CHAPTER-VIII

Non - Co-operation Movement-II

Introduction:

After the historic Dandi March, political events were taking place swiftly. Pacts, Conferences, Assurances and resumption of movements etc., all happened within a short period. It seemed the issue of dominion status and Swaraj in near future was guaranteed, but British again showing their old style of betrayal disposed the proposals. It was during this period that British Government utilized the concept of 'divide and rule'. It not only tried to divide India on religious basis but also on caste basis. Thus to avoid communal representation and division among the major religion 'Poona Pact' was signed. However, the individual civil disobedience continued, as the mass civil disobedience was adjourned till the conciliatory efforts yielded.

Gandhi-Irwin Pact:

In the month of July 1930, Lord Irwin, during his speech in the Legislative Assembly, expressed the hope that it was perhaps not too late for 'wiser counsels to prevail'. He also encouraged Sapru and Jaykar to see Gandhi in the Yeravda jail to 'merge the detached bond and encourage the Congress to be represented at the Conference'.

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Gandhi stated that, personally, he would have no objection to a Round Table Conference which concerned itself with safeguards, during the period of transition, to full self government provided he was satisfied with the composition of the conference and was given the freedom to raise the issue of independence. In such a case, Civil Disobedience Movement would be terminated, but peaceful picketing and salt manufacture would continue. In return Gandhi expected the British government, to free all satyagrahis convicted during their non-violent campaign, restore confiscated properties, refund fines and securities, reinstate officers who had resigned or been dismissed, retract ordinances and not enforce the penal clauses of the Salt Act.

The Viceroy was not happy with the demands of Gandhi, which constituted some sort of pre-conditions to the suspension of the Civil Disobedience Movement. He informed the Secretary of State on 13th August 1930, "Peace efforts of Sapru and Jaykar continue... It is too much to hope that they will call off Civil Disobedience Movement unconditionally or even suggest proposals which could be accepted by Government."

During the first Round Table Conference, Gandhi was in jail, and the Congress took no part in its deliberations. As its session was drawing to its close, the Viceroy had decided to make a determined effort to secure the cooperation of the Congress. He fully realized the gravity of the loss of public revenues and the enormous damage done to the British trade by the Civil Disobedience Movement.
Gandhi was released from Yeravda Central Prison, Poona, on 26th January 1931. The Liberal leaders Sapru, Sastri and Jaykar, on landing in Bombay on 6th February 1931 declared that the attainment by India of the dominion status was no longer in dispute. But when they reached Allahabad and held prolonged discussions with the Congress Leaders, they had nothing convincing to tell them about their achievements in the First Round Table Conference. The Congress Working Committee, therefore, authorized Gandhi to negotiate with the Viceroy. Gandhi was not overwhelmed by the achievements of the conference, nor did he feel optimistic on the possibilities of an understanding with the government. Nevertheless, before coming to any decision, he wrote to Irwin on 14th February 1931, seeking an interview with him as a moral obligation to make a response to his gesture of good will in releasing the members of the Congress of the Congress Working Committee.

On February 18, Gandhi reached Viceregal Lodge five minutes earlier than the scheduled time, and the conversations began at 2-30 p.m., and no one except the two entered the room. Gandhi's six demands, which were the absolute minimum for the peace negotiations to begin, were:

- General amnesty;
- Immediate cessation of repression;
- Restitution of all confiscated property;
- Reinstatement of all government servants punished on political grounds;
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> Liberty to manufacture salt and picket liquor and foreign cloth shops and enquiry into the excess committed by the police.

The Viceroy subsequently agreed five of these demands to and the last one was not likely to create a deadlock. However, the main hindrance to immediate ceasefire lay in the issue whether the government would agree to an enquiry into specified cases of police extremes. Throughout his negotiations with the Viceroy, Gandhi seemed to be in a peace-making mood. The response of the Viceroy far exceeded his anticipation. So settlement seemed to be in sight.

The agreement was the result of fifteen days' negotiations, in which Gandhi visited the Viceroy's House eight times and spent altogether twenty-four hours, besides undergoing the strain of discussing the terms of negotiation with the Congress Executive from time to time for longer hours than he spent with the Viceroy.

The Congress Working Committee took two hours in discussing the draft agreement and gave unanimous support to it. After obtaining the formal approval of his colleagues, Gandhi drove to the Viceroy's House, where within an incredible space of five minutes the agreement was confirmed on 4th March 1931 and came to be known as the Gandhi-Irwin Pact.  

