chapter six

The Age of Gandhian Politics

6.1 THE CARROTS OF LIMITED SELF-GOVERNMENT, 1909–19

The second half of the nineteenth century, particularly the period after the suppression of the revolt of 1857, is considered to be the high noon of British imperialism in India. A self-confident paternalism tended to turn into a despotism, which was not prepared to accept any self-governing right for the Indians. This imperial idea had a philosophical as well as functional basis. Philosophically, there was what Eric Stokes has called a "Liberal division on India".1 The division arose on the question of democracy and self-government to the dependent empire. While on the Irish Home Rule question the educated mind in England had gone against the earlier Gladstonian liberalism, utilitarianism in the late nineteenth century developed certain divergent strands. There was on the one hand, an extreme liberal position taken by John Bright and the Manchester School, which became outrightly critical of British rule in India. Taking the middle course were the other liberal utilitarians like John Stuart Mill, who believed that democracy and self-government were essential checks on despotic power, but the doctrine was only suitable for civilised people. India, therefore, had to be governed despotically. But they also inherited the optimism of the eighteenth century Enlightenment that human nature could be changed through proper education. So they conceived the imperial goal as an educative mission: Indians could be entrusted with self-government when they were properly educated for the purpose of self-rule in accordance with the principles of rationalism and natural justice. J. S. Mill had his disciples in India like Macaulay and Lord Ripon, who still believed that the Indians could be given self-governing rights at an appropriate date, when they would be properly educated for this.

There was, however, a third and more authoritarian strand. Both Bentham and James Mill thought that democracy was a checking device against the abuse of power and ultimately a means of registering the will of the majority. But neither had any belief in individual

liberty for its own sake; happiness and not liberty was the end of good government. From this, an extreme authoritarian position was derived by Fitzjames Stephen, who succeeded the liberal Macaulay as the law member in the viceroy's council in India. He combined Benthamism with Hobbesian despotism: law and good government, he thought, were the instruments of improvement, and both were meaningless unless backed by power. From this philosophy followed his position on Britain's role in India being the great mission of establishing peace and order conducive to the progress of civilisation, pax Britannica. The task of the British was to introduce essential principles of European civilisation. He rejected the notion that the British had a moral duty to introduce representative institutions in India. It could be conceded if only there was a strong demand from among a sizeable section of the Indians. Stephen, with his immense influence on the Indian civil servants, became the philosopher of authoritarian British imperialism in India in the late nineteenth century. It became the tradition of direct rule, of imperial law, of empire resting on power and an Evangelical sense of duty to initiate improvement and rejecting the notion of buying support with favour to any particular class.[2]

Yet the Government of India had to introduce, though gradually, the principle of representative self-government in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. The Indian Councils Act. of 1861 established limited self-government in Bengal, Madras and Bombay and it was extended to the North-Western Provinces in 1886 and Punjab in 1897. The Act of 1892 increased the number of nominated members in provincial legislative councils. Then there were the Local Self-Government Act of 1882, the llbert Bill of 1883, the Morley-Minto Reforms of 1909 and the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms of 1919. How do we then explain these reforms? The old 'Cambridge School' would refer to its theory of "weak imperialism" and argue that the reforms were because of the functional needs of imperialism. The empire being essentially "weak", politically there was a need for lndian collaborators. Therefore, there was a gradual lndianisation of the civil service and entry of Indians at lower levels of local self-governing institutions. In the British empire, there was strong centralised control, but slackness at the bottom; the devolution of power was essentially to rope in more collaborators. [3] B.R. Tomlinson (1975), on the other hand, has argued about a fiscal crisis of the British Indian empire which left its imperial obligations unfulfilled. So devolution of power was to buy Indian support, as the elected Indian representatives would be better able to raise more

revenue and would be more judicious in spending it. This was not a very new idea in itself, as discussion about devolution on financial reasons had started as early as the late nineteenth century. Indeed, opposition to the idea of Indian self-government melted down because of war pressures and financial weaknesses; but it is difficult to explain the reforms solely in terms of fiscal exigencies. A more important reason behind this gradual devolution was the growing strength of Indian nationalism which the Cambridge cluster of historians chose to underestimate.

Intensity of the Swadeshi movement and the spread of extremism had forced upon the administration some new thoughts on constitutional reforms, while revolutionary terrorism reinforced this process. Fresh thinking had started since 1906, as Secretary of State Lord Morley, a liberal scholar, urged Viceroy Lord Minto to balance the unpopular Bengal partition with reforms. Although partition was declared to be a settled fact, there was also a realisation that India could no longer be ruled with a "cast iron bureaucracy". Indians should be given some share of power; they had to be admitted into the legislature, and if necessary, even into the executive council. In the legislarures, more time for budget discussion was to be allowed and amendments to government sponsored resolutions were to be admitted; but at the same time, official majority was to be retained. There were three aspects of this new policy: outright repression on the one hand, concessions to rally the moderates on the other, matched by divide and rule through separate electorates for the Muslims. The discussions on the constitutional reforms were initiated in Morley's budget speech in September 1906. There were some controversies between London and Calcutta, particularly centring round the definition of moderates. By this term, Morley thought of the Congress moderates, while Minto meant the loyal elements outside the Congress, like the rulers of the princely states or the Muslim aristocracy. The post-mutiny policy of alliance with the conservative elements in Indian society was now to be further institutionalised in the face of mounting nationalist pressure.

The Indian Councils Act of 1909 (Morley-Minto Reforms) provided for limited self-government and therefore satisfied none of the Indian political groups. It was the most short-lived of all constitutional reforms in British India and had to be revised within ten years. It did allow somewhat greater power for budget discussion, raising questions and sponsoring resolutions to members of legislative councils, who were to be elected for the first time. The act introduced the principle of election, but under various constraints.

Details of seat allocation and electoral qualifications were left to be decided by the local governments, and this left enough space for bureaucratic manipulation. Special provision was made for additional representation of professional classes, the landholders, the Muslims, as well as European and Indian commerce. Official majority was retained in the Imperial Legislative Council, which would have only 27 elected members out of 60; and out of those 27 seats, 8 were reserved for the Muslim separate electorate. Non-official majorities were provided for in the Provincial Councils, but importance of this non-official majority was reduced by the fact that many of these non-officials were to be nominated by the government. The Bengal provincial legislature was given an elected majority, but four of the elected members were to represent European commercial interests, who were aJways expected to vote with the government. Finally, the electorate was based on high property qualifications and therefore was heavily restricted. There were disparities too, as income qualifications for the Muslims were lower than those for the Hindus. And above everything, the Government of India was given the general power to disallow any candidate from contesting the election on suspicion of being politically dangerous.

Dissatisfaction with the existing constitution and clamour for more seJf-governing rights increased during World War One. There was also now greater acceptance of the idea of Indian self-rule in British political circles, and this brought in important changes in British policies too. But the idea of reform perhaps originated in India, where the government had been facing the radical transformation of Indian politics on a day-to-day basis. This experience strengthened the new Viceroy Lord Chelmsford's liberal vision of enunciating the goal of "Indian self-government within the E~ pire"." But as the Government of India's dispatch to the secretary of state in November 1916 argued, this should be offered gradually, in keeping with the rate of diffusion of education, resolution of religious differences and acquisition of political experience. In other words, there was no definite timetable for devolution, but enough safeguards to protect Indians against the tyranny of their own rule.

However, the ultimate goal of transplanting British parliamentary institutions in India had to be declared as the moderates in Indian politics were gradually being sidelined by the radicals. In December 1916 the Congress and the Muslim League for the first rime drew up a common constitutional programme at Lucknow. The beginning of the Home Rule agitation and the internment of its leader Annie Besant in April 1917 further radicalised Indian politics, as we shall

see. Lord Chelmsford's administration had already allowed a number of concessions to nationalist demands, such as customs duty on cotton imports without a countervailing excise duty, ban on labour emigration etc. Now it was desperate for a declaration of goals for British rule in India, but nothing happened until Edwin Montagu took over as the Secretary of State for India in July 1917. He has been described by a sympathetic historian as "the most liberal Secretary of State since Ripon".5 Montagu on 20 August 1917 made a historic declaration at the House of Commons that henceforth British policy in India would have an overall objective of "gradual development of self-governing institutions, with a view to the progressive realization of responsible government in India as an integral part of British empire".6 The declaration, in other words, did not propose the end of empire or independence for India. But the reform proposals were definitely an improvement over the 1909 act, as its main theme was elected majority in the provinces with executive responsibility. But the responsible government was to be realised progressively, thus suggesting an indefinite timetable that could be easily manipulated to frustrate liberal expectations.

Before we jump to any conclusion on whether or not the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms really sought to introduce representative and responsible government in India, we should first examine its provisions. The Government of India Act of 1919 provided for a bicameral legislature at the centre, the council of state and the legislative assembly. The latter would have an elected majority, but no control over the ministers. The viceroy would have a veto in the form of the 'certificate' procedure for pushing the rejected bills. The electorates were considerably enlarged to 5.5 million for the provinces and 1.5 million for the imperial legislature. But on the other hand, despite some theoretical criticism of the principle of separate electorate in the Montagu-Chelmsford Report, communal representation and reservations were not only retained, but also considerably extended. In addition to the Muslims, Sikhs were granted separate electorate too, while seats were reserved for the non-Brahmans in Madras and the 'depressed classes' were offered nominated seats in the legislatures at all levels. However, the most innovative feature of the new act was 'dyarchy', which meant that certain functions of the provincial governments were to be tranJferred to the ministers responsible to the legislative assemblies, while other subjects were to be kept as 'reserved' for firm bureaucratic control. The departments that were actually transferred were, however, of less political weight, such as education, health, agriculture, local bodies etc. These had

limited funds, which would invariably discredit the Indian ministers, while more vital departments, such as law and order, finance etc. were kept under official control. This was co some extent balanced off by the provision of parity of representation between the Europeans and Indians in the provincial executive councils. But the provincial governors too had veto and certificate powers. The revenue resources were divided between the centre and the provinces, with land revenue going to the provinces, and income tax remaining with the centre.

The significance of the reform of 1919 has been assessed variously by different historians. Philip Woods, on the one hand, has argued that the ideas behind the reforms "were crucial in establishing parliamentary democracy in India and, thereby, in beginning the process of decolonisation"." For Carl Bridge, on the ocher hand, these were measures to "safeguard the essentials of the British position" in India.[8] For Tomlinson, it was an attempt to mobilise "an influential section of Indian opinion ... to support the Raj".[9] The major problem of the reform, as Peter Robb has identified, was its being "limited by ideas of continuing British presence" .[10] Many Indians by this time had moved beyond the idea of self-government within the empire. Their new goal was swaraj, which was soon going to be defined as complete independence. The reform therefore failed co satisfy Indian political opinions, and prevent the eventual mass movement. The Cambridge School has in a different way sought to establish a connection between the constitutional reforms of 1909 and 1919 and the emergence of mass politics after World War One. As the electorate was widened, the Indian leaders were forced to operate in a democratic way and seek the support of the masses.[11] This interpretation does not necessarily explain the mass upsurge under Mahatma Gandhi. A major theme of Gandhi's non-cooperation programme launched in December 1920 was the boycott of the new councils. Gandhian philosophy, as we will see, was based on a critique of Western civil society; the mass movement he engineered had an altogether different logic, as his mission was to liberate Indian politics from this constricted arena of constiturionalisrn.

