Chapter-5

NADIA DISTRICT AND THE ‘QUIT INDIA’ MOVEMENT: BACKGROUND

At the failure of the Cripps Mission to make a suitable solution of the-then political problems of India relating to the demand of India’s independence due to the reactionary imperialist policy of the British Government, ¹ the All India Congress Committee (hereafter A.I.C.C.) on the 8th August, 1942 took, in its Bombay session, the resolution on the ‘Quit India’ movement to be launched under the leadership of Gandhiji, ² declaring that

“…the immediate ending of British rule in India is an urgent necessity, both for the sake of India and for the success of the cause of the United Nations….A free India will assure this success by throwing all her great resources in the struggle for freedom and against the aggression of Nazism, Fascism and Imperialism….”. ³

With the adoption of the resolution by the A.I.C.C. the ‘Quit India’ movement started theoretically. But the British Government was determined not to let it turn into a practical rebellion. The police thus arrested all the important Congress leaders, including Mahatma Gandhiji, Moulana Abul Kalam Azad,
Jawaharlal Nehru, Rajendra Prasad, Ballabhai Patel and so on before the sunrise of the 9th August, 1942. And their arrest directly unleashed an unprecedented wave of mass-struggle, converting the movement into a practical and radical one.

The only Gandhian suggestion of “Do or Die” regarding the ‘Quit India’ movement created an exciting pro-movement wave all over the country. And the district of Nadia, an important area of Bengal (now West Bengal), like all other parts of India, was also greatly influenced by this great wave which ultimately resulted in the country-wide life and death struggle against the Raj. In this direction, people of Nadia district had tried their best to accelerate the speed of the ‘Quit India’ movement, i.e., the August rebellion, of India in 1942.

It was mainly the Nadia District Congress Committee (hereafter N.D.C.C.) that had taken the lead in launching the August movement throughout the district. And the Nadia District Committees of other parties, like the Congress Socialist Party (C.S.P.), the Forward Bloc (F.B.) the Revolutionary Communist Party of India (R.C.P.I.) etc., excepting that of the Communist Party of India (C.P.I.), also joined the movement and supported all the pro-movement activities of the Congress Party. In fact, along with the N.D.C.C, the District Committees of these parties took sincere steps in favour of the August movement and organized hartals, protest meetings, processions and even sabotage activities in order to make the movement in the district a success.
However, we shall now start the discussion on the ‘Quit India’ movement in district of Nadia by making a survey of the political history of the N.D.C.C. in relation to the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee (hereafter B.P.C.C.), and then go to look at actual course of action of the movement as it took place in Nadia district.

By 1942, the N.D.C.C. had already achieved fame for its organizing skill and working discipline. It had taken laudable steps in raising protest and launching different movements during 1910s, 1920s and 1930s such as the protest movement against the imperialist policy of partition of Bengal(1905), Boycott and Swadeshi movement (1905-8), protest movement against the Rowlatt Act, (1919), the Non-violent Non-co-operation Movement (1921), the Civil Disobedience Movement (1930-32) etc.

It is interesting to note that a strong No-Tax Satyagraha-Movement was organized by the N.D.C.C. at Tehatta, a village of Nadia district, during 1932-33 in support of the 2nd Civil Disobedience Movement of early 1930s. However, while launching the movement against the imperialist British rule, the leaders and supporters of the N.D.C.C. were arrested, beaten and even fired upon by the police. Its leaders like Smarajit Bandyopadhayay, Shibaram Gupta, Jagannath Majumdar, Dhirananda Goswami, (Prof.) Bireswar Basu, Haripada Chattopadhayay, Amarendra Nath Chakrabarty, Anantahari Biswas, Harendra Nath
Bose, Sudhiranjan Lahiri, Nitai Paul, Kanai Paul, Phani Khan, Niranjan Modak, Someswar Chowdhury, Satyesh Bhattacharyya and many others had been the guiding force of the-then district-politics of Nadia.