Commenting on the outcome of Gandhi-Irwin negotiations, the Free Press Journal observed, 'The conclusions of truce in no way solve the root problem, namely, the transference of power from England to India'. 6 The Times of India under the caption, 'Peace At Last', where as the Pioneer
commended the Pact as 'Lord Irwin's Great Achievement in Conciliation'. The Amrita Bazaar Patrika commended, 'A Sigh of Relief: Political Tension of Twelve Months Ends', and the Bombay Chronicle criticized the Pact by stating 'Delhi Proposals Give Us Nothing'.

Two days after signing the Pact, Gandhi expressed his reaction in a public meeting in Delhi on 7th March 1931: "It is a provisional temporary settlement we have arrived at.......... I may tell you that throughout the negotiations I was not acting on my own; I was backed by the whole Working Committee. We brought all the pressure we could to bear on our negotiations and satisfied ourselves with what in justice we could have under the provisional settlement'.

Gandhi believed in independence in association with Great Britain and had been fully determined to achieve it, but he had not reached nearer to it. The Pact did not mention the Congress demand for independence even by implications. The oft-repeated earlier demand for Dominion Status or the 'eleven points' which the Mahatma had previously considered to be the 'acid' test of British sincerity, had not found mention anywhere in the agreement. Yet, he signed the Pact and agreed to attend the projected Second Round Table Conference in London, without any definite commitment on the part of the government.

After about three weeks of the signing of the Pact, when the Indian National Congress held its session in Karachi under the Presidentship of Vallabhbhai Patel on 29th March 1931, there was a note of great indignation
and deep resentment at the executions of Bhagat Singh and his colleagues, Raj Guru and Sukhdev and of sorrow by the news of Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi's martyrdom at Kanpur. In a depressed mood, Jawaharlal Nehru moved a resolution for the approval of the Pact and reiterated the Congress demand for Poorna Swaraj and the right of either party to end the partnership at will. The resolution committed the Congress to participate in the Round Table Conference and allowed the delegates freedom to accept such adjustment as might be necessary in the interests of India.

Gandhi who was appointed the sole representative of the Congress for the forthcoming Round Table Conference, explained that 'as a Satyagrahi, he could not refuse the invitation of the British Prime Minister and the Viceroy of India to attend the Round Table Conference, although ..........sometimes I have felt within myself what is there in this Conference after all, and of what use it will be?' Before Gandhi's departure, the Labour Government went out of office in England. Lord Willington succeeded Irwin as Viceroy in April 1931 and Samuel Heare assumed the post of the Secretary of State for India in August 1931. Under the new government in England, the character of the policy till then pursued by Wedgwood Benn and Irwin towards India underwent a change. In India the attitude of the British bureaucracy did not change even after the signing of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact. The official machinery under the new Viceroy did not implement its terms.

Gandhi returned from the Round Table conference to Bombay on 28th December 1931, dissatisfied and grim. He was apprised of the new
developments in the country during his absence from India. Gandhi sent a telegram to Lord Willington expressing surprise at the ordinances and arrests, which greeted him on returning to Bombay. The Viceroy, in his reply justified what the government had done in Bengal to prevent immoral assassination of their officers and of private citizens. This reply grieved Gandhi. In a telegraphic communication to the Viceroy, he expressed his opinion that the constitutional issue dwindled into insignificance in face of ordinances and acts which must, if not met with stubborn resistance, result in utter demoralization of the nation. The last telegram of Gandhi dated the 3rd January 1932 was taken as a threat to resume movement: the bureaucracy let loose its offensive on the 4th January by arresting Gandhi and removing him to the Yeravda jail.

The news of the arrest of Gandhi spread like wild fire.

Hartal was observed elsewhere in the country. Various cities and towns like Calcutta, Madras, Delhi, Patna, Allahabad, Ahmedabad, Kanpur, Lucknow, Lahore and many others showed considerable resentment in a non-violent way. Students observed strikes; processions were taken out and meetings were held. The political atmosphere suddenly became burning in the country. To keep the situation under control and prevent the spread of tension, the government issued orders under section 144 Cr. P.C. prohibiting processions, meetings and carrying of lethal weapons and lathis within the municipal limits for a limited period wherever it considered expedient.