6.2. THE ARRIVAL OF MAHATMA GANDHI

Nationalist movement in India before the arrival of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (soon to be known as Mahatma [great soul] Gandhi) from South Africa in 1915 has been described by Judith Brown as "politics of studied limitations"[12] and by Ravinder Kumar as "a movement representing the classes" as opposed to the masses.[13]

What these descriptions essentially imply is that nationalist politics until this time was participated only by a limited group of Western-educated professionals, whose new skills had enabled them to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the Raj in the form of administrative positions, seats in the district boards or legislative councils. They belonged mainly to certain specific castes and communities, certain linguistic and economic groups, living primarily in the three presidency towns of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras. D.A. Low has described these classes as "the underlings of the British rulers", who were marginally, if at all, interested in any far reaching economic or social change in India. They were more concerned about creating a new elite society and culture for themselves and were influenced by the ideas and ideals of the British aristocracy or the middle classes.[14] Apart from these groups, like the bhadralok of Bengal, the Chitpavan Brahmans of Bombay or the Tamil Brahmans of Madras, the other sections of the society, like the lower-caste Hindus or the Muslims, the landlords and the peasants, both rich and landless, and commercial men of all kinds, showed reluctance to join Congress politics. They lived in Bihar, Orissa, the Central Provinces and Berar as well as in the United Provinces and Gujarat, which could be described as the "backward provinces" so far as Congress politics were concerned. The colonial government, therefore, could take comfort in the fact that Congress was being run as a closed shop by "a microscopic minority".

This early Congress politics was also limited in goals and rather unspectacular in achievements. The moderates after the Surat Split in 1907 demanded colonial self-government, as against the extremist demand of complete independence. Their organisations were seemingly based on personality networks woven around such prominent leaders as S.N. Banerjea, P.M. Mehta or G.K. Gokhale on one side, and Bepin Pal, B.G. lilak or Lajpat Rai on the other. In popular perception, there appeared to be no difference in principle or conviction between the two groups of leaders, apparently engaged in nothing but fruitless polemics. Both the groups had lost credibility as they had failed to achieve their stated goals. The constitutional politics of the moderates had failed to impress the British government and that was amply reflected in the Morley-Minto Reforms of 1909. Extremism was confined mainly to Bengal, Maharashtra and Punjab, where outbreak of terrorism allowed the government to unleash repression. Deportation and long sentences broke the rank of their leadership and forced the movement to move underground and into further isolation from the people. With extremist leaders

like Tilak in prison, the moderate-dominated Congress was immersed in total inactivity. In other words, by 1915-17 both these two varieties of politics had reached an impasse, and when Gandhi came to encounter these politicians, they had very little room to manoeuvre. By contrast, Gandhi as a newcomer to Indian politics was not tainted by the failures of any of these groups. He did not have a vested interest in the political status quo and therefore more prepared to welcome a shift of power from the Western-educated elites to the hands of the masses. He had a clear vision of the pluralist nature of Indian society, but was dedicated to the ideal of a united India. For the younger generation of Indians, frustrated by the eternal squabbles between the moderates and extremists, he offered something refreshingly new. In an age of moral vacuum and physical despondency, he promised a political programme that was also spiritually noble.

In order to understand why Gandhi's philosophy and political programme had a wide popular appeal, it is necessary to have a look at the social and economic environment of India during World War One, as it undoubtedly created a congenial context for his emergence as an undisputed leader of Indian nationalism. The most immediate outcome of war was a phenomenal increase in defence expenditure, which instead of being cut back, kept on rising even after 1919. The result was a huge national debt, which rose by more than Rs. 3 million between 1914 and 1923. This meant heavy war loans and rising taxes and since land revenue had been settled and could not be immediately enhanced, there was more indirect taxation on trade and industry. There were higher customs duties, an income tax, super tax on companies and undivided Hindu business families, excess profit tax and so on. Ultimately the burden of this new taxation fell on the common people, as it resulted in a phenomenal price rise. According to official calculations, price index on an all-India level rose from 147 in 1914 to 281 in 1920 (1873 as the base year)." This unprecedented price rise was partly due to indirect taxes, partly due to transport and other economic dislocations. There was underproduction of food crops during the war period, caused by two extraordinary crop failures in 1918-19 and 1920-21, affecting large areas of United Provinces, Punjab, Bombay, Central Provinces, Bihar and Orissa. And when there was already serious shortage of food for home consumption, export of food to feed the army fighting abroad continued. This resulted in near famine conditions in many areas, where the miseries of the people were further compounded by the outbreak of an influenza epidemic. According

to the census of 1921, about 12 to 13 million people had lost their lives due to the famine and epidemic of 1918-19, causing a stultification of natural population growth in the country.[16]

Between the years of 1914 and 1923 forced recruitment for the army was going on without interruptions, leading to a steady accumulation of popular resentment in the countryside. More so, because all the sections of rural society had already been affected by the economic impact of war. While prices of industrial and imported goods and food crops were rising, affecting poor peasantry, that of exported Indian agricultural raw materials did not increase at the same pace. The outcome was a decline in export, rising stockpiles and falling acreage for commercial crops, causing a crisis in the market in 1917-19. This adversely affected the richer peasantry. During this period, there was a marked increase in the number of peasant-proprietors being dispossessed and turned into tenants-at-will, and land passing into the hands of the non-cultivating classes. This process was intensive and more dearly visible between 1914 and 1922 in Madras and United Provinces. In some areas the mounting economic distress of the peasantry found expression in organised peasant protests, such as the Kisan Sabha movement in UP which started in 1918.

The other major economic development during World War One was the growth of industries. Due to fiscal requirements, economic necessities and nationalist pressure, there was a change in official policy towards industrialisation, leading to noticeable developments in the jute and textile industries. While the jute industry developed mainly with British capital, it was Indian capital that was involved in the textile industry in Bombay and Ahmedabad. Here the big industrial magnates remained loyal to the British, as they were dependent on exports and on government assistance for keeping the prices of raw cotton low and in dealing with labour unrest. By contrast, the small and middle traders had a series of grievances against the wartime taxes and the fluctuating rupee-sterling exchange rates. The other important result of industrialisation was an expansion of the working class. According to census figures, the number of workers in the organised industries increased by 575 thousand between 1911 and 1921 and this expanding working class was really hard hit by the extraordinary price hike of this period. The wartime and the post-war periods witnessed super profits for businessmen, but declining real wages for the workers. In cities like Lahore or Bombay the average cost of living for workers had increased by 60 to 70 per cent, while wages rose by only 15 to 25 per cent;[17] the situation was

the same in the Calcutta jute mills, jamshedpur steel plants or the Assam tea gardens. The obvious result was what Chelmsford described as a "sort of epidemic strike fever" that affected all the industrial centres in India,[18] a topic which we will discuss in the next chapter.

World War One thus brought in social and economic dislocations for nearly all the classes of Indian population, accomplishing the necessary social mobilisation for an impending mass upsurge. The war also brought disillusionment for the educated youth, long mesmerised by the glitter of the West; suddenly they discovered the ugly face of Western civilisation. It was, therefore, a climate of moral and physical despondency that greeted Gandhi, arriving in India with his background of a successful encounter with the British in South Africa. Gandhi's novel political ideology, as Judith Brown has argued, "appealed to few wholly, but to many partially", as everyone could find in it something to identify with.[19] Unlike the older politicians, he was fully aware of Indian pluralism and took care not to alienate any of the communities or classes. The earlier politicians wanted a hegemony of a nationalist ideology built on ideas borrowed from the West, while Gandhi argued that the ideology must be rooted in India and its ancient civilisation. Popular loyaJties in India, in his opinion, were not determined by the institution of class; religion had a stronger influence on popular mind. He therefore successfully used religious idioms to mobilise the masses. But this was not revivalism of the earlier politicians, as he was not referring to history, but to religious morality. His goal was a moral goal, and therefore, a utopian goal-unattainable and ever-elusive. He talked about swaraj as his political goal, but never defined it and therefore could unite different communities under his umbrella type leadership. "Inclusivism" became identified as "Gandhi's unique style of polincs"," which was based on a recognition of the diversities of India.

Gandhi derived his political ideas from various sources. He drew inspiration from his reading of Western thinkers like Henry David Thoreau, john Ruskin, Ralph Waldo Emerson or Leo Tolstoy. He was equally, if not more, influenced by Vaishnavism and Jainism, as he was exposed to these ideas during his early life in Gujarat.[21] Where Gandhian philosophy differed significantly from those of the earlier nationalist leaders was that he began with a trenchant critique of the "modem" civilisation-a critique which has evoked mixed responses from his later commentators. For Ashis Nandy, he was-like Rabindranath Tagore before him-"a counter modernist critic of the West",[21] which he thought had become diseased because

of its disproportionate power and spread; and by arguing this, Gandhi "threatened the internal legitimacy of the ruling culture". 2J For Partha Chatterjee, his philosophy represented a "critique of civil society" or to put it more directly, "a fundamental critique of the entire edifice of bourgeois society". 24 Manfred Steger (2000) has called it a "critique of liberalism", while for Bhikhu Parekh, it is a "Critique of Modern Civilisation", which by way of providing an ideology to confront imperialism also "overlooked some of its great achievements and strengths"." Gandhi's *Collected Works* have now run into more than one hundred volumes, and his ideas on various issues had been continually evolving. It is therefore difficult to make an authoritative statement on his philosophy. Within the short space that we have here an attempt will be made only to highlight some important aspects of his political thinking.