It is in this regard that the name of Tarakdas Bandyopadhayay deserves especial attention, for the N.D.C.C. had revolved around him at that time. Formerly he was the secretary of the N.D.C.C and then its President. He was also the Secretary of the B.P.C.C.; and as the B.P.C.C. Secretary, he successfully directed, in 1940, the Hollwell Monument Movement, launched by Subhash Chandra Bose.  

He had direct contact with every nook and corner of Nadia district. He was arrested in 1940 and imprisoned for 6 years. From the jail he instructed his followers in Nadia to launch the August movement i.e., the ‘Quit India’ movement and suggested measures to conduct it.  

However, after his arrest Smarajit Bandyopadhayay, Shibaram Gupta, Sanat Mukhopadhayay, Shyampada Bhattacharyya, Jagannath Majumder, Harendra Nath Bose, Kanai Paul, Niranjan Modak etc. came into the fore-front of the anti-imperialist political movement of Nadia district.

It is, however, to be noted here that at that time (1939) the N.D.C.C., was declared suspended by the A.I.C.C. as the sequel of the rift between Congress High Command and Subhash Chandra Bose, the-then A.I.C.C President. Subhash Chandra Bose had always preached direct action i.e., armed struggle against the
British Government to achieve India’s independence. But “since September, 1938,” as Subhash Chandra Bose himself wrote, “Mahatma Gandhi had consistently urged that a national struggle was out of the question in the near future, while others, like the writer (i.e., Subhash Chandra Bose) who were not less patriotic than him, were equally convinced that the country was internally more ripe for a revolution than ever before and that the coming international crisis would give India an opportunity for achieving her emancipation, which is rare in human history.”  

Thus a conflict of opinion regarding the nationalist struggle was there between Gandhiji and Subhash Chandra Bose and this conflict ultimately resulted in the resignation of Bose from the Congress Presidentship (at the meeting of the A.I.C.C., held on the April 29, 1939). And now Subhash Chandra Bose formed a new leftist party within the Congress, known as the Forward Bloc(F.B.), in order to rally the entire Left Wing of the Congress under a single banner. Though the Forward Bloc was a bloc within the Congress, yet presently there was little connexion between the two.

It was against such background that Subhash Chandra Bose directly refused to abide by the A.I.C.C. resolution of June 1939 that “In matters of policy if there is a difference between the ministry and the P.C.C. (Provincial Congress Committee), reference should be made to the Parliamentary Board. Public discussion Should be avoided.” For, this resolution, to him, was undemocratic
and unconstitutional,\textsuperscript{18} as it curbed the civil right of the Congressmen to freedom of speech and expression. He organized public meetings against the A.I.C.C. resolution; and under his direction many protest meetings were held on the 9th July, 1942 in Bengal and Uttar Pradesh.\textsuperscript{19} This action of him was, however, considered by the A.I.C.C. as a breach of its said Resolution.\textsuperscript{20} And the Congress Working Committee thus (after the passage of the formal ‘Show cause’ notice, issued by the A.I.C.C. to Bose, and its reply by him) passed a resolution declaring that Subhas Chandra Bose, “was declared disqualified as President of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee for 3 years as from August, 1939.”\textsuperscript{21} This is why the-then B.P.C.C., over which Bose had really had a strong hold and which was determined to follow his radical lead was automatically declared suspended by the A.I.C.C.\textsuperscript{22} And in the place of the suspended B.P.C.C. highly loyal to, and mainly led by, Subhash Chandra Bose, an ad-hoc Bengal Provincial Congress Committee (ad-hoc B.P.C.C.) was formed by the A.I.C.C.\textsuperscript{23} with Dr. Prafulla Chandra Ghosh as its President.