In Karnataka, the Gandhi-Irwin agreement did not materially alter the nature of the struggle. The people of the taluka of Sirsi and Siddapur in North
Kanara, and Hirekerur in Dharwad district were not in a position to pay their land revenue on account of the failure of rains. They represented their troubles to the government and appealed for exemption from tax payment. The government refused to grant any concession and the result was that Satyagraha was taken up in all the three talukas.

Arrangements were made to start the no-tax campaign in Karnataka. R.R. Diwakar was deputed to Sirsi and Siddapur taluks and D.P. Karmakar to prepare the people for the fight. 'Dictators' were appointed to lead the movements; bands of volunteers were organized and people were informed of the gravity of the situations. Smt. Gauramma was placed in charge of the lady volunteers. In Ankola, about 700 khatedars signed the pledge and suspended the revenue from the first kist beginning on the 5th February 1932. Out of a total of Rs.40,000 the amount withheld was Rs. 7,000. In Siddapur, the demand for first kist was about Rs.60,000 and out of this Rs.30,000 was withheld. As a result of it, their properties were attached and sold. Some of the ryots lost their all. The police, the patels and other government servants ruled these taluks with lathis, canes and whips. Some of the villages, particularly those in Heroor area in Siddapur taluk were exhausted of all adult male population by arrest, detention and conviction.

The part played by the women in the Satyagraha was commendable. Their work was confined mostly to picketing, taking part in processions and Satyagraha before the houses of those who bought seized-property at government auctions. They were arrested and bore the inhuman cruelty of the
police with courage and determination. The Satyagrahi ladies at Akkemji and Mavingudi in Siddapur taluk were dragged along with the road, beaten with lathis and canes and even whipped. Their sarees were pulled and torn and they were abused in the foulest language. At Mavingudi, a police havaldar was reported to have threatened two women, 'Do you want lathis? Do you want husband? Or do you want me?\textsuperscript{12}

The Congress carried on the work for Swadeshi in every nook and corner of the province. As a result of their efforts, the foreign cloth was sealed at Hubli, Mangalore, Bijapur, Belgaum, Gokak, Kasargod, Nippani, Athani and other places. The Swadeshi Sabha in Bangalore helped other parts of Karnataka in circulating its bulletins. Liquor shops were also picketed and the cutting of shendi trees was carried on in the Districts of Belgaum and Dharwad.

In this region a few important national days were celebrated with discussions, meetings and processions, participated both by men and women. Such days were the Independence Day, Gandhi Day and All-India Prisoners' Day.

Some newspapers, which published the pre-movement news, ceased their publications when their editors were asked by the government to pay securities and fines. The newspapers were Karmaveer, Taruna Karnataka, Janmabhumi, Udaya and Karnataka Vaibhava.
Poona Pact:

By February 1933, there was lull in Congress activities. On August 17, 1932, after the third session of the Round Table Conference was over, Ramsay MacDonald, the then British Prime Minister, announced his Majesties Government provisional scheme of minority representation known as the Communal Award whereby not only were the Depressed Classes (the so-called untouchables) given separate electorates, they were also approved the additional right of contesting seats in the general constituencies. The separate electorates, according to the scheme, were to lapse automatically at the end of 20 years. Gandhi, who was then in the Yeravda Central Prison, was such maneuver calculated to drive an additional wedge between the caste Hindus and the Untouchables in yet another effort by the British Government to counteract the weight of the majority weight. And he lost no time in apprising the British Government of his determination. He had already written to Sir Samuel Hoare, the then secretary of State for India, in his letter of March 11, 1932, "Separate electorate is neither a panacea nor any remedy for the crushing degradation they (untouchables) have groaned under. I, therefore, respectfully inform His Majesty's Government that in the event of their decision creating separate electorate for the depressed classes, I must fast unto death". 13

On August 18th Gandhi, reiterating his standpoint, wrote to the British Prime Minister that in protest against the communal award, he would begin his "fast unto death" on September 20th. Ramsay MacDonald, in his letter of September 8th, regretted that the Government's decision could not be changed
unless the various Indian groups and communities agreed to an alternative as between themselves. This produced a concern and disappointment throughout the country and as a result several orthodox Hindu Temples were thrown open to the Untouchables. But this gesture could not solve the constitutional problem.

