Chapter -7

THE CHARACTER OF THE ‘QUIT INDIA’ MOVEMENT IN THE DISTRICT OF NADIA: ORGANIZATION AND MASS-PARTICIPATION

The present chapter reflects the organization of the ‘Quit India’ movement in Nadia district and people’s participation in it. The discussion will facilitate to understand the real nature and character of the movement in the district.

ORGANIZATION AND MASS-PARTICIPATION

It does hardly require any evidence to state that the success of a movement largely depends upon organization, “Which means building up co-ordination and utilization of human and material resources.”¹ But it is historically true that the ‘Quit India’ movement in the district of Nadia as in other parts of India suffered to a great extent for the lack of proper organization. In fact, there was no organized leadership and centralized programme of action in shaping the movement. In the national level of the movement we find that Gandhiji, under whose direction the A.I.C.C. took the ‘Quit India’ resolution late at night on the 8th August 1942, had got no chance of formulating any definite programme of operation of the movement, as he was arrested in the early morning of the 9th August.² What he had
only done was to urge the ‘Do or Die’ sentiment in a speech just after the adoption of the resolution by the A.I.C.C.:

‘Every one of you should from this moment onwards consider yourself a freeman or woman and act as if you are free... We shall do or die. We shall either free India or die in the attempt’.³

Regarding this Jawaharlal Nehru also said:

Neither in public nor in private at the meetings of the Congress Working Committee did he (Gandhiji) hint at the nature of action he had in mind, except in one particular. He had suggested privately that in the event of failure of all negotiation he would appeal for some kind of non-cooperation and a one-day protest hartal, or cessation of all work --- symbolic of a nation’s protest. .....So neither he nor the Congress Working
Committee issued any kind of directions, public or private, except that people should be prepared for all developments and should in any event adhere to the policy of peaceful and non-violent action.⁴

This lack of centralized programme of action directly resulted in the absence of proper organization of the ‘Quit India’ movement in the district of Nadia.⁵ The leaders of the district failed to build up any well-knit organization throughout the district due to the absence of any programme of action.⁶ Consequently, the nature of operation of the movement was not similar everywhere in the district. And that explains why military programmes were followed in different parts of the district during the movement.

It is, however, true that the movement was organized in the district on both lines of operation—violent and non-violent—according to the taste and temperament of the district leaders, workers and supporters of the movement.⁷ The actual occurrences in the district during the movement certainly did not follow the Gandhian instruction of ‘Do or Die’ within the limits of non-violence. In fact, the Gandhian instruction of ‘Do or Die’ could be interpreted to have sanction for violent action, for Gandhiji himself said, though in favour of non-violent action,
that “We shall do or die. We shall either free India or die in the attempt.”\textsuperscript{8} (emphasis is ours).

Such a ‘do or die’ sentiment of Gandhiji might have created a feeling in the minds of the common people that we should die, but should die only after doing something for freeing India. And this something was certainly not a non-violent affair, but a violent one, indeed.\textsuperscript{9} This was why the leaders of Nadia district, having been invigorated by the ‘do or die’ mantra, felt no hesitation to launch the violent sabotage activities along with non-violent activities with a view to making the ‘Quit India’ movement a success.\textsuperscript{10}

But despite the initial success, the British authority, by deploying large bodies of police and military forces,\textsuperscript{11} soon controlled all the pro-movement activities and thereby reestablished its absolute authority.\textsuperscript{12} This was, however, possible only because of the fact that the ‘Quit India’ movement had no nation-wide proper organization, which accounted for the ‘immense wastage of human energy’ and ‘material resources’.\textsuperscript{13}

It is, however, worthwhile to note that the leaders of Nadia district, having got no clear picture of any nation-wide organization of the ‘Quit India’ movement,
had themselves sought to organize the movement in the district completely on local basis. For this purpose they arranged a secret meeting on the 10th August, 1942 at the residence of Mahadeb Sarkar at the Wellesley Street, Calcutta.\textsuperscript{14} In this meeting it was unanimously decided, it may be recalled, to launch the movement in the district through both the violent and non-violent means keeping in abeyance the inhibition for violence. They also decided to involve the masses in the movement.\textsuperscript{15} The leaders were, however, more or less successful in performing this self-imposed task. As has already been discussed in the previous chapter, different leaders had made extensive propaganda tour in different parts of the district at different times in order to organize the masses.\textsuperscript{16}