Similarly, the N.D.C.C. was also suspended for its unhesitating allegiance to the Bose’s line. Tarakdas Bandyopadhayay, the most popular and influential leader of the district of Nadia and his followers whole-heartedly supported Subhash Chandra Bose’s view regarding the mass-struggle against the imperialist British Government.\textsuperscript{24} And even he was one of the founder-members of the Forward
Bloc, organized and led by Subhash Chandra Bose, and became the President of the Nadia District Forward Bloc Committee. And under the influence of Tarakdas Bandyopadhayay, who used to exercise an unchallengeable hold over the Congress politics of Nadia, almost all the important leaders and workers of the district Congress joined the Forward Bloc. 25 In fact, the Forward Bloc became the organization of the members of the suspended B.P.C.C and those of other Provincial Congress Committees having left-orientation regarding the national freedom struggle; and especially in Bengal, it was simply the another name of the suspended B.P.C.C. 26

Consequently, the ad-hoc Congress Committee of the district of Nadia like that of the Bengal Provincial body had become organizationally much weaker since the most influential Congress leaders of Bengal (including Nadia) were in the suspended B.P.C.C., i.e., in the Forward Bloc. However, at that time the Secretary of the ad-hoc N.D.C.C. was jagannath Majumder, an influential district leader.

It is, however, true that before 1942, the ad-hoc Congress Committee (of both Nadia and Bengal) along with the A.I.C.C. was not at all in favour of any kind of nationalist mass-struggle against the British authority in so far as Gandhiji, who had a direct control over the A.I.C.C., did not think it necessary in near future. But as is well known Subhash Chandra Bose had been strongly preaching an
immediate nationalist struggle against the imperialist authority, without which, he heartily believed, achievement of India’s independence was quite impossible.\textsuperscript{27}

Obviously there was a tension in the relationship between the ad-hoc Congress Committee and the suspended Congress Committee of Nadia district.\textsuperscript{28} The main reason behind this tension is in brief that while the ad-hoc Congress Committee maintained a moderate attitude towards the national mass-movement against the British rule, the suspended Congress Committee was ‘radical and progressive’\textsuperscript{29} in its attitude towards the same. Apparently the attitude of the suspended Congress Committee was highly appreciated all over Bengal and other Provinces of India. And Subhash Chandra Bose of the Suspended B.P.C.C., i.e., the Forward Bloc (in the Congress) thus claimed that “We are the only Congress” (“Amrai Congress”).\textsuperscript{30} And for all practical purposes, the suspended N.D.C.C., like the suspended B.P.C.C which used to work devotedly under the ‘radical and progressive’ lead of Subhash Chandra Bose, had been the dominant force in the Congress politics of Nadia.\textsuperscript{31}

But Subhash Chandra Bose was then not in a position to launch an India-wide mass-struggle against the British Government in India, until and unless Gandhiji, the most popular leader of India, decided to do so. The net result being that the suspended N.D.C.C., like the suspended B.P.C.C., could not translate into action the ‘radical and progressive’ philosophy of Subhash Chandra Bose, it rather
waited for Gandhiji’s call for nationalist struggle. In fact, Subhash Chandra Bose’s effort of organizing mass-movement against the British Government ultimately failed due to the non-co-operation of the Gandhi-wing of the A.I.C.C.32

But after the episode of the Cripps ‘Mission the A.I.C.C., as per Gandhiji’s suggestion, passed on the 8th August, 1942, in its Bombay session, the famous ‘Quit India’ resolution—the resolution of launching a strong movement(though on non-violent line) with the significant instruction of ‘Do or Die’. 33 And with his call started the movement immediately. Consequently, when the A.I.C.C. started the ‘Quit India’ movement, which the suspended B.P.C.C. had been really wanting so long, the said tension in the ralationship between the ad-hoc B.P.C.C. and the suspended B.P.C.C. regarding freedom movement against the British Government was reduced to naught. 34 And then both the Congress Committees ---ad-hoc and suspended--- joined hands in launching the movement.

