaster, it is up to everyone to do his best to relieve suffering which is as undeserved as it is cruel and I know that not even the Government with its vast resources can alone meet the situation. Non-official relief will have to be organized and that too quickly.  

107 Rajendra Prasad was touring the Congress provinces of Nagpur and Mahakoshal when he had received a pressing call from the Congressmen in Sind and Punjab.

108 Quetta and its neighbourhood had become a heap of ruins entombing its entire populace. "To live was a miracle", wrote Krishnadas in his official letter "and to die was natural". Letter from Krishnadas, 6 June 1935, Rajendra Prasad Papers.

109 Ibid.
Subsequently, he sent a telegram to the Viceroy and sought permission for bonafide relief parties to be allowed entry into Quetta to save buried persons and render relief in Quetta and affected areas. However the reply he received from the Government was exceedingly frustrating: “Conditions in Quetta are very different... and are such that every single additional person going to the area adds greatly to the difficulties of those engaged in relief operations of great magnitude and danger.” Rajendra Prasad felt agitated and baffled over the government’s attitude. In a statement issued to the press he expressed his anguish:

From my experience of Bihar I can unhesitatingly say that living persons can be recovered from underneath the debris several days after the quake and therefore, all possible efforts should be made to rescue them. The attitude of the authorities in refusing help from relief organizations is wholly unintelligible.... I cannot understand why they should not be given facilities to administer relief in Quetta and the affected area.... The public mind is naturally agitated.... I hope the authorities will give due weight to the public feelings.

110 Quetta, being the frontier and a military town, the Government was not allowing non-official relief work there despite the fact that the measures undertaken by the Government agencies were abysmally inadequate. Ibid.
111 Ibid.
112 Jairamdas Daulatram, General Secretary, Congress had earlier organized meetings in this regard in Sind which was the nearest Congress province to the affected area. Letter from Krishnadas, 13 June 1935, Rajendra Prasad Papers.
Rajendra Prasad, without waiting anymore for any gesture on the part of the Government, called off his tour and immediately proceeded to Karachi and visited all the towns in and around Sind, and saw the pitiable state of sufferers and the inadequacy of the relief work undertaken by the Government. He felt disappointment over the insensitive attitude of the Government in not allowing Congress workers to proceed to Quetta to organize relief work. However, indefatigable as he was, he declared that he had decided with the consent of Gandhiji that the Congress should avail itself of the opportunity of rendering help to the wounded and destitute sufferers who had been evacuated from Quetta.\footnote{Ibid.}

Rajendra Prasad, having returned from his visit to Sind, constituted a relief committee, the Quetta Central Relief Committee with himself as President and Jairamdas Daulatram and Dr. Choithram as its Secretaries\footnote{Other members of the Quetta Central Relief Committee were: Seth Jamnalal Bajaj, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, Sir P.C. Ray, Bhulabhai Desai, G.D. Birla, Mathuradas Vissanji, Dr. Khan Sahib, Mrs. Perking Captain, Jamshed Mehta, Sheikh Abdul Majed Sindhi, Dewan Bahadur, Murlidhar, Seth C. Haranaraincomani, Dr. Gopichari Bhargava of Lahore, Lala Dunichand (Ambala), Lala Dhalu Ram (Dera Ghazi Khan). \textit{Ibid.}} and issued a statement in the press emphasizing the necessity of such a committee in that hour of gloom. He stated that the relief, in the case of Quetta sufferers, would have to be extensive and spread over a long period of time.\footnote{Ibid.} He also fixed up 30 June as a day of prayer for the souls of the dead in the Quetta tragedy and for expression of sympathy for the survivors of the tragedy. In his statement to the press he said:

\begin{quote}
I suggest that Sunday, the 30th of June should be observed as a day of prayer for souls of the dead and for giving expression to the deep sympathy which the country feels for the survivors for
\end{quote}
all the physical torture and mental anguish which it has been their lot to suffer on account of circumstances beyond their control. The day may also be utilized for collecting funds for their relief. I hope that the people of all classes and communities will join in this solemn demonstration without any distinction even as earthquake made no distinction between men and women in the havoc and the destruction it wrought.\textsuperscript{116}