In *Hind Swaraj* (1909), a text which is often privileged as an authentic statement of his ideology, Gandhi offered a civilisational concept of Indian nation. The Indians constituted a nation or *praja*, he asserts, since the pre-Islamic days.26 The ancient Indian civilisation-"unquestionably the best"-was the fountainhead of Indian nationality, as it had an immense assimilative power of absorbing foreigners of different creed who made this country their own. This civilisation, which was "sound at the foundation" and which always tended "to elevate the moral being", had "nothing to learn" from the "godless" modern civilisation that only "propagate[d] immorality". Industrial capitalism, which was the essence of this modern civilisation, was held responsible for all conflicts of interests, for it divorced economic activities from moral concerns and thus provided imperatives for imperial aggression. Indians themselves were responsible for their enslavement, as they embraced capitalism and its associated legal and political structures. "The English have not taken India; we have given it to them." And now the railways, lawyers and doctors, Gandhi believed, were impoverishing the country. His remedy for this national infliction was moral and utopian. Indians must eschew greed and lust for consumption and revert to village based self-sufficient economy of the ancient times. On the other hand, parliamentary democracy—the foundational principle of Western liberal political system and therefore another essential aspect of modern civilisation-did not reflect in Gandhi's view the general will of the people, but of the political parties, which represented specific interests and constricted the moral autonomy of parliamentarians in the name of party discipline. So for him it was not enough to achieve independence and then perpetuate "English rule without

the Englishmen"; it was also essential to evolve an Indian alternative to Western liberal political structures. His alternative was a concept of popular sovereignty where each individual controls or restrains her/his own self and this was Gandhi's subtle distinction between self-rule and mere home rule. "[S]uch swaraj", Gandhi asserted, "has to be experienced by each one for him elf." If this was difficult to attain, Gandhi refused to consider it as just a "dream". "To believe that what has not occurred in history will not occur at all", Gandhi replied to his critic, "is to argue disbelief in the dignity of man." His technique to achieve it was *satyagraha,* which he defined as truth force or soul force. In more practical terms, it meant civil disobedience—but something more than that. It was based on the premise of superior moral power of the protesters capable of changing the heart of the oppressor through a display of moral strength. Non-violence or ahimsa was the cardinal principle of his message which was non-negotiable under all circumstances. [27]

It is not perhaps strictly correct to say that Gandhi was rejecting modernity as a package. Anthony Parel notes in his introduction to *Hind Swaraj* that this text is presented in the genre of a dialogue between a reader and an editor, "a very *modem* figure", with Gandhi taking on this role.[28] Throughout his career he made utmost use of the print media, editing *Indian Opinion* during his South African days, and then *Young India* and *Harijan* became the major communicators of his ideas. And he travelled extensively by railways while organising his campaigns. Yet, by offering an ideological critique of the Western civilisation in its modern phase, Gandhi was effectively contesting the moral legitimacy of the Raj that rested on a stated assumption of the superiority of the West. So far as his methods were concerned, Partha Chatterjee has argued that they gave Gandhi immense manoeuvrability in terms of real politics. There was an implicit recognition of an existing disjuncture between morality and politics—the concept of ahimsa could bridge this gap. Failures could be explained either in terms of the loftiness of the ideal or in terms of imperfections of human agency.[29] But this ontological space for manoeuvring notwithstanding, this problem of reconciling the principles of non-violence with the realities of nationalist movement proved to be a perpetual "dilemma" that Gandhi had to negotiate with throughout his career as a leader of Indian nationalism, and this dilemma grew stronger over time as the movement intensified.'?

It will be, however, misleading to suggest that Gandhi was introducing Indians to an entirely new kind of politics. The mass movement organised by Tilak in Maharashtra in the 1890s, the activities

of the Punjab extremists and above all the Swadeshi movement in Bengal in 1905-8 had already foreshadowed the coming of agitational politics in India. And so far as mass mobilisation was concerned, the Home Rule Leagues of Tilak and Annie Besant prepared the ground for the success of Gandhi's initial saryagraha movements. Indeed, when in 1914, Tilak was released from prison and Annie Besant, the World President of the Theosophical Society, then stationed in Madras, joined the Congress, they wanted to steer Indian politics to an almost similar direction. But although Tilak was readmitted to Congress in 1915 due to Besant's intervention, they failed to reactivate the party out of its almost decade-long inertia. In frustration, Tilak started his Indian Home Rule League in April 1916 and Besant her own All India Home Rule League in September-both acting at tandem and in cooperation. The Home Rule movement had a simple goal of promoting Home Rule for India and an educative programme to arouse in the Indian masses a sense of pride in the Motherland. [31]

By 1917-18, when the government came down heavily upon the Home Rule Leagues, they had a membership of about sixty thousand aU over India, most importantly, in areas like Gujarat, Sind, United Provinces, Bihar and parts of south India, which did not in the past participate in nationalist movement. Yet, although their impact fell on a much wider community outside its direct membership, the Leagues ultimately could not bring in mass agitational politics in India. In Madras, Maharashtra and Karnataka, despite some untouchable support, the Leagues being under Brahman domination, invited the opposition of the non-Brahmans. But more significantly, Annie Besant, who was made the Congress President in 1917, began to take a conciliatory attitude towards the moderates, particularly after the announcement of the Montagu-Chelmsford reform proposals, and put the passive resistance programme on hold. This frustrated the young extremist leaders who provided her main support base and the Home Rule Leagues soon became defunct. Nevertheless, many of the local leaders of Gandhi's early satyagrahas came from Home Rule League background and they used organisational networks created by the Leagues.

While Annie Besant failed, Gandhi succeeded in uniting both the moderates and extremists on a common political platform. In the divided and contestable space of Indian politics, he could effectively claim for himself a centrist position, because he alienated neither and tactically combined the goal of the moderates with the means of the extremists. He adopted the moderates' goal of swaraj, but was

revenue remission. Through the Gujarat Sabha they got in touch with Gandhi in January 1918, but it was not until 22 March that Gandhi decided to launch a satyagraha in their support. Even then, it was a "patchy campaign", as it affected only a few villages; often the peasants capitulated to government pressure and often they crossed the boundaries of Gandhian politics of non-violence. By April the Bombay government partially fulfilled the peasants' demands by not confiscating the properties of defaulting peasants who could not pay, and in June Gandhi withdrew the campaign. Here too the intervention of the Gujarat Sabha or its educated leaders like Vallabhbhai and Vithalbhai Patel was of little direct consequence, as a movement had already been started and subsequently sustained by the local leaders. Gandhi made a solid political base in the villages of Kheda district; but the support of the villagers was on their own terms. When Gandhi returned with an appeal for recruitment for the army to fight in World War One, peasants rejected it with contempt."

In the middle of the Kheda saryagraha, Gandhi also got involved in the Ahmedabad textile mill strike of February-March 1918. Herc his adversaries were the Gujarati millowners, who were otherwise very dose to him. The immediate reason for industrial conflict was the withdrawal of plague-bonus, which was being given to dissuade workers from leaving the city in the face of mounting plague-related deaths. This withdrawal came at a time when the workers were already facing hard times from unusual high prices caused by World War One, and there were wildcat strikes and the formation of a weavers' association. Thus when labour got restive in Ahmedabad, Gandhi was invited by Anusuya Sarabbai, a social worker, and *his* brother Ambalal Sarabhai, the president of the Ahmedabad Millowners, Association, to intervene as an arbitrator and defuse the crisis. But Gandhi's intervention and the formation of an arbitration board proved futile, as millowners demanded a complete strike moratorium as a precondition for any negotiated settlement. On 22 February when the srubborn millowners locked out the weavers, Gandhi decided to champion the workers' cause, but persuaded them to tone down their demand to a wage hike of 35 per cent, instead of their original demand of 50 per cent. He and his Sabarmati ashram volunteers mobilised the workers and held regular meetings where initially thousands attended. But as the impasse continued, the millowners stood their ground and the workers began to lose their morale. Gandhi now used his last weapon of a hunger strike; the intransigent millowncrs gave in and agreed to send the matter to the

arbitration board. Although the workers ultimately got only 27.5 per cent wage rise, this movement went a long way in mobilising and organising the working classes in Ahmedabad, paving the way for the foundation of the Textile Labour Association in February 1920. But neither labour nor capital in Ahmedabad showed any evidence of an ideological commitment to the idea of "arbitration" as a novel Gandhian technique of resolving industrial disputes."

Gandhi gained nationwide popularity by championing these localised causes. Yet, if we look closely at these movements, we will find that on every occasion Gandhi was invited to provide leadership where considerable mass mobilisation had already taken place under local initiative. The masses interpreted Gandhi's message in their own terms and rumours surrounding the powers of this messianic leader served to break the barriers of fear involved in confronting formidable enemies. And everywhere the masses pushed their own agendas, much to the dislike of the elite nationalist leaders in the regions. But in the process all these regions became strongholds of political support for Gandhi, as people here responded eloquently to his later calls for political action. But once again this activism followed trajectories that were vastly divergent from the one desired by the leader.

In the Rowlatt saryagraha of 1919 Gandhi sought to move to a campaign that proposed to involve the entire nation; but here too we witness the same phenomenon, i.e., overwhelming mass support for Gandhi but for reasons and considerations that were different from those of the leader. The movement was aimed against the two bills prepared by a committee under Justice S.A.T. Rowlatt, to provide the government with additional coercive power to deal with terrorism. One of the bills was passed in the Imperial Legislative Assembly on 18 March 1919 over the unanimous protests of the Indian members. Ever since the content of the bill was published, Gandhi proposed to resist it with saryagraha. He was opposed to the spirit of the bill, which he described as the distrust for common men. It signified the reluctance of the government to part with arbitrary powers and thus made a mockery of the democratic constitutional reforms. Gandhi's initial programme was, however, modest: along with a few close associates he signed a saryagraha pledge on 24 February to disobey this and similar other unjust laws. On 26 February he issued an 'open letter' to all the Indians urging them to join the satyagraha. He decided to launch a nationwide movement, starting with a general strike or *bartal* on 6 April. But the movement soon lapsed into violence, particularly after Gandhi's arrest on 9 April.

The government had no prior experience of handling such widespread mass agitation. To avoid trouble they arrested Gandhi, but that precipitated a crisis, provoking unprecedented mob fury in areas like Delhi, Bombay, Ahmedabad or Amritsar. Gandhi's trusted volunteers could not control this mass violence and were themselves swayed by it. The government response was varied, as in the event of a complete breakdown of communication, provincial governments reacted according to their own preconceived notions. In Bombay the response was restrained, while in Punjab, Sir Michael O'Dyer unleashed a reign of terror. The worst violent incident was the massacre of jallianwallabagh in the city of Amritsar on 13 April, where General Dyer opened fire on a peaceful gathering of saryagrahis, killing 379 people, in a bid to break their morale.

By mid-April the satyagraha had started losing momentum, forcing Gandhi to withdraw it. *As* a political campaign, therefore, it was a manifest failure, since it failed to secure its only aim, i.e., the repeal of the Rowlatt Act. It also lapsed into violence, although it was meant to be non-violent. Gandhi admitted to have committed a Himalayan blunder by offering the weapon of saryagraha to a people insufficiently trained in the discipline of non-violence. But the movement was significant nevertheless, as it was the first nationwide popular agitation, marking the beginning of a transformation of Indian nationalist politics from being the politics of some restricted classes to becoming the politics of the masses. However, having said this, *we* should also recognise the limits of this Gandhian mass movement. The whole of India literally was not affected and the movement was more effective in the cities than in the rural areas. And here again the strength of the movement was due more to local grievances, like price rise or scarcity of basic commodities, than to protest against the Rowlatt bills, about which there was very little popular awareness. Finally, the effectiveness of the movement depended on the capability of the local leaders to relate local grievances to the national issue of the Rowlatt Act.

In other words, in the absence of any central organisation and an overarching popular consciousness, the importance of regional specificities and salience of local issues and leadership remained too obvious in a movement that is often claimed in the nationalist historiography as the first mass agitation at a national level. Gandhi as yet had no control over the Congress; hence, for organising the movement he set up a Satyagraha Sabha in Bombay and was helped by the Home Rule Leagues. Apart from this, in course of his extensive tours in many parts of India in February-March, he had made personal

old students' association, and in 1913 a Quranic school in Delhi, to reach the wider Muslim community at a time when they were deeply affected, both emotionally and politically, by the Balkan Wars. In Lucknow, the ulama at the Firangi Mahal, who in the eighteenth century represented a rationalist school of Islamic learning, had been taking increasing interest in world Islam since the 1870s.[42] One of them, Abdul Bari, along with the Ali brothers-Muhammad and Shaukat-now opened an All India Anjuman-e-Khuddam-e-Kaaba, to unite all Indians to protect Muslim holy places. The younger Muslim leaders thus closed the distance, which Sayyid Ahmed would prefer to maintain with the ulama, as they were more cager to forge a community of believers or *umma,* as opposed to Sir Sayyid's qaum or a community of common descent."