It is also to be noted here that with a view to drawing the sympathy and support of the common students of the district to the movement the student-leaders namely Manoranjan Sen, Kiran Chattopadhyay, Mohan Kali Biswas, Bimal Kumar Chatterjee, Salil Paul, Dulal Bose, Balai Lal Mukherjee, Gobinda Mukherjee, Gour Paul and many others approached the students at their residences mainly under the cover of night and tried to impress upon them importance of the movement and the role they could play in the movement.\textsuperscript{17} And the students having been impressed at their appeal joined hands with them; and thus they left their academic institutions, took part in the processions, meetings and demonstrations in different
parts of the district and also often launched sabotage activities.\textsuperscript{18} In this direction the students of Krishnanagar, Ranaghat, Shantipur, Nabawip, Muragachha, Tehatta, Chakdaha etc. parts of the district played an important role.

It is very interesting to note in this regard that the organizing endeavour of the local leaders was so effective that they could draw the sympathy and earn the support even of the girl students. It may be mentioned here that Lalima Mukherjee, Uma Mukherjee, Minati Nandi, Rekha Roy, Mamata Ganguli and a few others of Ranaghat sub-division participated in the students’ processions and meetings.\textsuperscript{19}

It is on record, however, that the common masses could not be as much organized as was the expectation of the district leaders. In fact, the leaders often failed to involve the masses in favour of the open activities of the movement like public meetings, processions, demonstrations etc.\textsuperscript{20} The governmental repressive measures prevented common people from attending the pro-movement meetings, participating in the processions and even keeping any contact with the revolutionaries.\textsuperscript{21} To be precise, ordinary people had a marginal role in the open constitutional activities; and this was the direct result of the twin facts: fear of military and police repression and the lack of proper organization of the masses by
the leaders—the latter again being the result of the quick arrest of the leaders by the police.²²

But in a few cases the local leaders were able, it is also to be noted, to bring the people in the open constitutional agitation. As has already been mentioned in the previous chapter, the important leaders of different parts of the district, namely, Smarajit Bandyopadhyay, Shibaram Gupta, Jagannath Majumdar, Haripada Chattopadhyay, Harendra Nath Bose, Keshab Chandra Mitra, Fazlur Rahaman, Kanai Paul, Phani Khan, Manoranjan Sen, Shyamapada Bhattacharyya, Haricharan Pramanik, Mohan Kali Biswas, Gopendra Nath Mukherjee (Junior), Balai Goswami, Amal Sarkar, Sudhiranjan Lahiri (Kabu Da), Balailal Mukherjee and a few others were often able to organize mass-protest against the arrest of the important Congress leaders including Gandhiji, Jawaharlal Nehru, Ballav Bhai Pattel, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad etc. and also to launch public processions, meetings and demonstrations.²³ The police, however, controlled all these activities by making lathi charges and random arrest of the leaders and workers.²⁴ And with the arrest of the leaders these open operations in favour of the movement naturally came to a halt.²⁵

But in regard to the secret mode of operation, the organizing ability of the leaders deserves special mention. In fact, the sabotage operations, organized by the
leaders, caused panic to the British. The local action squad leaders (details given in the previous chapter) most of whom used to live incognito to continue the movement had launched different sabotage operations in different parts of Nadia district, like burning of the railway stations, trains, refugee camps, post offices and Government record offices, robbery of mail-bags, removal of railway lines and signal posts, cuttings of wires of telephone and telegraph, and so on.