Having the vast experience of organizing relief work during the days of Bihar earthquake, he set out two-fold strategy for engaging in the relief work for Quetta. People should be helped to rebuild their houses and secondly, they had to be helped out to restart their lives afresh.\textsuperscript{117} After all Rajendra Prasad had had vast experience in the organization of the relief work during a similar cataclysm that had struck Bihar earlier.

**Attitude Towards the Peoples’ Movement in Princely States**

Around this time there had emerged some amount of awakening and consciousness regarding democratic rights among the masses of the Indian Princely States. At the time of the Bombay Congress itself there had been demand from some quarters for intervention by the Indian National Congress into their struggles for democratic institutions. Mahatma Gandhi was, however, against any such initiative. Their struggle, in his view, could not have been carried out from outside and hence local initiative was

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.
enough for the same. The Working Committee in July 1935 discussed the matter and adopted a resolution, which was issued by Rajendra Prasad as President of the Congress:

The responsibility and the burden of carrying on that struggle within the states must necessarily fall on the state’s people themselves. The Congress can exercise moral and friendly influence upon the states and thus it is bound to do whenever possible.\(^{118}\)

Subsequently at a meeting of the AICC at Madras on 17 and 18 October 1935, this view of the Working Committee was endorsed and Rajendra Prasad made a statement clarifying the position of the Congress. The responsibility and burden of carrying on that struggle within the states must necessarily fall on the people of the states. The Congress could exercise moral and friendly influence upon the States and it was bound to do so wherever possible.\(^{119}\) One good result of this controversy was that the people of the states began to stir themselves and organizations called Praja Mandala sprang up in most of the princely states.\(^{120}\)

**Taking the Congress to the Masses**

After the AICC meeting was over, Rajendra Prasad commenced his tour from the city of Madras itself and completed it on 9 November. In total he visited fourteen Congress districts and addressed over a hundred meetings. Besides these regular meetings he also addressed a large number of wayside meetings, not included in the programme. On an


\(^{120}\) K.K. Datta, *op.cit.*
average he addressed six to seven meetings a day. During this three week programme he travelled nearly 3000 miles by road and more than 800 miles by train, covering the entire province of Tamil Nadu from Madras to Cape Comorin.\textsuperscript{121} Everywhere, even in the remotest villages, Rajendra Prasad noticed great confidence and enthusiasm among people for the Congress.\textsuperscript{122} Even in wayside villages, large gatherings of people often assembled to greet him.

For obvious reasons he addressed these meetings in English but everywhere, in almost all the meetings, he urged them to learn and acquire Hindustani language.\textsuperscript{123} He felt relieved to note their satisfactory work regarding Harijan upliftment and so observed that it was making special progress there. He had occasion to visit numerous institutions run for their benefit, and held discussions regarding their situation with several of their local leaders and workers. He found them satisfied with the way in which things were being managed.\textsuperscript{124} According to the directions of the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee, a purse was presented to him at every place he visited. The sum total of this fund had accumulated to nearly Rupees eighty thousand.\textsuperscript{125} It was remarkable that the total amount should be so high because at no single place he remembered to have received a single purse of Rupees five hundred, except the one where he believed it amounted to Rupees Eight hundred. As against this there were smaller purses containing only a few rupees made up of copper coins. This indicated the widespread influence the Congress commanded among the masses of the province. Referring to it, Rajendra Prasad observed on the last day of his tour:

\textsuperscript{121} Letter from Krishnadas, 14 November 1935, Rajendra Prasad Papers.
\textsuperscript{122} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{123} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid.
The nature of the purse itself is a proof of the fact that our message has reached the masses. In some places I got big bags of money containing all coppers; I consider that to be very valuable. That shows that the masses have responded to its call.  