It was against this background that a wave of mass movement swept across the district of Nadia like all other parts of India. Both the ad-hoc N.D.C.C. and the suspended N.D.C.C. presently came to act to together in organizing the ‘Quit India’ movement throughout the district. The-then Nadia’s highly popular leader Tarakdas Bandyopadhayay, a closest associate of Subhash Chandra Bose and the President of the Nadia District Forward Bloc (i.e., the suspended N.D.C.C), issued an instruction, from the jail (as he was then in Rajshahi jail,now in Bangladesh)
suggesting his followers in Nadia to act jointly with the ad-hoc N.D.C.C. to make
the movement a success, for the A.I.C.C. had fulfilled, though late, the long-
cherished demand of Subhash Chandra Bose---the demand of organizing a strong
mass movement to pressurize the British authority to leave its Indian empire.  

Accordingly, a joint meeting of the ad-hoc and suspended Congress
Committees of Nadia was called on the 10th August, 1942 at the Calcutta
residence of Mahadeb Sarkar at Wellesley Street.  Mahadeb babu was an once
honoured active Congress worker of the district; but at the time of the ‘Quit India’
movement, he was completely detached from direct politics.  And this is why it
was safe to call a meeting at his residence.  And the leaders of both the Nadia
District Congress Committee, namely, Sanat Mukhopadhayay, Vice President of
the suspended N.D.C.C., Smarajit Bandyopadhayay, Secretary of the said
Committee, Shibaram Gupta, Dhirananda Goswami, Niranjan Modak, Rampada
Raha, Sudhir Chowdhuri etc. members of the suspended Committee, and Jagannath
Majumdar, Secretary of the ad-hoc N.D.C.C., Setyesh Bhattacharyya, Haripada
Chattopadhayay etc. members of the ad-hoc Committee attended this joint
meeting.

In this secret joint meeting, all the above mentioned leaders deeply felt the
necessity of a district-wide joint action in favour of the mass movement of August,
1942. But there was no programme of action before them except the only
instruction of Gandhiji, i.e., ‘Do or Die’ to resist the ‘war effort’ of the British and to free India. This message invigorated them to organize the movement and also to make the British military preparations totally ineffective by whatever means found suitable.\textsuperscript{40} Thus in that meeting they decided not to hesitate to adopt covert method of activities, even the violent means, sabotage etc—if the circumstance so required, though emphasis was primarily given on the non-violent constitutional means. \textsuperscript{41}

Two main methods of operation were thus unanimously accepted in that meeting to organize and launch the movement in Nadia district: Overt and Covert, constitutional and sabotage, non-violent and violent. Overt constitutional method consisted of protest meeting, public processions, strikes, hoisting of national flag on all Government offices, circulation of anti-war and pro-movement leaflets and bulletines etc. On the other hand, the Covert sabotage method consisted of cutting of wires of Telephone and Telegraph, removal of railway lines and signal posts, damaging of bridges, burning of stations, trains, shelter shades and post offices, political dacoity, mail robbery etc. And both these methods were followed by the district leaders as the situation demanded. \textsuperscript{42}

In fact, the leaders of the district were mentally prepared to launch a strong movement to resist the war-efforts of the British Government and also to pressurize them to leave India; and they were thus determined, like the leaders of the other parts of India, not to make any compromise in this regard. This
uncompromising firm attitude of the local leaders bears similarity to the following statement of Vallabhbhai Patel;

“...If all the leaders are arrested tomorrow and there is no time to meet you again you should carry on the programme set forth before you by Gandhi from 1919 to 1942. Die but do not fall back. In this struggle, if instances like... the railway line is removed or an English man is murdered, the struggle will not be stopped. If the scorched earth policy is sought to be pursued here, as in other countries, do not allow it to be carried out. Face it boldly, even at the cost of violence. Carry this message to every nook and corner... you should put aside the constructive programme now and be ready to carry out Gandhi’s farman, Acts of violence even of the type of Chauri Chaura will not stop movement.”

This ‘Do or Die’ message fostered the spirit of militant nationalism in the minds of the political leaders of Nadia district as in other parts of India. It is an interesting phenomenon in this regard that not only the two Congress Committees -ad-hoc and suspended—joined hands in the course of action of the August rebellion, but also other political parties, namely R.C.P.I., Forward Bloc, Congress Socialist Party etc., except C.P.I., whole-heartedly joined the August movement to
co-operate with the Congress in its last-ditch battle against the Raj. The attitude of the local Committees of others parties towards the movement will be discussed in greater detail latter on.