It is to be noted in this regard that the oft-quoted ‘do or die’ policy, i.e., the resolve of doing something for India’s freedom before death, had largely inspired these leaders to engage themselves in the sabotage operations. And because of the large extent of sabotage operation in the district, the British authority felt impeded to declare that prize of a considerable amount of money would be awarded for helping the police to apprehend these leaders and workers. It is, however, to be noted here that the leaders of the district had followed this mode of sabotage operation mostly on unorganized and undecided manner. Still their capacity of immediately organizing the masses could by no means be ignored. They had often been successful in instantly mobilizing people in favour of the movement.

The apparent success of the leaders in regard to the organization of the movement in the district could be established from the fact that though people generally used to avoid contact with the action-squad leaders due to the fear of
police repression, yet in some cases they had joined hands with the leaders in launching protest processions and meetings; and even in the sabotage operation people had also participated despite governmental repressive measures.\textsuperscript{32}

It is also to be noted that in the face of repeated intimidation by the local police, people dared to co-operate with the leaders by offering them shelter and necessary food and clothing; and they had also often extended even financial assistance to the leaders.\textsuperscript{33} Similarly, it is also to be mentioned here that during the movement the leaders had been able to control the virus of communalism and had received assistance in this regard from both the Hindus and the Muslims.\textsuperscript{34} This was what added an extra energy to the organizing spirit of the leaders in launching the movement in the district.\textsuperscript{35}

The organizational activities of the leaders in launching and continuing the movement obviously required a large amount of money. And money was collected partly by voluntary donation, partly by exactions.\textsuperscript{36} In a few cases the leaders and their followers resorted to outright dacoity and looting; Barnia mail robbery at Tahatta,\textsuperscript{37} looting of the house of Bhudeb Charan Bhatta of the village Bhaluka\textsuperscript{38} etc. can be mentioned here. Besides, in other cases the leaders had on many occasions morally coerced people to donate money.\textsuperscript{39} But much of the money was given willingly by the friends and well-wishers of the leaders and also by common people.\textsuperscript{40} Among other things the money was used for buying national flags and
different materials for writing posters and placards, collecting arms and ammunition, making bombs etc. and also for financing the extensive publicity that was highly necessary during the movement.  

Underground cyclostyled bulletines and local papers had helped much in the organization of the movement in the district. 9th August (in English), Raktakta Biplab (in Bengali), Muktir Dak (in Bengali) etc. were circulated in different parts of the district of Nadia; the former two were published from Delhi and Calcutta respectively, while the latter was published from Krishnanagar, the main centre for publicity organization of the district.

Muktir Dak, edited by Smarajit Bandyopadhayay, was extensively distributed by hand throughout the district. Muktir Dak, used to cover the latest developments of the movement in the district as well as in other parts of India, especially of Bengal. The only cyclostyling machine that was used to bring out Muktir Dak, was, however, kept in different places in order to avoid detention. Besides this bulletin, other literature—bulletines, leaflets etc.—mainly cyclostyled in Calcutta by the underground Congress publicity organization, were also widely circulated in the district. The directives for carrying forward the movement were
conveyed through them. As could only be expected, Muktir Dak, in order to exhort the masses often gave exaggerated description of the success of the movement. whatever be one’s judgement on the ‘objectivity’ of the news catered through these bulletines, there is no doubt that these underground bulletines did play an important role in rousing the common masses during this movement.

Like these bulletines, some socio-cultural organizations had also contributed to the progress of the movement. In fact, such organizations had played an invaluable role in the movement by sheltering the leaders and political workers and also by helping them in other ways so that their activities could continue undisturbed. In this regard the names of the Sadhana Library and the Byayam Samiti, later known as the Athletic club, of Krishnanagar, the Sabuj Chakraborty (a children’s club with cultural orientation) and the Vendors’ Union of Ranaghat, the Mathors’ Samiti (i.e., Sweepers’ Union) of Shantipur, etc. can be referred to here. All these organizations, though apparently engaged in socio-cultural activities, used to perform the task of politicalizing the growing youth, students and nationalists.