In the meanwhile, the anti-Congress and pro-government attitude of the Muslim League was also changing with the induction of younger men, like Muhammad Ali, Wazir Hasan or Abul Kalam Azad, into its leadership. Muhammad Ali Jinnah was brought in and he became a bridge between the League and the Congress. These tendencies became more prominent when Britain declared war against Turkey in November 1914. The Muslims refused to believe that it was a non-religious war, as leaders like Ali brothers with pro-Turkish sympathies were soon put behind bars. The Lucknow Pact in 1916 offered a joint League-Congress scheme for constitutional reforms, demanding representative government and dominion status for India. The principle of separate electorate was accepted, and proportional representation in both imperial and provincial legislature was agreed upon. In 1917 the Muslim League supported the Home Ruic agitation started by Annie Besant. But the outbreak of communal riots in Bihar, United Provinces and Bengal soon after this rapprochement revealed the continuing disjunction between the masses and their leaders. The latter's lingering faith in constitutional politics suffered a further jolt when the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms in 1919 totally disregarded the Lucknow Pact and the Muslim University Bill passed in September 1920 provided for a non-affiliating university under strict government control. The defeat of Turkey created the spectre of Islam in danger, an issue that could be used to mobilise mass support. The result of these developments was a shift in Muslim League leadership from the moderate constitutionalists to those who believed in Islamic religious self-assertion and broad-based mass movement. The Delhi session of the Muslim League in December 1918 invited the ulama and gave them public prominence," thus for the first time bringing them directly into the political centrestage.

The context was thus prepared for the beginning of Khilafat movement, the first mass agitation to forge political unity among a divided Indian Muslim community.

Behind the Khilafat movement were the rumours about a harsh peace treaty being imposed on the Ottoman Emperor who was still regarded as the KhaJifa or the spiritual head of the Islamic world. The movement, launched by a Khilafat Committee formed in Bombay in March 1919, had three main demands: the Khalifa must retain control over the Muslim holy places; he must be left with his pre-war territories so that he could maintain his position as the head of the Islamic world; and the jazirat-ul-Arab (Arabia, Syria, Iraq and Palestine) must not be under non-Muslim sovereignty. It was thus a pan-Islamic movement in all its appearance, as the cause had nothing to do with India. But as Gail Minault has shown, the Khilafat was being used more as a symbol, while the leaders actually had little concern about altering the political realities in the Middle East. It was found to be a symbol that could unite the Indian Muslim community divided along many fault-lines, such as regional, linguistic, class and sectarian. To use Minault's words: "A pan-Islamic symbol opened the way to pan-Indian Islamic political mobilization."[45] It was anti-British, which inspired Gandhi to support this cause in a bid to bring the Muslims into the mainstream of Indian nationalism.

Initially the Khilafat movement had two broad trends: a moderate trend headed by the Bombay merchants and a radical trend led by the younger Muslim leaders, like Muhammad Ali, Shaukat Ali, Maulana Azad and the ulama. The former group preferred to proceed through the familiar constitutional path of sending a delegation to the viceroy or ensuring Muslim representation in the Paris Peace Conference. The latter group on the other hand, wanted a mass agitation against the British on the basis of unity with the Hindus. Gandhi took up the Khilafat cause and initially played a mediating role between the moderates and the radicals. The moderates began to lose ground when the delegation headed by Dr Ansari and participated by Muhammad Ali himself, met the viceroy, then Prime Minister Lloyd George and then visited Paris, but returned empty-handed. The radicals then took charge of the movement, as emotions ran high after the publication of the terms of the Treaty of Sevres with Turkey in May 1920. In the same month, the Hunter *Commission* Majority Report was published, and it did not seem strong enough in condemning General Dyer's role in the Jallianwallabagh massacre. This infuriated Indian public opinion. The Allahabad conference of the Central Khilafat Committee, held on 1-2 June 1920,

decided to launch a four stage non-cooperation movement: boycott of titles, civil services, police and army and finally non-payment of taxes. The whole movement was to begin with a hartal on 1 August. Muslim opinion on non-cooperation was still divided and throughout the summer of 1920 Gandhi and Shaukat Ali toured extensively mobilising popular support for the programme. The hartal was a grand success, as it coincided with the death of Tilak, and from then on support for non-cooperation began to rise. Gandhi now pressed the Congress to adopt a similar plan of campaign on three issues: Punjab wrong, Khilafat wrong and swaraj. In an article in *Young India* he announced that through this movement he would bring swaraj in one year. He did not, however, define what this swaraj would actually mean.

The established politicians of the Congress still had their doubts about a non-cooperation programme. As they had no experience in mass agitation, it appeared to be a leap in the dark. There was an apprehension that it might lead to violence which would delay the implementation of the new constitutional reform, since the elections to the reformed councils were scheduled for November 1920. On the other hand, support for Gandhi's proposal for a non-cooperation movement came from the politically backward provinces and groups, which were not hitherto involved in Congress politics. Between September and December 1920 the Congress witnessed a tussle between these two grol;lps, as neither side wanted a split and searched for a consensus. A special session of the Congress was convened at Calcutta on 4-9 September 1920, where Gandhi's resolution on non-cooperation programme was approved over a qualifying amendment from Bepin Chandra Pal of Bengal, and despite stiff opposition from the old guards, like C.R. Das, Jinnah or Pal. The programme provided for surrender of government titles, boycott of schools, courts and councils, boycort of foreign goods, encouragement of national schools, arbitration courts and *khadi* (homespun cloth). The programme was then endorsed at the regular session of the Congress at Nagpur in December 1920. Here too opposition came from Das, who sought to turn the table against Gandhi by proposing a more radical programme. But ultimately a compromise was reached, as Das turned over to Gandhi's side. The resolution accepted all parts of the non-cooperation programme, but it was to be implemenred in stages, as directed by the All India Congress Committee. The movement, Gandhi assured, would bring swaraj within one year. If that did not happen or if government resorted to repression, then a civil disobedience campaign was to be launched, involving non-

and recruiting an equal number of volunteers. Gradually, the movement became more militant, with the beginning of boycott and organisation of public bonfires of foreign cloth. A nationwide strike was observed on 17 November, the day the Prince of Wales arrived in India on an official visit. On that day Bombay witnessed the outbreak of the first violent riot of the movement, targeting the Europeans, Anglo-Indians and the Parsis in the city. Gandhi was incensed; full-scale civil disobedience or a no tax campaign was postponed; it was decided that an experimental no revenue campaign would be launched at Bardoli in Gujarat in February 1922. The venue was carefully chosen, as it was a ryotwari area, with no zamindars and therefore no danger of a no-revenue campaign snowballing into a no-rent campaign tearing apart the fragile coalition of classes. But this never happened, as before that the Non-cooperation movement was withdrawn.

The extent of success of the non-cooperation movement would not definitely give Gandhi total satisfaction. Middle-class participation was not spectacular, as revealed in the figures for school, colleges and court boycotts, while peasant and working class participation was more impressive. Except in Madras, council election boycott was more or less successful, with the polling average being 5-8 per cent. Economic boycott was more intense and successful, as the value of imports of foreign cloth dropped from Rs. 1,020 million in 1920-21 to Rs. 570 million in 1921-22. The import of British cotton piece goods also declined from 1,292 million to 955 million yards during the same period.[51] Partly responsible for this success was trader participation, as the businessmen pledged not to indent foreign cloth for specific periods. During the period 1918-22, while the large industrialists remained anti-non-cooperation and pro-government, the Marwari and Gujarati merchants, aggrieved by the falling exchange rates and the taxation policy of the government, remained "fairly consistently pro-nationalist".[52] However, their refusal to import foreign cloth might have also been due to a sudden fall in rupee-sterling exchange rates that made import extremely unprofitable.P Production of handloom, on the other hand, also increased, but no definite statistics are available for that. Together with non-cooperation, there were other associated Gandhian social movements, which also achieved some success. Temperance or anti-liquor campaign resulted in significant drop in liquor excise revenue in Punjab, Madras, Bihar and Orissa. Hindu-Muslim alliance remained unshaken throughout the period, except in the Malabar region. The anri-untouchabiliry campaign, however, remained a secondary concern

for the Congressmen, though for the first time Gandhi had brought this issue to the forefront of nationalist politics by inserting in the historic 1920 resolution an appeal "to rid Hinduism of the reproach of untouchabiliry"." The emphasis of the movement was always on the unifying issues and on trying to cut across or reconcile class and communal disjunctions.

The most significant aspects of the Non-cooperation movement were, however, its uneven geographical spread and wide regional variations. First of all, it was marked by the involvement of regions and classes that did not participate in the past in any movement initiated by the Congress. There was significant peasant participation in Rajasthan, Sind, Gujarat, Awadh, Assam and Maharashtra, although in some cases such peasant movements were autonomous of any Congress organisational intervention. Of the four linguistic regions in ourh India, three were effectively brought into the movement, while Karnataka remained unaffected. There were some non-Brahman lower-caste participation in Madras and Maharashtra, powerful tribal movements in Andhra delta and Bengal in the form of forest saryagraha, labour unrest in Madras, Bengal and Assam, traders' participation in Bombay and Bengal. But on the other hand, the masses often crossed the limits of Gandhian creed of non-violence. Gandhi himself condemned the unruly mob, but failed to restrain them. And this was the main reason why he hesitated to begin a full-fledged civil disobedience or a no-revenue campaign. The final threshold was reached in the Chauri Chaura incident in Gorakhpur district of Utrar Pradesh on 4 February 1922, when villagers burned alive twenty-two policemen in the local police station. Here the local volunteers had gathered to protest against police oppression and the sale and high prices of certain articles. The police initially sought to deter them by firing in the air. This was interpreted by the crowd as a sign of fear, as bullets were turning into water "by the grace of Gandhiji". The crowd then marched towards the market, threw brickbats at the police and when the latter opened real fire, they were chased into the thana, which was then set on fire. For the Gandhian volunteers the destruction of the thana only signalled the coming of the Gandhi raj.[55] But for Gandhi it confirmed the absence of an environment of non-violence, as the stench of the Bombay riot greeting the Prince of Wales in September 1921 was still fresh in his nostrils, as he described it. The Non-cooperation movement was, therefore, withdrawn on 11 February 1922, followed by the Bardoli resolution, which emphasised the need for constructive work before beginning any political agitation. Gandhi was criticised by his own

Congressmen, particularly the younger elements, for withdrawing the movement when it had reached its peak. But he stood firm in his faith in non-violence and refused to budge. He was arrested on 10 March 1922 and was sentenced to prison for six years. Officially the Congress-led Non-cooperation movement ended, but in different localities it continued despite official withdrawal.