It is in this way that the ‘Quit India’ movement was vigorously organized in the district of Nadia in 1942. And it is by actively participating in the movement and valiantly performing an heroic role in it through both the overt non-violent constitutional mode of operation and the covert violent mode of sabotage activities that the district of Nadia had brilliantly kept an abiding impression in the whole history of the ‘Quit India’ movement (1942) in India. Now to turn to the course of action of the movement in the district of Nadia.

NOTES AND REFERENCES


2. Ramesh Chandra Majumder, op.cit., p.531.
3. This part of the August Resolution is quoted in the *Swadhinata Sangrame Nadia* (in Bengali), Nadia District Citizens’ Council, Krishnanagar, (Nadia), 1973. p.187. See also R.C. Majumder, op.cit., p.531.

4. Gandhiji promised, “We shall do or die. We shall either free India or die in the attempt” (emphasis ours), quoted in Ramesh Chandra Majumder, op.cit., p.532.

5. See *Swadhinata Sangrame Nadia*, op.cit., pp.186-98.


7. In an interview on 27.2.1985, Shibaram Gupta had expressed this view regarding the organizing skill of the N.D.C.C. He had also given me a brief account of the disciplined character of the N.D.C.C.


11. See *Swadhinata Sangrame Nadia*, op.cit., p.188.

12. Ibid. Besides, Smaratit Bandyopadhayay has also told me this in his interview on 14.2.1985.


15. Ibid.; statement of Subhash Chandra Bose is quoted here regarding his resignation from the Congress Presidentship and the formation of the Forward Bloc, which is as follows—

“In March, 1939, at the annual session of the Congress, the writer who presided made a clear proposal that the Indian National Congress should immediately send an ultimatum to the British Government demanding Independence within six months and should simultaneously prepare for a national struggle. This proposal was opposed by the Gandhi Wing and by Nehru and was thrown out. Thus a situation arose in which though the writer was the President of the Congress, his lead was not accepted by that body. Moreover, it was seen that on every conceivable occasion, the Gandhi-wing was opposing the President with a view to making it impossible for him to function. A complete deadlock within the Congress was the result... With a view to finding a possible compromise direct negotiations between Mahatma Gandhi and the writer took place but they proved to be abortive...

“(For,) on the one side, the Gandhi wing would not follow the lead of the writer and (that) on the other, the writer would not agree to be a puppet
President. There was, consequently, no alternative but to resign the Presidency. This the writer did on the 29 April, 1939, and he immediately proceeded to form a radical and progressive party within the Congress, with a view to rallying the entire Left Wing under one banner. This party was called the Forward Bloc. The first President of the Bloc was the writer and the Vice-President (Now acting President) was Sardar Sardul Singh Cavesheer of Punjab.”—Subhash Chandra Bose, The Indian Struggle, vol. III, Netaji Publishing Society, Thaker, Spink and Company. Limited, Calcutta, 1948, pp.19-20.

16. Interviews of Smarajit Bandyopadhyay, Shibaram Gupta and Harendra Nath Bose on 14.2.1985, 27.2.85 and 12.5.85 respectively.

17. Quoted in Ramesh Chandra Majumdar, op.cit., p.485. Emphasis and bracket are ours.

18. Subhash Chandra Bose considered the A.I.C.C. Resolution of June, 1939 as unconstitutional and undemocratic. In his reply to a letter to the Congress President he wrote:

“... It is my constitutional right to give expression to my opinion regarding any resolution passed by the A.I.C.C. You will perhaps admit that it is customary with a large number of Congressmen to express their view on resolutions
passed by the A.I.C.C. when a particular session of that body comes to a close. If you grant Congressmen the right to express their views on resolutions passed by the A.I.C.C. you can not draw a line and say that only favourable opinions will be allowed expression and unfavourable opinions will be banned. If we have the constitutional right to express our views, then it does not matter if those views are favourable or unfavourable. Your letter seems to suggest that only expression of unfavourable views is to be banned.