During his tour, Rajendra Prasad also witnessed bitter Brahmin and non-Brahmin differences. He found that the vast bulk of the people who came to greet him and attended his meetings were non-Brahmins. Also, the organizers of several meetings were in most cases non-Brahmins. "After this tour it had become more difficult for him than before to look upon the Congress in Tamil Nadu as an institution dominated by Brahmins." Rajendra Prasad, therefore, made an appeal to the non-Brahmins to study the situation a little more closely and help the national institution which stood for all, and not for any particular community. Rajendra Prasad, however, with all satisfaction in his heart was impressed by the fellow feeling of the Hindus and the Musalmans working side by side. Indeed, at many places he visited, he received addresses of welcome from the Musalmans as well.  

Next Rajendra Prasad visited Andhra Pradesh from 10 November and Kerala from 1 to 8 December, touching not only all the important places but even some remotest villages. He was greeted with an enthusiastic response at every place he visited. Women gathered in good numbers in almost all the meetings he addressed. Except at half a dozen places, he delivered his speeches in Andhra Pradesh in Hindi, which were

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Rajendra Prasad next went to Kerala where he spent over a week and addressed fifty-seven meetings and collected a sum of over Rupees four thousand for Congress work. A careful perusal of Rajendra Prasad’s idea of undertaking an all India tour and an analysis of his speeches delivered during the course of the meetings he addressed, reveal that the tours were planned with a view to resurrecting and reinvigorating the Indian National Congress for a bigger leap in the coming phase of the Freedom Struggle. His words were illustrative of this when he urged people in a speech delivered at Tellichery:

*I ask what is wrong in the Congress programme for achieving unity of the various communities which inhabit this land?* I ask what is wrong in encouraging the establishment of cottage industries which we have taken up as one of our important items of work? *How can we expect to win Swaraj if we continue to treat millions of our own people as untouchables in this very land?* (Emphasis added.)

He further advised people to address these issues, as that alone can strengthen the Congress and the nationalist cause. “It is easy enough”, he warned people, “to demolish what has been built, (but) more creation of discontent is no solution of the problem of poverty of this country.” Dwelling on the achievements of Congress over the past fifty years and elaborating the Congress policy and programme of activities, he further said:

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129 Ibid.
130 Ibid.
131 Ibid. p. 142.
Chapter One

The Congress has, after fifty years of services and sacrifices by generations of men and women, succeeded in winning a certain amount of confidence of all classes. Does anyone imagine that this great affection which this great institution has won for itself is of no value in the struggle for freedom? I regard it as the greatest national asset which we have in our possession today, and I regard it as a great sin against the country if anyone wishes to destroy or to injure this prestige. I ask all friends who are interested in the freedom of the country to add to this prestige, to increase it, and if they cannot do that, at any rate, to leave it untouched. It is easy to destroy but very difficult to build. The Congress had been working as your mouth-piece for winning freedom. If the Congress is strong, it is because you have given it that strength. 132

During his tour meetings he also took up the issues like Khadi and village industries and the very idea he had was to popularize them. At the opening ceremony of the Khadi and Swadeshi Exhibition at Calicut he said that “the problem in India was not to introduce mechanized labour to displace human labour, but to provide work to the villagers in their own houses”. 133 He made an appeal to all there to encourage growth of cottage industries and help the villages thereby to regain their lost prosperity.

132 Ibid.
133 Letter from Krishnadas, 5 December, 1935, Rajendra Prasad Papers.
Chapter One

The Golden Jubilee Celebrations of the Congress

An important landmark event of Rajendra Prasad's tenure as President was holding of the Golden Jubilee celebrations of the Congress, which had completed fifty years of its formation on 28 December 1935. As a mark of its revitalization and reorganization, after the repressive years during the Civil Disobedience Movement, and also as a tribute to the unstinted testimony of the people's faith in it during the recently held Central Assembly elections, the Congress decided to celebrate it on a grand scale throughout India. The spontaneous response from across the country was beyond expectations. Rajendra Prasad as President of the Congress issued a message on this occasion, which the Congress Working Committee decided was to be read everywhere during the celebrations.