As announced, Gandhi commenced his fast on September 20th 1932. The Government, thinking lest he should die in prison, offered to release him under certain conditions. Gandhi utterly refused to accept the conditions. The following day a conference of the Hindu Leaders was called to find out a solution to the problem. But Dr. B.R.Ambedkar, a leader of the Untouchables, remained adamant on the issue of separate electorates. Four days passed in tense discussions and Gandhi’s condition grew worse causing grave concern. Suddenly, on the fifth day of the fast, Dr. Ambedkar gave way and an agreement was reached. Under the provisions of agreement, known as the 'Poona Pact', the Untouchables, abandoned their demand for separate electorates. In return, they were guaranteed a number of reserved seats from those assigned to the Untouchables by that Award. Mac Donald lost no time in telegraphically communicating the British Government’s acceptance of the Poona Pact. On September 26th, Gandhi ended his fast.

Suddenly another shock was administered by Gandhi. On May 8, 1933, when the civil disobedience struggle was at its lowest ebb, the Mahatma began a twenty-one-day fast for "self-purification". On the first day of his fast, the government released him. The Mahatma reciprocated by recommending the
suspension of the Movement for a month, simultaneously calling upon the Government to withdraw ordinances and to release all political prisoners, estimated at about 9,000, including a few big leaders like Jawaharlal and Rajendra Prasad. The Government was adamant and insisted on complete termination of the Civil Disobedience agitation. Total surrender now seemed to be inevitable. In mid-June the suspension was extended to another six weeks, and in the following months at a conference of prominent Congressmen, held under Gandhi's leadership, mass civil disobedience was formally abandoned. However, he permitted individual civil disobedience. He himself offered individual Satyagraha at the beginning of August, and was arrested and sentenced to a year's imprisonment. The end arrived, as he announced that he would adjure civil disobedience of any kind until the conclusion of his one-year sentence, i.e., August 1934.

Some leaders, however, made obligatory demonstrations of Individual Civil Disobedience by picketing shops, distributing proscribed pamphlets and publicly stirring people to join the Civil Disobedience and courted arrest and prosecution. This action was confined to some towns and resulted in an insignificant number of arrests. The tempo of the movement was so much undermined that the public seemed unenthusiastic to the revival of any kind of agitation.¹⁴

Within a few days the government took speedy action against other Congress leaders in various districts. In fact, repression and coercion, in one form or another had been going on since the truce days of March 1931 to
December 1931, under one pretext or another. A reign of terror was established and even conceivable variety of atrocity had been resorted to. There has been indiscriminate lathi charges, firing, canning, beating with shoes, kicking, stripping necked, ducking in pounds, drenching in water in the mid-night cold and then leaving the victims without food and shelter in a naked state in some out of the way place. There had been cases in which the volunteers were not allowed to answer calls of nature, sticks and lathis were inserted into the rectum of volunteers; their male organ were pulled mercilessly. Besides pulling hair uprooted several volunteers; and immoral proposals and attempts to have unnatural intercourse with boy-volunteers were made several instances. Even women were not spared. They were abused insulted and humiliated in numerous ways. Volunteers were so severely belaboured that most of them found it difficult even to breathe properly and even passed blood instead of urine. Children of very tender age were refused to their mothers in the lock-up. The condition of 'c' class prisoners was extremely bad.
Conclusion:
The second phase of the movement inaugurated in 1932 elicited far less popular support than the first phase of 1930, and was stifled by the iron hand of the government under Lord Willington. Nonetheless, the two campaigns between 1930-34 were of considerable significance in the political history of India. Although the Civil Disobedience, as a whole, neither led to Poorna Swaraj nor did it influence the process of constitution reform, significantly, it proved a powerful factor in inculcating sense of unity in the political thinking of the people. Participation in it became one of the potent qualifications for political place and a source of prestige in the years, which followed. Moreover, these campaigns greatly encouraged young men and women to participate in the future nation-building activities. The Congress, as a political party, demonstrated political ideas and actions throughout the country and generated political awareness even in the remote villages. It indeed convinced persons representing different shades of views and opinions.
Reference:


2) The Tribune, 28 January 1931.


5) The Tribune, 5 March 1931.

6) The Tribune, 7 March 1931.

7) The Pioneer, 6 March 1931.

8) The Bombay Chronicle, 6 March 1931.

9) Young India, 12 March 1931.


11) Young India, 7 January 1932.