Gradually the Khilafat movement too died. It had proved to be another problem for Gandhi, as the attitudes of the Khilafat leaders increasingly revealed that they had accepted the Gandhian creed of non-violence more as a matter of convenience to take advantage of Gandhi's charismatic appeal, rather than as a matter of faith. By bringing in the ulama and by overtly using a religious symbol, the movement evoked religious emotions among the Muslim masses. Violent tendencies soon appeared in the Khilafat movement, as the masses lost self-discipline and the leaders failed to control them. The worst-case scenario was the Moplah uprising in Malabar, where the poor Moplah peasants, emboldened by the Khilafat spirit, rose against the Hindu moneylenders and the state.[56] There was also factionalism within the Khilafat Committee, as the breach between the ulama, allied with the radical leaders who wanted to move beyond non-violence, and the moderates who preferred to stay with Gandhi, began to widen. There were differences between Gandhi on the one hand and the Ali brothers and Abdul Bari on the other over the issue of escalating use of religious rhetoric. By the end of 1921, with the outbreak of the Moplah uprising in Malabar, followed by other communal riots in various parts of the subcontinent in 1922-23, there was a visible breach in the Hindu-Muslim alliance. The symbol itself, around which Muslim mass mobilisation had taken place, soon lost its significance, as a nationalist revolution in Turkey abolished monarchy or the Khilafat in 1924. In India the Khilafat movement hereafter died down, but the religious emotions which it had articulated continued to persist, matched by an equally militant Hindu radicalism.

The Non-Cooperarion-Khilafar movement, however, raises many issues about the nature of mass movement in India under the leadership of the Gandhian Congress. In different regions, as we have noted earlier, the movement took different shapes. In all the regions the movement was initially confined to the cities and small towns, where it was primarily dependent on middle class participation that gradually declined. There was low turn out at the council election almost everywhere; but an exception was Madras, where very few candidates actually withdrew and the justice Party returned as a

majority party in the legislature." In Madras, the movement witnessed from the very beginning a Brahman-non-Brahman conflict, as the Justice Party launched an active campaign against the 'Brahman' Congress and its non-cooperation programme and rallied in support of the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms. Because of this resistance, the boycott of foreign cloth was also much weaker in the Tamil regions than in other provinces of India.[51] The development of national schools and arbitration courts and khadi did not succeed everywhere either. In Nagpur division, for example, the inadequacy of national schools forced students to get back to government educational institutions. As arbitration courts became defunct, lawyers got back to their usual legal practice.[59] In most areas, khadi was 30 to 40 per cent more expensive than mill cloth, resulting in its unpopularity among the poor people.[60] In many cases, such as in the small towns of Gujarat, mobilisation depended on local issues, like temple politics, control over municipalities or control over educational institutions'[1] or in the south Indian towns grievances against rising municipal taxes or the income tax. In Tamilnad, the success of the temperance movement depended on various social motives, such as the Sanskritising tendencies of the upwardly mobile castes and local factionalism.'[2] In some other areas, mobilisation to a~ extent depended on personal influence of local leaders, such as C.R. Das in Bengal, whose personal sacrificer-giving up a lucrative legal practice, for example-inspired the younger generation.'[3]

In Punjab, on the other hand, the Akali movement has been described by Richard Fox as representing "the largest and longest application of the Gandhian programme of satyagraha, or nonviolent resistance."[64] However, if we look closely at this movement, we will find that it had very little direct relevance to his non-cooperation programme. Tracing its origins from the wider reformist Singh Sabha movement of the late nineteenth century (sec chapter 5.2), this particular campaign started in October 1920 when a Siromoni Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) was formed. Its aims were to reform the Sikh gurdwaras and to reclaim control of the Sikh shrines from the hands of the government manipulated loyalist committees that included non-Sikhs. In December, as an auxiliary of the SGPC the Akali Dal was formed to coordinate *jathas* to wrest control of the shrines, the name Akali ("servants of the Eternal God") being derived from the small band of martyr-warriors formed to defend the faith during the time of Ranjit Singh.[65] Already irritated by the administration of martial law and the jallianwaJlabagh

massacre, the Akalis came to a head-on collision with the government when in early 1921 it took the keys of the Golden Temple at Amritsar and appointed a new manager. When the Akalis protested, the government once more unleashed a repressive regime, and the latter responded with satyagraha. Gandhi and the Congress supported the campaign, which ultimately forced the government to surrender the keys and administration of the temple to the Akalis. But the middle-class Sikh leadership had only selectively adopted the non-cooperation programme and once their limited goal was achieved, did not allow their distinctive religious struggle to be completely appropriated by the Congress agitation. [66]

As urban middle-class enthusiasm soon petered out all over India, business interest was also vacillating. While the larger Indian capitalists opposed the non-cooperation programme from the very beginning, smaller traders and merchants continued to use their networks to promote hartal and generously donated money to the Tilak Swaraj Fund. But they too opposed a total boycott of foreign goods. [67] Attempts to involve the working classes also ran into problems. For instance, an experiment to involve the tea garden labourers in Assam ended up in a disaster at Chandpur which was condemned severely by Gandhi. Dependence on the capitalists prevented the leaders from mobilising the working class, as Gandhi continually insisted that the movement should maintain harmonious capital-labour relationship. [68] In Nagpur and Berar, the Gandhians achieved some influence over the working classes, but this hardly had any significant impact on the overall momentum of the Non-cooperation movement in the region. [69] And where labour unrest turned violent, as in Madras, the local leaders quickly washed their hands off, forcing the striking workers to submit to the authorities. This disheartened the workers so much that when in 1922 the Congress workers wanted again to mobilise them, there was hardly any response. [70] The flagging interest in the urban areas soon shifted the focus of the movement to the countryside. It was here that the movement took widely variable shapes depending on the structures of peasant societies.

The non-cooperation movement was most effective where the peasants had already organised themselves. In Awadh district of UP a radical peasant movement was being organised since 1918-19 against the oppressive taluqdars. This peasant militancy, organised at the grassroots level by local leader Baba Ramchandra, was later harnessed by the UP Kisan Sabha which was launched in February 1918 in Allahabad. By June 1919 the Kisan Sabha had 450 branches and the UP Congress tried to tap into this reservoir of peasant

militancy by tagging the movement to the Non-cooperation campaign in the province.[71] In north Bihar too, the Congress movement became most powerful in those areas which witnessed the previous anti-planter agitation, Swami Viswananda's campaign and Kisan Sabha acrivities." In the Midnapur district of Bengal the Mahishya peasants had been organised in 1919 against the Union Board taxes by a locaJ leader B.N. Sasmal; later on this movement too merged into the non-cooperation campaign." In certain regions of Orissa, like Kanika for example, the existing tradition of peasant *melis* or anti-feudal demonstrations continuing since the nineteenth century, was later on incorporated into the non-cooperation movement.[74] In the Kheda district of Gujarat, the Paridar peasants had already launched a successful no-revenue campaign in 1918 and they were again preparing for another round of stir; this district for obvious reasons, therefore, became the strongest bastion of non-cooperation movement.[75] In south India, between December 1921 and February 1922 there was a "brief and sporadic" no-revenue campaign in the Godavari, Krishna and Guntur districts in the Andhra delta. Here the village officials, through whom the revenue was collected, resigned and the peasants hoping for a collapse of the government, stopped paying the revenue. But when the government instituted an inquiry into their grievances and threatened to arrest the leaders who would not give up, the agitation subsided within weeks. In both these cases, the momentum of the agitations was slowly mounting for quite some rime, at least since 1918-19, and these were then integrated into the non-cooperation movement.[76] In other areas, where there was no pre-history of peasant mobilisation, the response of the countryside was rather muted. This shows that it was the internal dynamics of the regions that accounted for the success of the non-cooperation movement, rather than the Congress mobilising an as yet inert peasantry into an organised nationalist campaign.

The Non-cooperation movement remained more under the control of the Congress leaders where there were homogeneous and dominant peasant communities holding sway over lower caste agricultural labourers, such as the Mahishya peasant caste in Bengal or the Patidar peasant caste in Gujarat. Here local leaders had greater control through caste organisations and other community and kinship networks. Even here, the peasants showed considerable self-initiative: the Paridar peasants had started a no-revenue campaign even without the formal approval of the Congress. Then the withdrawal of the movement so disheartened them that when their leaders wanted to mobilise them again in 1922, they simply refused to

respond.n Such self-initiative was more clearly discernible where no such homogenous peasant groups could be found. In some parts of Orissa, for example, peasants stopped paying rents and forest taxes against the wishes of their local Congress leaders and continued their stir even after its formal withdrawal by the Congress.71 Elsewhere, in Awadh for example, where there was more cross-caste mobilisation, the peasants were more uncontrolled. They interpreted Gandhi in their own varied ways and tried to combine the nationalist movement with their own struggle against taluqdari oppression. Attacks on taluqdari property increased in the winter of 1921-22 and the Congress found it too difficult to control. Gandhi visited UP and criticised the peasants for turning violent, but with no appreciable results. So the Congress decided to abandon it; Baba Ramchandra was arrested and the movement was severely repressed, but the local Congress did not raise a finger.79 For the peasants in Gorakhpur, for instance, Gandhi represented a symbol of deliverance from day-to-day oppression. There were rumours all around which showed that to the peasants swaraj meant a millenium, a utopian state where there would be no rent, no revenue, no repayment of loans, no zamindar or taluqdar. It was a situation which the peasants in their imagination had always desired. Gandhi had thus appealed to their imagination and fired them into action.•0 On the other hand, in Punjab after the Amritsar victory the Akali campaign moved to the countryside, wresting control of the Guru-ka-bagh shrine in Novemeber 1922, i.e., long after the non-cooperation movement had been formally withdrawn. By January 1923 they had taken control of about one hundred shrines, and then in September, when the government deposed the ruler of the princely state of Nabha for his alleged support to the Akalis, the latter launched a militant anti-colonial campaign in Jaito for his restoration. During its rural phase the Akali movement at various places crossed the boundary of non-violent movement, and the peasants openly defied the authority of the Raj. Gandhi withdrew his support at this point as he disapproved of the campaign for the deposed Nabha ruler. The government now came down heavily on the Akalis, but ultimately patched up a compromise for fear of affecting the loyalty of the Sikh soldiers. The Gurdwara Reform Act of 1925 restored the control of the shrines to Sikh management. But as the movement was withdrawn, the rural protesters felt bctrayed.11

Gandhi also appealed to the millennial dreams of the Indian tribal population who got involved increasingly in the wider politics of the nation, although on their own terms. In tribal areas, building on the

The short-lived Muslim League-Congress alliance was also jeopardised by the decline of the Khilafat movement. The Muslim League itself became divided among the supporters of joint electorate and separate electorate. Communal riots broke out in Kohat in the North-Western Frontier. In Bengal the Hindu–Muslim pact forged by C.R. Das in 1923 broke down, culminating in a fierce riot in Calcutta in April 1926. It was followed by a series of other riots in eastern Bengal between 1926 and 1931, as "music before mosques" became an emotional issue for rival communal mobilisation in the countryside." In UP between 1923 and 1927 there were eighty-eight riots, leading almost to a complete breakdown of Hindu-Muslim relations.[92] In the election of 1925–26 religious issues were freely exploited by Hindu orthodox groups led by Madan Mohan Malaviya, resulting in the defeat of the secularist Motilal Nehru. As a corollary, Hindu nationalist organisations, like the All India Hindu Mahasabha gained in strength in north and central India; its close and problematic relationship with the Congress tarnished the latter's secular image and led to further alienation of the Muslims from mainstream nationalism." The untouchables too, whom Gandhi called Harijan (God's people), were frustrated as the campaign to ameliorate their conditions received lukewarm response throughout India. They were first organised in 1926 under the banner of an exclusive organisation by Rao Bahadur M.C. Rajah; but in 1930 Dr B.R. Ambedkar organised them into an All India Depressed Classes Congress with a clear anti-Congress agenda (more in chapter 7.2).