It is in this regard that the role played by the Matri Bhandar and the National Service Committee (N.S.C.)—both in Krishnanagar—also deserves
special mention in as much as they, despite being by nature economic and social organizations respectively, used to help a lot the leaders and workers of the district in giving shelter and money for carrying on the nationalist cause.

The Matri Bhandar, a shop of cloth, was then the main centre of political communication where the leaders of Nadia district used to meet, consult and take decisions regarding the movement.\textsuperscript{57} And the National Service Committee (N.S.C.), a voluntary social service organization, used to serve nationalist political cause along with its self-imposed task of national social service under the tricolour banner with the letters N.S.C. inscribed in its white middle portion.\textsuperscript{58}

Besides these organizations, special mention should also be made of the role played by the Sahebnagar Agricultural and Industrial Institution at Tehatta.\textsuperscript{59} This institution was founded by late Haripada Chattapadhyay on the Gandhian model of Abhay Ashram, based on the principle of self-sufficient village economy.\textsuperscript{60} This socio-economic institution, though mainly engaged in constructive work, used to extensively propagate nationalist ideals. Workers of this institution were subjected to indiscriminate police torture for their nationalist political orientation and activities in disguise.\textsuperscript{61}
With such wide co-operation from and sympathy of a large section of people it became possible for the leaders and political workers of the district of Nadia to organize and launch the ‘Quit India’ movement in the district. The local officials of the British Government felt really threatened because of the extensity of the movement in the district. The local authority of the Government had thus empowered the police to subdue the movement by any means; and accordingly police activity at once reached the peak point of absolute severity.62

The police now began to search frantically the offices of both the suspended N.D.C.C and the ad-hoc N.D.C.C., and sealed the offices after having seized all the party papers, leaflets, posters and furniture found in them.63 Besides, the police had also sought to arrest them indiscriminately and also to restrain people from attending processions and meetings by making lathi-charges and even by making random arrests; and thereby the police had created a feeling of panic all over the district.

To such a situation where police-repression reigned supreme was added the military terror. Military forces were posted at the ‘disturbed’ areas of the district and provisions were made for military-patrolling in the streets of the important areas of the district to prevent any sort of disturbances.64 obviously, the phase of
open mass movement did not last long. The sabotage operations which started later could not also be sustained for long, because the people could not withstand the brutal military repression.  

Besides, the role of the judiciary which overplayed its part also contributed a lot to undermine the morale of the people. Obviously the movement in the district lost ‘Subaltern’ character and now abruptly turned into an affair of a few absconded leaders and workers of the district.  

However, mass participation in the ‘Quit India’ movement in the district of Nadia, as has been mentioned above, is quite similar to that in the province of Bihar. To quote Stephen Henningham regarding the participation of the common masses in the movement:

The ‘Quit India’ revolt drew in broad spectrum of the population and temporarily crippled the apparatus of British rule. But despite the insurgents’ initial success, the British, by deploying large bodies of troops, soon re-established themselves. ... Within a few days of the
arrival of troops in an area, the mass participation phase of the movement ceased, to be replaced by a lengthy phase of sporadic guerilla warfare. The British re-established control quickly, partly because at the time of the insurrection they had at their disposal a massive military force which had been concentrated in order to face the Japanese. And under war censorship, they could repress revolt ruthlessly without worrying about domestic or international opinion. Moreover, they had developed a siege mentality, and had determined to cope relentlessly with disruptions to their war effort. Often the British employed harsh measures, and to protect its agents from subsequent prosecution the government enacted a retrospective Act of indemnity. 69

This description of the people’s participation in the ‘Quit India’ movement in Bihar and the repressive reaction on the part of the local administrative authority of the British Government to their participation in the movement is completely applicable in the case of the movement in the district of Nadia of the-then Bengal.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


3. Quoted in ibid, p.532.

4. Quoted in ibid, p.546.


6. ibid.

