

Political Construction of the Non-Cooperation 1920-22



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In September 1920 the Indian national congress launched a non –cooperation movement against the British administration of India. Under the direction of M.K Gandhi the congress denounced recent British constitutional concessions as inadequate, demanded that India be given swaraj or ‘self rule’. And undertook to force Britain to grant India freedoms by mobilizing Indians to refuse co-operation with alien rule. British rule depended ‘on the active collaboration with alien rule. British rule depended’ on the active collaboration of some Indians and the acquiescence of the rest’, and if Indian co-operative cased, the Indian empire would collapse like a house of cards.

The programmed of non co-operation was designed to ensure this collapse through the boycott of the forthcoming elections to the provincial legislature, the gradual boycott of government school , college and courts , the abandonment of titles, the resignation of honorary offices, the giving up of government jobs, and the boycott of foreign goods. Latter the program me also called for the boycott of liquor producer and sellers, in order to reform society and to pressure provincial governments by reducing their income from the collection of excise. The movement would culminate in active civil disobedience; the refusal to pay cresses, taxes and revenue and complete non-cooperative with the authorities in order to bring about administrative paralysis.

In Indian in 1920-23 non-cooperation ‘become a chameleon campaign, taking color formats surrounding as it was shaped in each locality. In north Bihar nationalist agitation received impetus from the khilfat movement, interacted with anti-indigo protest, and in addition provided a vehicle for the expression of a variety of discontents. Members of the village elite took the lead in protest, but middle it gave the apparatus of British rule a sever shaking. This chapter examines the development of the Bihar congress and of the nationalist movement up until 1920, describes non-co operational; in north Bihar, and concludes with an assessment of the campaign

In 1920 the Bihar branch of the India national congress was a new actor on the political stage. Twenty years earlier the editor of the Bihar times had likened Bihar, in terms of the energy displayed in public life to ‘a pool of stagnant water. Yet
Even in 1900 new eddies were beginning to swirl in Bihar politics.

Throughout much of the nineteenth century the imperial state had been a distant, autocratic entity which played a limited part in the lives of most north Biharis. But from the last decades of the century this sense of distance began to lessen. To improve the political and financial stability of their far-flung empire the British made several constitutional concessions. Set in train in 1882, 1909 and 1919, these concessions progressively increased the opportunities for some members of Indian society to participate in institutions of representative government, particularly in the sphere of local government power directly affected only a small minority of the population but had wider repercussion because this minority commanded considerable wealth and influence. Through the extension of representative institutions the state linked the politics of the locality and the region into a wider imperial structure and itself became a more obtrusive factor in local politics.

The constitutional concessions were less rapid and less substantial than many had hoped, and thus their implementations created a much animosity as it won support. and because of the structure of imperial control in north Bihar and particularly because of the zamindari system, government had few resources at its disposal after it had covered the costs of revenue collection and of seeing 'that the districts remained quiet'. Hence it could spend little on social and administrative services which might have reaped a valuable harvest of support. Through intervention in local political arenas the imperial state created expectations which because of its pattern of rule, it did not have the capacity to fulfill. Moreover than they had in the nineteenth century. People came to look at the state as recourse and to blame it for their problems.

The development of a new political awareness in Bihar accelerated when in 1912, as part of a general re-organization of the Bengal presidency, Bihar and Orissa made little or no impact on the lives of the vast majority of its inhabitants, most of whom had no clear notion of the designation or extent of the administrative unit within they resided. But for a tiny, high caste educated elite the creation of the new province brought opportunities both for private professional advancement and for public social and political activity. Administrative separation meant that henceforth Bengalis would suffer less from the competition of skilled and educated Bengalis, who for generations had been attracted from Calcutta in search of careers. And the sleepy town of Patna, by becoming the local for a new hospital, a new university, a new high court and a large and impressive secretariat to house the provincial government, drew young middle-class Biharis off to distant cities, and particularly Calcutta, in search of education jobs and advancement.

The Patna-based Bihar provincial congress had been inactive since its founding in 1907 but began a new lease of life in 1912. At this time most of its members were small zamindars and/or lawyers and landlords and lawyers dominated its leadership. (Table 1) In 1917 the Bihar and Orissa chief secretary commented disparagingly that the congress here is a most hollow business. The whole thing is run by half a dozen wire-pullers and the audience consists chiefly of the junior bar.

But increasingly from around 1919 the membership of the organization broadened. Merchants and businessmen and particularly those of the Marwari community, began to participate, in part because of the rise to prominence of Mahatma Gandhi. And of special importance in overwhelmingly rural north Bihar,

rich peasants and a large number of small landlords gravitated towards the congress members of the village elite wishing to expend upon their their local influence found themselves in natural alliance with politically aspiring urban professional. Their mutual opponents were the grate landlords and the established, conservative professional who, supported by the administration, dominated provincial-level social and political life and controlled the organs of local government, namely the municipalities and district boards.

Because only member of the landed interest could afford to educate their sons to a professional level, caste and kinship ties knitted together the village elite and urban professional alliance. For example rajendra Prasad, who graduated in law from Calcutta before returning to Bihar in 1912, was the son of a small landlord from saran. Mutual interest further strengthened the alliance .since urban professionals supplied the legal, education and other service required by the village elite. The extent of mutual interest between urban professional and members of the village elite was increased, moreover, by the montague-chelmsford constitutional reforms. These reforms, which were announced in April 1918, extended the electorate to give the rural and urban middle classes substantial say in future elections and ensured them control over local government.

Nationalist binaries, responding to initiatives that originated in other provinces, supported the Indian home rule movement between 1915 and 1918 and participated in the Rowlett satyagraha of 1919,

Conclusion:

The chaukidars displayed even more weakness than the regular police. The chaukidars had always been subject to local pressure. In some areas in 1930 such pressure caused the temporary collapse of the whole chaukidari system. Nor did the chaukidars prove themselves reliable in clashes between police and demonstrators. Outside the Goreakothi school in Saran the chaukidars broke and ran before the onset of the crowd, while at Khautana in Darbhanga they let the regular police to their fate once stones began to fly. Overall, the conduct of both chaukidars and regular policemen during the period of the civil disobedience movemend indicated that the whole police system needed drastic and extensive reforms. But such reforms would be costly, and because of the financial problems bedeviling the province they were not undertaken. A decade later, the inadequacy of the policy system was to contribute to the collapse of British rule during the Quit India revolt.

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