This was a recapitulation of its programme, policies and policies:

This day, fifty years ago, the National Congress met for the first time in Bombay with only a sprinkling of delegates who could hardly be called elected representatives, but who were nevertheless true servants of the people of India. This Congress had the freedom of the people as its definitive goal, but 'freedom' was an undefined word. It has now obtained a concrete shape, it means Poorna Swaraj or complete independence; it means control by the chosen representative of India. It means freedom not for one class or race or clan, but freedom for all, including the poorest of her people. In order to end the exploitation of the masses, political freedom must include real economic freedom. The means for the attainment of that goal are also well defined. They must be legitimate and peaceful. These means have been knowingly
adopted by the Congress since 1920. In their most acute form they have included non-violent non-cooperation, and civil, i.e. non-violent resistance, under which thousands of people, men and women, have suffered imprisonment, confiscation of their property and loss of their cherished possessions. Many have suffered personal injury, even death, through lathi charges, and the like. For reasons well-known to all, civil resistance has been suspended.

From a very small beginning the Congress has now become the most powerful political organisation representing the masses of India, and has branches covering the whole of the country from the Himalayas in the north to Kanya Kumari in the extreme south. Its present programme includes membership in the legislatures, revival of and encouragement to hand-spinning and hand weaving, promotion of useful village small industries, reconstruction of village life in its economic, educational, social and hygienic aspects, removal of untouchability, promotion of inter-communal unity, total abstinence, national education, spread of useful knowledge among adult populations, organization of industrial labour, organization of peasants, and improvement of their economic condition by the revival of village industries.

The Congress thus covers about every sphere of national activity. It has had the adherence of some of the noblest of men and women of India as also of the masses, who have responded to the
Congress call to sacrifice. Such an organisation may well be proud of its achievement. But this is no time for jubilation, or resting on our oars. The work yet to be accomplished is great and needs much patient toil, endless sacrifice and unflinching determination.

Let us bow down our heads to all those men, women and children –Known and unknown –who have laid down their lives for the freedom of India, who have suffered woes and privations, and who are still paying the penalty for loving their motherland. Let us to-day also in grateful reverence recall the services of those who sowed seeds of this mighty organization, who nurtured it with their unremitting labour and sacrifice.

The small seedling that was planted fifty years ago, has now grown into a mighty tree with branches spreading over this vast country, and has now blossomed in the sacrifices of countless men and women. It is for those that are now left behind to nourish the tree by their further services and sacrifices so that it may bear fruit and make India the free and prosperous country that nature intended her to be. Let this be a day of remembrance and of renewing our resolve to win Poorna Swaraj which, in the late Lokmanya’s words, is our birth right.”

The principal function the Golden Jubilee of the Congress was held in Bombay at the same place where the first session of the Congress had been held fifty years ago in

134 The Hindustan Times, 29 December 1935.
1885. It was, indeed, a landmark occasion in the fifty years of history of the Congress. It was also a significant event of the tenure of Rajendra Prasad as President of the Congress. True to his way of working, with a profound sense of devotion to the purpose, he dedicated himself to its celebrations. When after reaching Bombay, he learnt that Dinshaw Wacha, the oldest Ex-President of the Congress and the only survivor of those who attended the first session of the Congress in 1885, was seriously ill; he at once felt an urge to pay him a visit. This was not only a mark of respect to him but this was also symbolic gesture of respect to the spirit of the Congress and the nation as a whole. In all humility and earnestness he visited him and sought his blessings for the occasion.