7. A detailed analysis of the nature of operations of the movement in Nadia district has been made in the chapter No. 5.

8. Gandhiji also said.

   I shall take every precaution I can to handle the movement gently, but I would not hesitate to go to the extremist limit, if I find that no impression is produced on the British Government or the Allied Powers,

   (Quoted in Ramesh Chandra Majumder, op.cit., p.532.)
For Gandhiji heartily believed, Violence when employed against superior odds automatically becomes non-violence. If a man fights with his sword single-handed against a horde of dacoits, armed to the teeth, I should say he is fighting non-violently.

(Quoted in op.cit., p.547.)


10. For details see chapter no. 5.


In their interviews on 14.02.1985, 27.02.1985, 12.05.1985 and 15.07.1985 respectively Smarajit Bandyopahayay, Shibaram Gupta, Harendra Nath Bose, and Shyamapada Bhattacharyya had informed me of the arrangement of military patrol in the district of Nadia.


14. See chapter no.4


17. Interviews with of Manoranjan Sen, Salil paul, Bimal Kumar Chatterjee, Balailal Mukherjee and Dulal Bose on 29.05.1985, 06.05.1985, 06.06.1985, 02.06.1985 and 23.05.1985 respectively.

18. Ibid.

19. Interviews with Mrs Rekha Roy (Majumder), Salil Paul and Dulal Bose on 31.05.1985, 06.05.1985. and 23.05.1985 respectively.

20. Interviews with Salil Paul, Shibaram gupta, Bimal Kumar Chaterjee and Asim Kumar Majumder on 06.05.1985, 27.05.1985, 06.06.1985, and 31.05.1985 respectively.

21. Interviews with Dulal Bose and Salil Pual on 23.02.1985, and 06.05.1985 respectively.

22. Interviews with Harendra Nath Bose, Bimal Kumar Chatterjee, and Manoranjan Sen on 12.05.1985, 06.06.1985. and 29.05.1985 respectively.
23. Interviews with Smarajit Bandyopadhyay, Shibaram Gupta, Harendra Nath Bose, Sanat Mukhopadhyay (Vadubabu), Balailal Mukherjee, Mohan Kali Biswas, Shyamapada Bhattacharyya, Niranjan Modak, Balai Goswami on 14.02.1985, 27.02.1985, 12.05.1985, 16.06.1985, 02.06.1985, 07.07.1985, and 15.07.1985 respectively. (On the very date 15.07.1985 interviews of Shyamapada Bhattacharyya, Niranjan Modak and Balai Goswami were taken.)

24. Ibid.

25. Interviews with Gour Chandra Kundu and Asim Kumar Majumder on 01.06.1985 and 31.05.1985 respectively.

26. Interviews with Shibaram Gupta, Sanat Mukhopadhyay, Dulal Bose and Shyamapada Bhattacharyya on 27.02.1985, 16.06.1985, 23.05.1985, and 15.07.1985 respectively.

27. Ibid.

28. Interviews with Harendra Nath Bose, Shibaram Gupta and Salil Paul on 12.05.1985, 27.02.1985, and 06.05.1985 respectively.

29. See ‘Swadhinite Sangrame Nadia’, op.cit., p.196. Interviews with Sanat Mukhopadhyay and Shibram Gupta on 16.06.1985 and 27.02.1985. It may be remembered that a prize of Rs. 2000/- was announced to be awarded in
lieu of the head of the revolutionary leader Kanai Paul of Shantipur, see. ibid., pp.230-1.


31. ibid.

32. Interviews with Shibaram Gupta, Dulal Bose, Manoranjan Sen and Harendra Nath Bose on 27.02.1985, 23.05.1985, 29.05.1985 and 12.05.1985 respectively.

33. See Swadhinata Sangrame Nadia, op.cit.,p.197.

34. Interviews with Kalimuddin Sheikh (Hazi Saheb), Smarajit Bandyopadhyay, Asim Kumar Majumder, Shibaram Gupta and Harendra Nath Bose on 04.07.1985., 14.02.1985., 31.05.1985., 27.02.1985., and 12.05.1985 respectively.

The attitude of Muslim League to the movement has been discussed below.