“We have so long been fighting the British Government among other things for our Civil Liberty. Civil Liberty I take it, includes freedom of speech…. If we are denied the right to adversely criticize resolutions of the A.I.C.C. which in our view are harmful to the country’s cause, then it would amount to denial of a democratic right…”


20. Ibid.

21. Quoted in Ramesh Chandra Majumder, op.cit., p.488 (Emphasis is ours)


24. Interviews of Smarajit Bandyopadhayay and Shibaram Gupta on 14.2.1985 and 27.2.85. respectively.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.

27. Such a view of Subhash Chandra Bose has been noted in Ramesh Chandra Majumder, op.cit., p.490. See also Shailesh Dey, op.cit., pp.328-30.


29. The adjectives ‘radical and progressive’ were used by Subhash Chandra Bose himself in the name of the Forward Bloc (F.B.), formed by him. Since the F.B.was, actually speaking, another name of the Suspended Congress Committee, the adjectives ‘radical and progressive’ are used here to denote the political orientation of the suspended Congress Committee. See Ramesh Chandra Majumder, op.cit., p.484.

30. Quoted in Swadhinata Sangrame Nadia, op.cit., p.188.

31. Interviews with Shibaram Gupta and Smarajit Bandyopadhayay on 27.2.1985. and 14.2.85. respectively.
32. Despite enjoying high degree of popularity in Indian politics especially in Bengal Politics, Subhash Chandra Bose’s effort of launching mass-struggle did not get adequate response. Regarding this ineffectiveness of Subhash Chandra Bose’s attempt, Smarajit Bandyopadhayay recollected on the 14.2.1985. an historic event which is as follows.

“In 1940, in a meeting of more than one lake people (Smarajit Babu also attended the meeting) at the Deshbandhu Park in Calcutta, Subhash Chandra Bose declared his attitude that in order to achieve India’s Independence national struggle was urgently necessary which alone can pressurize the British authority to leave its Indian empire. And now when he asked whether people, gathered, supported his this attitude, all of them, present there, raised hands to express their support to his proposal of immediately launching a mass movement against the British authority. But it is a fact that people did not really come later on to help in launching such a movement, as Gnadhiji who had by this time created a ‘hero cult’ around him throughout India and exercised his deep influence all over the country, did not yet think it immediately necessary to put Subhash’ proposal into effect. Thus Subhash’ effort of organizing mass struggle could not find its fruition.”


34. Interview with Smarajit Bandyopadhayay on 14.2.1985.
35. Ibid.

36. Interviews with Shibaram Gupta on 27.2.1985. See also Swadhinata Sangrame Nadia, op.cit.,p.188,p.247 and p.263.

37. Interview with Smarajit Bandyopadhayay on 14.2.1985. and of Shibaram Gupta on 27.2.85.

38. Ibid.

39. This list of the leaders who attended the secret joint meeting of the ad-hoc and suspended Nadia District Congress Committees at the Calcutta residence of Mahadeb Sarkar is collected from Swadhinata Sangrame Nadia, op.cit.,pp.188-9.


41. Ibid.

42. Ibid.


44. Interviews with Manoranjan Sen on 29.5.1985.

45. Interviews with Harendra Nath Bose, Smarajit Bandyopadhayay, Shibaram Gupta, Manoranjan Sen, Balailal Mukhopadhayay and Dulal Bose on 12.2.85., 14.2.85., 27.2.85., 29.5.85., 2.6.85. respectively.
46. The non Congress parties shared the attitude of the Congress regarding the ‘Quit India’ Movement of 1942. Only the C.P.I did not join this Movement against the British Government, as it took the side of the Government in the 2nd world war considering it as the ‘People’s War’. This was, in brief, the attitude of different political parties regarding the movement of 1942. We will make a detailed analysis regarding this in the later chapter “Attitude of Different Political Parties towards the ‘Quite India’ Movement in Nadia.”