However, despite such fissures in organised political life, there were, on the other hand, some significant changes that prepared the ground for another round of mass agitation against the British Raj. First of all, a major crisis for the export-oriented colonial economy culminated in the great depression in the late 1920s. The prices of exportable agricultural cash crops went down steeply-by about 50 per cent in general-affecting the rich peasantry. The prices of some cash crops fell more drastically than others. The price of cotton, for example, grown in Punjab, Gujarat and Maharashtra, fell from Rs. 0.70 per pound in the mid-1920s to Rs. 0.22 in 1930. The price of wheat within a year fell from Rs. 5 to Rs. 3 per maund between 1929 and 1930. The price of rice began to faJI a little later, from the beginning of 1931, when the jute market also crashed in Bengal. While the income of the peasantry was going down, the amount of revenue, settled previously in a condition of high prices, remained static, as government was not prepared to allow any remission to accommodate the price fall, still widely believed to be a temporary

phenomenon: As landlords remained under pressure to pay revenue, there was no relenting in the pressure of rent on the tenants. And in such a situation debt servicing became a problem, as moneylenders were now more keen in recovering their capital. In many areas the flow of rural credit dried up and the peasants were forced to sell parts of their land to raise the capital to keep cultivation going.[94] However, the situation varied from region to region, and even within the same region such as Bengal, as Sugata Bose has shown, the effect varied widely depending on the structure of peasant society and organisation of production.[95]

This situation helped Congress to mobilise the rich peasants and small holders in various parts of the country, such as Bengal, coastal Andhra or UP. In the latter area, repeated crop failures and shortfall in the production of food crops also added to the miseries of the poor peasants. This led to the organisation of peasant movements outside the Congress, as it was clearly not interested in mobilising such potentially radical lower peasant groups. In Bengal too, poor Muslim, untouchable Namasudra and tribal Santhal peasants mobilised around radical agrarian demands in 1928-29, representing what Tanika Sarkar has described as "a parallel stream of protest".[96] The environment was certainly conducive for a mass agitation if the local Congress leaders could relate the specific grievances of these peasants to the broader national agenda of swaraj. But their major challenge was to reconcile the interests of the richer landowning peasants with the concerns of the labouring agricultural workers and tenants.

The other important development was the emergence of a capitalist class during and in the years immediately following World War One. Fiscal needs forced the Government of India to impose protective tariffs, pushing the prices of imported articles up, and thus helping unintentionally Indian industrialisation. As a result, in the 1920s there was a powerful and conscious Indian capitalist class which organised itself in 1927 under the banner of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industries (FICCI). This was also the time when the Indian bourgeoisie was coming into conflict with the imperial government on many issues. Their usual way of handling the situation was to operate as a pressure group; but increasingly their leaders like G.D. Birla or Purushottamdas Thakurdas and even the moderate Lalji Naranji were coming to the conclusion that they would do better if they sided with the Congress to fight their battle. Many of the captains of Indian industries were the cotton mill owners of western India, who had reached the threshold of

endurance a a result of depression and competition from cheap Japanese textiles. By the summer of 1930 the Bombay mill owners were left with record unsold stocks-120,000 bales of cloth and 19,000 bales of yarn.[97] Throwing their lot with the Congress now seemed to be an option worth trying. Congress too began to support many of their demands and made them into national issues, and thus began to attract the capitalist class to its side. But the problem was, there had also been a parallel expansion of the industrial working class and a rise in its political consciousness. The year 1928-29 was the peak period of labour unrest in India, wimessing about 203 strikes spread over all parts of the country. Although the workers often exhibited considerable autonomy of action, one of the major reasons behind this enhanced labour activism was the penetration of communist influence-in eastern India through the Workers' Peasants' Party and in Bombay through the Girni Kamgar Union. By 1930, however, this communist influence declined as the government came down heavily on them with repressive measures, and the Comintern instructed them to keep distance from the Congress-led nationalist movement. This gave the Congress an opportunity to resurrect a broad united front, although working-class support for it was in general weak, except in Bengal, where their fight was against the British capitalists. But still the Congress tried to project itself as a "supra-class entity" and "above intere ts"[98] and thus ought, although very clumsily, to bring in both the capitalists and the workers under the same banner (more in chapter 7).

Within such a cluttered context of discord and disorder, Indian politics was galvanised again from late 1927 when a Tory government in London appointed an all-white Statutory Commission under Sir John Simon to review the operation of the constitutional system in India. Non-inclusion of Indians in the commission provoked protests from all the political groups in India and resulted in a successful nationwide boycott—participated by both Congress and the Muslim League. When the Simon Commission arrived in the country in early 1928, it was greeted with slogans like "Go Back Simon". Morilal Nehru in this context started negotiating for a joint Hindu-Muslim constitutional scheme as a fitting reply, and at an all parties conference in Lucknow in August 1928 the Nehru Report was finalised. It was a bunch of uneasy compromises and therefore stood on shaky grounds. Its final fate was to be decided at the forthcoming Calcutta Congress in December 1928, and Morilal wanted Gandhi to throw his weight behind the scheme, so that it was accepted smoothly by the Congress. But for Gandhi swaraj was not a

opposition to the Nehru Report had become stronger. It contained a constitutional scheme that proposed dominion status for India, which was opposed by a radical younger group led by jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose. Both Nehru and Bose were in favour of complete independence. Even Muslim opposition to the report was increasing, as groups headed by Jinnah and Aga Khan repudiated it. So Gandhi proposed a compromise resolution, which adopted the Nehru Report, but said that if the government did not accept it by 31 December 1930, the Congress would go in for a non-cooperation movement to achieve full independence. Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Bose were still unhappy; but when Gandhi as a further concession cut down the time limit to 1929, the resolution was passed. In the open session also Gandhi's compromise resolution was carried, while Bose's amendment demanding complete independence was lost. Thus Gandhi once again came to dominate the Congress, but as Brown (1977) says, he wanted to assume leadership only on his own terms. So he had a second resolution passed which contained a detailed programme of constructive work. It involved revival of organisational work, removal of untouchabiliry, boycott of foreign cloth, spread of khadi, temperance, village reconstruction and removal of disabilities of women. It was through this constructive programme that Gandhi hoped to achieve true swaraj. But one important issue that this constructive programme did not touch was Hindu-Muslim unity.

Even after the Calcutta Congress, some Congress leaders outside the Nehru-Bose group, like the Liberals, preferred cooperation with the British. The then viceroy, Lord Irwin, also wanted a reconciliation to introduce a constitutional scheme with a dominion status as the ultimate goal. He received the support of the Labour government in power and hence came the "Irwin Offer" of 31 October 1929, proposing a Round Table Conference to settle the issue. Gandhi was reluctant to reject it outright, but negotiations broke down, as the Congress leaders wanted the details of the dominion status to be discussed, and not just the principle. In December public attention shifted to Lahore where the next session of the Congress was going to be held with jawaharlal Nehru as the president. Many leaders had reservations about starting a movement for full independence, particularly in view of the rising wave of violence spearheaded by revolutionary leaders like Bhagat Singh and others. So when Gandhi arrived in Lahore he had an uphill task and a lot of opposition to encounter; but in spite of everything his preferred resolution was passed. It defined the Congress goal as full independence or *"puma*

stoaraj" and proposed that as a preliminary to start a civil disobedience movement to achieve it, a boycott of legislature would begin immediately. The All India Congress Committee (AICC) was authorised to start a civil disobedience movement at an appropriate time. But Gandhi, as it seems, had not as yet been able to convince all his cnncs.

The call for the boycott of legislatures evoked only limited response. Muslim members of the Congress, like Dr Ansari, were unhappy, as communal unity they thought was an essential precondition for the success of a civil disobedience movement. Outside the Congress, the Muslim Conference and the Muslim League condemned the movement as a devise to establish Hindu Raj. Similarly, Sikh support also seemed to have shifted away from Congress. Non-Congress Hindus, like the Hindu Mahasabha and the Justice Party in Madras declared their opposition to civil disobedience. Business groups were apprehensive about the uncertain possibilities of the Lahore resolution, while young Congressmen were pressing for more militant action. Under the circumstances, the celebration of the "Independence Day" on 26 January 1930 evoked little enthusiasm, except in Punjab, UP, Delhi and Bombay. In Bihar, the celebrations resulted in violent clashes between the police and the Congress volunteers. Gandhi had to devise a strategy to break out of this impasse and impute a broader meaning into the word 'independence', as opposed to its narrower political connotation that had such a divisive impact.

On 31 January 1930 Gandhi therefore announced an eleven point ultimatum for Lord Irwin; if these demands were met by 11 March, he declared, there would be no civil disobedience and the Congress would participate in any conference. It was a compromise formula, which included, according to Surnit Sarkar's classification, six "issues of general interest", like reduction of military expenditure and civil service salaries, total prohibition, discharge of political prisoners not convicted of murder, reform of the CID and its popular control and changes in the arms act; three "specific bourgeois demands", like lowering of the rupee-sterling exchange rate to 1s 4d, protective tariff on foreign cloth and reservation of coastal traffic for Indian shipping companies; and two "basically peasant themes", i.e., 50 per cent reduction of land revenue and its subjection to legislative control and abolition of salt tax and government salt monopoly,'?' It was a mixed package to appeal to a wide cross-section of political opinions and unite the Indians once again under one overarching political leadership. Gandhi thus related the abstract

concept of independence to certain specific grievances; but of all grievances, salt tax seemed to be the most crucial one for many reasons. It affected all sections of the population and had no divisive implication. It did not threaten government finances or any vested interests and therefore would not alienate any of the non-Congress political elements, nor would provoke government repression. And finally, it could be made into a highly emotive issue with great publicity value.