35. Interviews with Smarajit bandyopadhyay, Shibaram Gupta, Harendra Nath Bose, Manoranjan Sen and Salil Paul on 14.02.1985., 27.02.1985., 12.05.1985., 29.05.1985 and 06.05.1985 respectively.
36. Interviews with Sanat Mukhopadhyay, Manoranjan Sen, Balailal Mukherjee, Dulal Bose, Shibaram Gupta and Balai Goswami on 16.06.1985, 29.05.1985, 02.06.1985, 23.05.1985, 27.02.1985 and 15.05.1985 respectively.


41. Interviews with Salil Paul, Asim Majumder, balailal Mukherjee, Shibaram Gupta, Manoranjan Sen, Samrat bandyopadhyay, Harendra Nath Bose, Mohan Kali Biswas and Sanat Mukhopadhyay on 06.05.1985, 31.05.1985, 02.06.1985, 27.02.1985, 28.05.1985, 14.02.1985, 12.05.1985, 07.07.1985, and 16.06.1985 respectively.


43. Interviews with Asim Kumar Majumder, and Samrat Bandyopadhyay on 31.05.1985 and 14.02.1985 respectively.

44. Ibid.
45. See Swadhinite Sangrame Nadia, op.cit.,p.192. Also interviews with Shibaram Gupta and Smarakit Bandyopadhyay on 27.02.1985 and 14.02.1985 respectively.

46. Interviews with Salil Paul, Smarakit Bandyopadhyay, Manoranjan Sen, Shibaram Gupta, Asim Kumar Majumder, Nani Gopal Singha and Balailal Mukherjee on 06.05.1985, 14.02.1985, 29.05.1985, 27.02.1985, 31.05.1985, 16.07.1985 and 02.06.1985 respectively.

47. Interview with Asim Kumar Majumder on 31.05.1985.


49. Interviews with Balailal Mukherjee, Asim Kumar Majumder and Manoranjan Sen on 02.05.1985, 31.05.1985 and 29.05.1985 respectively.

50. Interviews with Shibaram Gupta, Smarakit Bandyopadhyay, Salil Paul, Harendra Nath Bose, Balailal Mukherjee and Mohan Kali biswas on 27.02.1985, 14.02.1985, 06.05.1985, 12.05.1985, 02.06.1985 and 07.07.1985 respectively.


52. Interviews with Salil Paul on 06.05.1985.
53. Interviews with Balailal Mukherjee on 02.06.1985.

54. Interview with Salil Paul on 06.05.1985.

55. See Swadhinite Sangrame Nadia, op.cit., p.192.

56. ibid., p-340.


58. Interview with Shibaram Gupta on 27.02.1985.


64. Interviews with Dulal Bose, Harendra Nath Bose, Smarajit Bandyopadhyay, Shyamapada Bhattacharyya, Shibaram Gupta, Balailal Mukherjee, Sanat Mukhopadhyay, Salil Paul, Niranjan Modak, Tinkari Bhattacharyya and Shyam Sundar Halder on 23.5.1985, 12.05.1985, 14.02.1985, 15.07.1985,
27.02.1985, 16.06.1985, 06.05.1985, 15.07.1985 and 08.08.1985, respectively.

65. Interviews with Shibaram Gupta, Salil Paul, Smarajit Bandyopadhyay and Shiba Kumar Chattopadhyay (Gulin Babu) on 27.02.1985, 06.05.1985, 14.02.1985 and 30.05.1985 respectively.

66. ibid.

67. ‘Subaltern Character’ of a movement is shaped when the movement is conducted by the subordinate common masses.

See the introductory note on Subaltern Studies given by Ranajit Guha; ‘On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India’. Ranajit Guha (ed.) Subaltern Studies-I, Delhi Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1982.

68. Interviews with Manaranjan Sen, Shibaram Gupta, Sanat Mukhopadhyay, Salil Paul, Smarajit Bandyopadhyay and Asim Kumar Majumder on 29.05.1985, 27.02.1985, 16.06.1985, 06.05.1985, 14.02.1985 and 31.05.1985 respectively.