The main function had been fixed on 28 December but on a day prior to that on 27 December he opened the Khadi exhibition at Bombay signifying the beginning of the Jubilee celebrations. The main function was fixed at the same venue, the hall of the Gokuldas Tejpal Pathshala, Bombay, where the first Congress had been held under the presidency W.C. Bannerji. In the same hall, the Congress had met fifty years ago; and scenes reminiscent of the first session prevailed here. The Congressmen came in huge procession from the Congress House and other parts of the city in the morning, and a representative all-party gathering assembled under the presidency of Sarojini Naidu to extended Jubilee felicitations. Rajendra Prasad unfurled the Congress flag and then Pandit Malaviya unveiled the commemoration tablet fixed at the entrance of the main hall where the first Congress had been held. The tiny hall of the Pathshala was overcrowded with people of all communities and all shades of political opinion, men and women, and the speeches on the occasion had to be relayed over the loud speakers to the large

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135 Known as Sir Dinshaw Wacha, he was the President of the Calcutta session of the Congress in 1901.
137 The Hindustan Times, 29 December 1935
gathering waiting outside.\textsuperscript{138} Sarojini Naidu presided over the function, and in her speech she highlighted the importance of the day and the function:

To-day marks an epoch in the history of the nation which must move every Indian’s heart with pride and pleasure. I am myself deeply stirred to have been chosen to preside on this historic occasion. It is the chivalry of the Indian people that the only Indian women who had the proud privilege of presiding over the Indian National Congress should have been asked to preside over this memorable ceremony to do honour to these numerous patriots, famous and anonymous, who have built up the Indian National Congress, which is the symbol of India’s invincible fervor to win Swaraj, and who have aroused patriotic feelings in us and made us articulate. In this very hall, fifty years ago, a small group of patriots met together and sowed the first seed of the harvest which we are about to reap. Let us honour these men who were the standard bearers of India’s freedom.\textsuperscript{139}

Malaviya also highlighted the significance of the existence of the Congress over the years and urged the detractors of the Congress to realize it:

In the battle for freedom there are bound to be ups and downs. Think of the conditions fifty years ago and compare them with

\textsuperscript{138} IAR, 1935, Vol. II, P. 263
\textsuperscript{139} Ibid.
to-day's conditions. You will then see what the Indian National Congress has really achieved. It may not be goal of Swaraj, but nevertheless it is something of which every Indian ought to be proud.\textsuperscript{140}

The memorial plaque appropriately had been engraved with these words:

\begin{quote}
In this historic hall on 28\textsuperscript{th} December, 1885, a band of gallant patriots laid the foundation of the Indian National Congress, which during these fifty years has been built up stone by stone, tier by tier by the faith and devotion, courage and sacrifice of countless men and women as the pledge and symbol of their invincible purpose to secure to India, their motherland, her legitimate birthright of Swaraj.\textsuperscript{141}
\end{quote}

In the afternoon the function saw a huge procession leave Azad Maidan, led by the Bombay Mayor, K.F. Nariman and the members of the Bombay Provincial Congress Committee, which finally culminated in a huge public meeting at Gowalia Tank Maidan that Rajendra Prasad himself presided over.\textsuperscript{142}

The Silver Jubilee celebrations were not confined to Bombay alone. Rather it was observed and celebrated in a systematic and elaborate manner in all parts of the country. In many places, local programmes had also been included in the celebrations to suit local circumstances and include workers. All the provincial Congress Committees had made