Irwin was in no mood to compromise, and hence on 12 March began Gandhi's historic Dandi March to the Gujarat seashore where on 6 April he publicly violated the salt law. The march attracted enormous publicity both in India and overseas, and was followed by wholesale illegal manufacture and sale of salt, accompanied by boycott of foreign cloth and liquor. In the next stage would come non-payment of revenue in the ryotwari areas, non-payment of chaukidari taxes in the zamindari areas and violation of forest laws in the Central Provinces. The Congress Working Committee had thus chalked out a programme, which would have less divisive impact on Indian society. But things began to take an abrupt turn towards the end of April, as violent terrorist activities and less disciplined mass upsurge began to take place in different parts of India. The most important of these was the armoury raid in Chittagong in Bengal, followed by a spate of terrorist activities throughout the province. In Peshawar the masses became unruly after the arrest of the local charismatic leader Badsha Khan. Then in mid-May Gandhi himself was arrested. This was followed by a spontaneous textile strike in Sholapur, where the workers went around rampaging government buildings and other official targets in the city. All these encouraged in nearly all parts of India a mass movement that did not merely involve non-cooperation with a foreign government, but actual violation of its laws to achieve complete independence. Even the outbreak of violence in three areas did not immediately lead to withdrawal of the movement. In this sense, the Civil Disobedience movement, as Sumit Sarkar (1983) has argued, witnessed a definite advance of radicalism over the 1920 movement. But at the same time, it was not an unqualified success. There was a discernible absence of Hindu-Muslim unity, no major labour participation and the intelligentsia was not as involved as in the past.

On the other hand, a new feature of the Civil Disobedience movement was a massive business support. They participated, at least during the initial period, in two very fruitful ways: they provided the finance and supported the boycott movement, particularly that of

revolutionary terrorism. Bhagat Singh in Punjab, who had assassinated a British officer and thrown bombs at the legislative assembly, and Benoy, Badal and Dinesh in Bengal, who had attacked the Writers' Building in Calcutta, became their heroes. On the other hand, working-class support was non-existent and given their recent radical propensities, Gandhi had reservations about involving them in the movement. One exception was Nagpur, where working-class participation was massive and much more than in the 1921 movement.[106] In the countryside, the enthusiasm of the richer peasantry, such as the Patidars of Gujarat or the Jats of UP, dissipated due to confiscation and sale of properties. On the other hand, drastic fall in agricultural prices resulted in the movement of the lesser peasantry acquiring radical tendencies, such as no-rent campaigns in UP, violation of forest laws and tribal rebellions in parts of Andhra, CP, Maharashtra, Orissa, Bihar, Assam and Punjab. These developments might have serious divisive impact on society which Gandhi certainly wanted to avoid. So the movement was withdrawn through the Gandhi-Irwin Pact of 5 March 1931 and Congress agreed to participate in the Second Round Table Conference to discuss the future constitution of India. Interestingly, peasants in Orissa celebrated the truce as a "victory for Gandhi" and were further encouraged to stop paying taxes and manufacture salt![107]

The compromise of 1931 is, however, the subject of a major controversy in Indian history. It was R.J. Moore (1974) who first pointed out that bourgeois pressure was a significant factor behind the compromise, a point which Sumit Sarkar (1976) developed later to argue that the Indian bourgeoisie played a "crucial" role both in the initial success of the movement as well as in its subsequent withdrawal. This position has been accepted by other historians too across the ideological spectrum, like Judith Brown (1977), Claude Markovits (1985) and Basudev Chatterji (1992). The alliance between Congress and the capitalists, it is argued, was uneasy and vulnerable from the very beginning and now uncontrolled mass movement unnerved the business classes who wanted to give peace a chance. Hence the pressure on Gandhi to return to constitutional politics and the result was the Gandhi-Irwin Pact. But the problem with this thesis is that the business groups hardly represented a homogeneous class in 1931 and did not speak with one voice. As A.D.D. Gordon puts it, the enthusiasm of the industrialists was dampened by the depression, boycott, hartals and the social disruptions, and they wanted either to destroy civil disobedience or broker a peace between Congress and the government. But on the other

side by side with this apathy and antipathy, there were also signs of more radicalism among certain other sections of the lower peasantry, expressed through salt satyagrahas, forest saryagrahas, non-payment of chaukidari taxes, no-rent and no-revenue campaigns. But these were movements largely outside the ambit of Congress organisation, and so at places Congress leaders tried to exert a moderating influence on them, or where this was not possible, sought to distance themselves from such peasant militancy.[112]

In the urban areas, the business groups were certainly ambivalent. There was an open estrangement between the Congress and the Bombay mill-owners, who under the leadership of Homi Mody warned Gandhi against a renewal of the movement. The other sections of the Indian big business were in a dilemma. Their hope for concessions from the government had been belied; but a renewal of civil disobedience might this time seriously threaten the social status quo, as government was more prepared for a counter offensive. Under the strain of this dilemma, argues Claude Markovits (1985), the unity of the Indian capitalist class broke down. By 1933, the weakening economy and growing violence even crushed the enthusiasm of the staunchest of Gandhian supporters-the Gujarati and Marwari merchants.[!"]? The urban intelligentsia also felt less inclined to follow the Gandhian path. Picketing of shops was frequently punctuated by the use of bombs, which Gandhi condemned, but failed to stop. The labour remained apathetic and the Muslims often antagonistic. Government repression saw thousands of Congress volunteers behind bars. The movement gradually declined by 1934.

For Congress, however, the Civil Disobedience movement was by no means a failure. It had by now mobilised great political support and gained a moral authority, which were converted into a massive electoral victory in 1937. In this first election under the Government of India Act of 1935, which offered franchise to a larger electorate, Congress achieved absolute majority in five out of eleven provinces, i.e., Madras, Bihar, Orissa, C.P. and U.P., near majority in Bombay and became the single largest party in Bengal, which was a Muslim majority province. For most of the Indians, especially Hindus, it was a "vote for Gandhiji and the yellow box", and it registered their expectation for some real socio-economic changes, promised recently by the Socialists and other left-wing Congress leaders.[!"] The subsequent ministry formation in eight provinces (U.P., Bihar, Orissa, C.P., Bombay, Madras, North-West Frontier Province and Assam) was Congress's first association with the apparatus of power. But this office acceptance also symbolised the victory

within Congress command structures of the right-wingers who preferred constitutional politics to agitarional methods of Gandhi. *As* D.A. Low has argued,[115] while fighting the British Raj, the Congress itself was becoming the Raj and was gradually drifting away from the Gandhian ideal of swaraj (details in chapter 8.1).

6.5. THE ACT OF 1935, "PAPER FEDERATION" AND THE PRINCES

The Act of 1919 had impressed neither any section of Indian opinion, nor the Conservatives in London. The political agitations made it clear that Congress had to be allowed some share of power, without endangering British control over the central government. So fresh discussions for reform started in the late 1920s, with a parliamentary commission appointed in 1927 under Lord Simon. But when the Simon Commission visited India, it was boycotted by all the political parties as it was wholly European and did not include any Indian member. In October 1929, Lord Irwin made a further concession by making an announcement that full dominion status would be the natural goal of India's constitutional progress; but in view of Conservative opposition at home, it meant really nothing. The report of the Simon Commission was released in June 1930 and it suggested the replacement of dyarchy with full responsible government in the provinces, with the provision of some emergency powers in the hands of the governors; but no change was suggested in the constitution of the central government. Meant to protect imperial control over the centre, the proposal satisfied none of the political groups in India and could not be implemented because of the beginning of Civil Disobedience movement. Irwin again offered as a concession the proposal of a Round Table Conference to discuss the future system of government. But its first session, held in London between November 1930 and January 1931, was boycotted by the Congress. Here the nominated representatives of British India and princely states discussed the need for a federal government of India free of British control. But the conference achieved very little, as the Conservative-dominated National government in power in London was not in a mood to take the federal idea seriously. Gandhi was then persuaded to participate in the Second Round Table Conference in September–December 1931 on the basis of three vague principles of federation, responsible government and reservation and safeguards. But Gandhi's participation proved futile, as negotiations at the Minorities Committee broke down on the issue of

separate electorate, now demanded not only by the Muslims, but by the depressed classes (untouchables), Anglo-Indians, Indian Christians and the Europeans too. With the coming of a Tory ministry in Britain in September 1931, British official attitudes hardened even further.[116]

The constitutional history of India again took a dramatic turn when Prime Minister Ramsay Macdonald announced his Communal Award in August 1932. It apportioned representation among communities and extended the provision of separate electorate to the untouchables as well. Gandhi, then in Yeravda jail, saw in it a sinister motive to divide the Hindu society, as the untouchables, he believed, were an integral part of it. The provision of separate electorate, he argued, would politically separate them and would permanently block the path of their integration into Hindu society. He therefore decided to fast unto death to reverse the arrangement. The nation panicked, although some of the depressed classes leaders like M.C. Rajah favoured joint electorate, the most influential of them, Dr B.R. Ambedkar saw in the provision of separate electorate the only hope of securing political representation for the untouchables (for more details see chapter 7.2). But Gandhi, though opposed to separate electorate, was not averse to the idea of reserved seats, and Ambedkar too ultimately agreed to it, as the proposed number of such reserved seats for the depressed classes was increased and a two-tier election system was recommended to ensure proper representation of such classes.[117] This became the basis of the Poona Pact of September 1932, which the government subsequently accepted. The third Round Table Conference in November-December 1932 was largely formal and unimportant, as only 46 out of 112 delegates attended the session. A White Paper in March 1933 set up a Parliamentary Joint Select Committee with a provision merely to consult Indian opinion. The Government of India Act, which ultimately did eventuate in 1935 could therefore hardly satisfy anybody and was criticised equally by Congress as well as the Muslim League.

In the provinces, in place of dyarchy the Act of 1935 provided for responsible government in all the departments. But this was balanced off by wide discretionary powers given to the governors about summoning legislatures, giving assent to bills and administering tribal regions. The governors were also given special power to safeguard minority rights, privileges of civil servants and British business interests. And finally, they could take over and run the administration of a province indefinitely under a special provision. At the

centre, the act provided for a federal structure, but it would come into effect only if more than 50 per cent of the princely states formally acceded to it by signing the Instruments of Accession, which would override their previous treaties with the British crown. The act introduced dyarchy at the centre, but subject to various safeguards, and departments like foreign affairs, defence and internal security remained completely under the control of the viceroy. Another feature of this act was the transfer of financial control from London to New Delhi, in response to a long-standing demand of the Government of India for fiscal autonomy. The electorate was enlarged to 30 million; but the high property qualifications only enfranchised 10 per cent of the Indian population. In rural India, it gave voting right to the rich and middle peasants, as they were presumably the main constituency for Congress politics. So the act, suspects D.A. Low, was a ploy to corrode the support base of the Congress and tie these important classes to the Raj. A "competition for the allegiance of the dominant peasant communities", he writes, lay at the heart of the conflict between the Congress and the Raj at this stage.[118] Apart from that, in the bicameral central legislature, members nominated by the princes would constitute 30 to 40 per cent of the seats, thus permanently eliminating the possibility of a Congress majority. Separate electorate was provided for the Muslims and reserved seats for the Scheduled Castes (a new term for the 'depressed classes' or untouchables) in the provincial and central legislatures. Not unjustifiably the Labour opposition argued in London that the act only proposed to protect British interests in India by sharing power with the loyalist elements.