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Ibid
\item Ibid.
\item The Hindustan Times, 29 December 1935. Also in JAR, 1935, Vol. II, P. 263.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
arrangements to celebrate the event in a fitting manner not merely in their provincial headquarters but also in the remotest villages. The Khaddar and village industries exhibitions and Jubilee Melas were organized at Karachi, Hyderabad, Nagpur, Guwahati, Jorhat, Muzzafarnagar and Lucknow. In many places, sports and games, kavi sammelans (Hindi poetry sessions), mushairas (Urdu poetry sessions), and musical concerts were organized. In a number of places the poor were either fed or alms were given to them. Children’s fetes were organized and sweets given to them.\(^{143}\) The Municipal and local bodies at various centers also participated in the celebrations. Many influential public bodies conveyed their felicitations and messages of goodwill.\(^{144}\) To commemorate the occasion the AICC office came out with a series of Congress Golden Jubilee brochures, dealing with the political, economic and social problems of the country. It also published a voluminous book written by Pattabhi Sitaramayya, a member of the Working Committee, The History of the Indian National Congress, 1885-1935, which dealt with the freedom struggle since 1885 and highlighted the achievements of the Congress.\(^ {145}\) Rajendra Prasad, who wrote the introduction of this book, reminded the readers about the glorious struggle of the Congress since the time it could hardly be called an organization of the elected representatives:

Fifty years ago the Indian National Congress met for the first time in Bombay with a small number of delegates who could hardly be called elected representatives, but who were nevertheless true servants of the people. Ever since then it has been striving for winning freedom for the people of India. In the

\(^{144}\) Ibid.
\(^{145}\) Ibid., p. 261.
beginning its aim was indefinite but it has always insisted on a democratic form of Government responsible to the people of India and representatives of all communities and classes inhabiting this vast country. It started with the hope and confidence that British statesmanship and the British Government would rise equal to the occasion and establish truly representative institutions giving the right to the people of India in the interest of India....

That hope and confidence have been gradually shattered by the action of the British Government in India and in England. The attitude of the British Government has become more and more stiff as the national consciousness has become more and more expressive.¹⁴⁶

Before commending the book he recounted the travails through which the Congress had passed and paid tribute to "those who sowed the seeds of this mighty organisation" and nurtured it with their unrelenting labour and sacrifice:

The Congress has thus marched on from stage to stage and covers practically every stage of national activity.... Starting as a small organisation, it now covers the entire country with a network of branches and enjoys the confidence of the masses of the country.... The

organisation itself is a great national asset which it should be the duty of every Indian to increase and preserve. It is bound to play an ever increasing part in the struggle for freedom that still lies ahead. This is no time for resting on our oars. The work yet to be accomplished is great and needs much patient toil, endless sacrifice and unflinching determination. It is nothing less than the attainment of Purna Swaraj. Let us bow down our heads to all those men, women, and children, known and unknown, who have laid down their lives, who have suffered woes and privations, and who are still paying the penalty for loving their motherland.

Let us also in grateful reverence recall the services of those who sowed the seeds of this mighty organisation, who nurtured it with their unremitting labour and sacrifice. The small seedling that was planted fifty years ago has now grown into a mighty tree with branches spreading over this vast country and now blossomed in the sacrifice of countless men and women. It is for those that are now left behind to nourish the tree by their further services and sacrifice, so that it may bear fruit and make India the free and prosperous country that nature intended her to be.147

The Golden Jubilee celebrations were immensely successful. The response of the people once again brought to the fore the strength of the Congress as an organization and renewed its claims as the representative body of the Indian Nation and the no-official

147 Ibid., pp. xx-xxii.
Parliament of India. No wonder Nehru found a “bubbling vitality” everywhere in the country after his taking over the reins of the Congress from Rajendra Prasad as the President of the Congress in 1936.\textsuperscript{148} The secret, one could now say confidently, lay in the work initiated by the erstwhile President Rajendra Prasad.

\textsuperscript{148} I was told, when I returned from Europe, that the country was demoralized and we had to go slow. My own little experience during the past four months has not confirmed this impression. Indeed I have found a bubbling vitality wherever I have gone and I have been surprised at the public response. What this is due to I cannot say definitely. Nehru to Mahatma Gandhi, 5 July 1936, Jawaharlal Nehru, ed., \textit{A Bunch of old Letters: Written mostly to Jawaharlal Nehru and some written by him}, Bombay, 1958, p. 188