The Act of 1935 did not mention the granting of dominion status promised during the Civil Disobedience movement. However much diehard Conservatives like Winston Churchill might think that the act amounted to Britain's abdication of empire, his colleagues had consciously chosen the federal structure because, as Carl Bridge has argued, it "would act primarily to protect Britain's interests rather than hand over control in vital areas".[119] Its net effect was to divert Congress attention to the provinces, while maintaining strong imperial control at the centre. If any change happened at all, as B.R. Tomlinson has pointed out: "The apex of the system of imperial control moved from London to Delhi."[120] The viceroy was now to enjoy many of the powers previously exercised by the secretary of state and thus Indo-Brirish relationship was provided with a new orientation that would best protect essential imperial interests. The significance of the Government of India Act of 1935 can be best

summed up in the words of the then Viceroy Lord Linlithgow himself: "After all we framed the constitution ... of 1935 because we thought it the best way ... to hold India to the Empire."[121]

The provincial part of the 1935 act took effect with the elections of 1937; but a stalemate prevailed at the centre, perhaps as expected by the Tories, because the federal part of the act remained a non-starter, as no one seemed to be really interested in it. The Muslim leaders, first of all, were afraid of Hindu domination and felt that the proposed federal structure was still very unitary. All the representatives of British India to the central legislature were to be elected by the provincial assemblies and this would go against the Muslims who were minorities in all but four provinces. So although they did not oppose federation in public, they certainly preferred decentralisation, with a weak central government, allowing more autonomy for the provincial governments in the Muslim majority provinces.[122] The Congress too did not like the proposed structure of the federation, where one-third of the seats in the federal assembly were to be filled in by the princes, thus tying up the fate of democratic India to the whims of the autocratic dynastic rulers.[123] But the federation scheme ultimately failed because the princes were reluctant to join it. Their main objection was that the act *did* not resolve the issue of pararnountcy. The Government of India as a paramount power still enjoyed the right to intervene in the affairs of their states or even overthrow them if necessary. Their other fear was about joining a democratised federal central government, where the elected political leaders of British India would have little sympathy for their autocratic rules and would provide encouragement to the democratic movements in their territories. Furthermore, the larger states did not want to surrender their fiscal autonomy, while the smaller states complained of their inadequate representation in the legislarure.[P'] However, these concerns of the princes would become more meaningful if placed in their proper historical context. It will, therefore, be pertinent here to digress a little to tell the story of princely India since the outbreak of World War One.

If the Curzonian policy of interventionist paternalism had strained the relationship between the princes and the Raj at the beginning of the twentieth century, Minta's policy of *laissez faire* again revived the bonhomie. The latter policy was intended to insulate the states from the sweeping political changes of British India and keep their people away from the rising emotions of nationalism.[P'] It was this isolation and political quarantine that gradually began to dissolve since the outbreak of World War One. The war once more showed

nationalist posturing-such as, not shaking hands with Europeans without his gloves on. In Bharatpur, where the local ruler was deposed due to alleged charges of financial irregularities, the combination of Congress, Arya Samaj and the Jat Mahasabha made this region a major centre of nationalism in the entire Rajasthan.[129] But, on the other hand, there were many other princes who remained loyal to the Raj and proved to be its most credible allies when nationalist challenge began to mount. When extremism and terrorism became powerful in the first decade of the twentieth century and later when the Non-cooperation movement rocked the subcontinent, the princes rendered valuable service in containing the ride in their territories. The visit of the Prince of Wales, boycotted by the Congress, was made somewhat worthwhile because of the warmth and grandeur of princely welcome. In the 1920s, however, popular movements began to appear in all these states in the form of *praja mandals*. These mandals were eventually affiliated to a national body called the All India States' People's Conference, founded in 1927 with its headquarters at Bombay. It raised moderate demands for democratic rights and constitutional changes, to which many of the princes responded with sharp vengeance and massive repression. However, if most of them were sensitive about guarding their autonomy and sovereignty, there were some exceptions too-like Baroda, Mysore, Travancore and Cochin-who had initiated, albeit in limited spheres, some constitutional changes.[130]

There were states-like Mysore or Travancore-where Congress politics had made considerable inroads.[131] But Congress during this whole period scrupulously maintained an official policy of non-interference in the affairs of the states-ostensibly, out of respect for the princes' traditional rights of sovereignty. The only exception was made in 1928 when a Congress resolution urged the princes to "introduce responsible government based on representative institutions" and expressed its "sympathy" and "support" for the "legitimate and peaceful struggle" of the people of the Indian states striving to attain "full responsible government".[132] Such verbal sympathy, however, counted for little for the states' peoples' movements and for the clandestine Congress branches, which were dealt with stiff resistance from most of the princes. Therefore, when the Civil Disobedience movement started, the Raj's princely clients-barring a few exceptions like Bhavnagar, Junagadh or Kathiawar—proved to be as dependable as before in suppressing Congress activities in their respective territories.[133]

So during all these years, the Raj had been using its subordinate allies-representing old and in British perspective, authentic India-

as effective tools against the new forces of nationalism in the provinces. Little was done to induce democratic constitutional changes in the states to bring them at par with the political developments in British India. This made the princes, unprepared to face the future, increasingly more alarmist about the nationalist leaders challenging their internal autonomy of rule.[134] This did not mean that the Raj refrained from intervening in the affairs of the states. Indeed, there were many officers in the Political Department who continually pushed the boundary of the powers of paramountcy, compelling the princes to clamour for an impartial inquiry into their constitutional status. But the Indian States Committee, which was formed in 1928 under Sir Harcourt Butler, scarcely provided in its Report (1929) any solace for the beleaguered princes. It gave them a concession in the form of a promise that paramountcy would not be transferred without their consent to any democratically elected government in British India; but at the same time, it reaffirmed the supremacy of paramountcy with unlimited power-even to suggest constitutional changes in a particular state if there was widespread demand for such reforms. It did push the doctrine of paramountcy, a Political Department officer confessed, "beyond any hitherto accepted limit".[135]

Thus pushed to a tight corner and pressured from both ends, the princes now started taking interest in politics and began to fraternise with some of the moderate politicians. They found in the idea of federation, first proposed in the Motilal Nehru Report of 1928, an ideal way out of their present predicament. By joining an autonomous all-India federation they could escape the "shackles of paramountcy" and at the same time could safeguard their internal autonomy of action. But not all princes were too sure about it, the Maharaja of Pariala being the leader of this faction. Ultimately a mutual agreement-known as the "Delhi Pact"–was brokered on 11 March and was endorsed by the Chamber of Princes on 1 April 1932, projecting federation as a constitutional demand of the princes of India. But the demand was cushioned, as Ian Copland has pointed out, with significant safeguards, which were sure to be rejected by both the British and the nationalists. They wanted, for example, individual seats for all the members of the Chamber of Princes in the upper house of the federal legislature, protection of their existing treaty rights, subjects to be placed under the jurisdiction of the federal government were to be mutually agreed upon by the member states, and above all, a right to secede.[136] The British loved the idea of federation, as in that case the princes could act as

counterweight against the nationalist politicians from the provinces; but their idea of federation differed from that of the princes. If in the first Round Table Conference the representatives of princely India deliberated enthusiastically on a federation, by the time of its second session many of them had developed cold feet about the idea. At its Bombay session in late January 1935, the Chamber adopted a resolution, which was highly critical of the federation proposal as it had evolved by that time. When finally the Government of India Act got the royal assent on 2 August 1935, the federation scheme contained in it could hardly satisfy the majority of the princes.!"

However, Ian Copland (1999) argues that the princes even at this stage were not completely rejecting federation, but were bargaining for a better deal. They wanted the Instrument of Accession to be defined appropriately to address their two major concerns, i.e., recognition of their existing treaty rights and protection of their internal autonomy. Although the new viceroy, Linlithgow, recommended some such changes, intense bureaucratic haggling delayed the process by several years. In the meanwhile, the spectacular political rise of the Congress after the provincial elections of 1937 made the princes panicky. In 1938 the traditional Congress policy of non-interference in the affairs of the states was jettisoned at the Haripura Congress, and in the following months the most vehement peoples' movement under the leadership of the All India States' People's Conference, with the active patronage of the Congress, rocked princely India (for more details of this movement see chapter 8.1). The smaller and middle-sized states were hardly prepared for this kind of popular upsurge and they buckled in, taking a more conciliatory attitude towards the Congress. But the larger states fought back with resolute stubbornness, and they were helped by British troops. To the majority of the princes in 1939, the Congress had thus shown its true colours and could therefore never be trusted again. When in January 1939 Linlithgow finally gave them a revised offer, with some minor concessions, federation to most of them had become an unmitigated evil to be rejected outright. That is what they did at the Bombay session of the Chamber of Princes in June; and then, when the war broke out in Europe in August, the secretary of state, Zetland, promptly put the federal offer in "cold storage".[138]

NOTES

1. For more details, see Stokes 1959: 288.
2. For more details, see Stokes 1959: 288–310; also see chapter 2.1 for more discussion on imperial ideology.

3. Seal 1973.
4. Robb 1976: 3.
5. Woods 1994: 31.
6. Quoted in Desika Char 1983: 457.
7. Woods 1994: 42.
8. Bridge 1986: 5.
9. Tomlinson 1976a: 10.
10. Robb 1976: 268.
11. Seal 1973.
12. Brown 1972: 28.
13. Kumar 1971: 4.
14. Low 1968: 1.
15. Brown 1972: 125.
16. For more details, see Balabushevich and Dyakov 1964.
17. Kumar 1983.
18. Quoted in Sarkar 1983: 174.
19. Brown 1972: 46.
20. Dalton 1993: 21.
21. Basham 1971: 17-42.
22. Nandy 1994a: 2-4.
23. Nandy 1998: 100-2.
24. Chatterjee 1984b: 162 and passim.
25. Parekh 1989b: 34.
26. Parel 1997: 53.
27. Quotations from Gandhi 1997: 39, 52, 66-67, 71-74, 116.
28. Parel 1997: 50; emphasis in original.
29. Chatterjee 1986.
30. Steger 2000.
31. Owen 1968: 174.
32. Brown 1972: 356.
33. See Amin 1989.
34. Sarkar 1983: 225.
35. See Guha 1993: 107; Amin 1996: 13.
36. Details in Pouchepadass 1999.
37. Henningham 1982.
38. Details in Hardiman 1981: 85–113.
39. Details in Patel 1987: 37-51.
40. Owen 1971.
41. Hasan 1985: 24.
42. For more on Firangi Mahal, see Robinson 2001.
43. Lelyveld 1978.
44. Robinson 1974: 262.
45. Minault 1982: 11.
46. Brown 1972: 296-97, 302.
47. Gordon 1973: 150.
48. Ray 1984: 262.

49. Kumar 1983: 213–39.
50. Sarkar 1983: 174-75.
51. Ibid: 206-7.
52. Gordon 1978: 159.
53. Bhattacharya 1976.
54. Quoted in Zelliot 1988: 185.
55. Details in Amin 1996: 14-17.
56. See Wood 1987· Panikkar 1989; Dhanagare 1991.
57. Arnold 1977.
58. Irschick 1969: 183, 197-98.
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