

C H A P T E R - V I I I

THE CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE MOVEMENT

Almost all the political parties except the Justice Party of Madras and the Punjab Unionists agreed to boycott the Simon Commission and convened an All Parties Conference which met in Delhi in February, 1928.¹ Under the auspices of the Conference a Committee headed by Motilal Nehru was formed entrusted with the task of drafting a constitution for India. The Report of the Nehru Committee was considered at the All Parties Conference held in Lucknow in August 1928.² The draft constitution provided for a centre with an unitary bias and reserved seats at the centre and in the Muslim minority Provinces. But the issue of Communal representation stood in the way of political unity of Hindus and Muslims as both Hindu Mahasabha and Muslim League were opposed to the solution offered by the Nehru Committee.³

However, the Calcutta Session of the Congress held in December, 1928 considered the report of Nehru Committee and moved a resolution that if the Government failed to accept the proposals for administrative reforms in accordance with the recommendations of the Nehru Committee by December 31, 1929, a movement should be launched for non-payment of revenue along with other Non Co-operative measures non-violent in nature.⁴

1. Sarkar, Sumit, *Modern India (1885-1947)*, p. 262, Delhi, 1984.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*, p. 262-63.

4. Masumdar, R.C., *History of Modern Bengal (Part-two)*, p. 292, Calcutta, 1981.

Inspite of the fact that Ramsay Modonald and his Labour Party assumed power in 1929 it was realised in course of a few months' time that no benefit would accrue to India in respect of her aspirations. Motilal Nehru and Gandhi met the Viceroy in December, 1929 and did not receive any assurance regarding further constitutional reforms.⁵

Under such circumstances the Lahore session of the Indian National Congress held under the Presidency of Jawaharlal Nehru in December, 1929 arrived at the decision that complete independence should be the object and demand of the Congress instead of dominion status.⁶

At the insistence of Gandhi a new Working Committee was formed which was packed by his nominees despite opposition from certain leaders like Subhas Bose.⁷

The members of Central and State legislatures were directed by the working committee to resign and not to contest any fresh election. The Working Committee of Congress also decided to observe January 26 as the independence day all over the Country.⁸

In pursuance of the decisions of the Working Committee the Malda district Congress Committee at a meeting on January 13⁹ decided upon the celebration of independence. It was also resolved

5. Ibid, p. 296.

6. Chandra, Bipan et al., Freedom Struggle, New Delhi, 1972, p. 153; The Amritabazar Patrika, January 18, 1930.

7. Mazumdar R.C., OP. Cit., p. 298.

8. Ibid, p. 299.

9. The Amritabazar Patrika, January 15, 1930.

to establish Branch Congress Committees, Volunteer Corps and Khadi Board. Moreover, Ramesh Chandra Bagchi, a member of Legislative Council from the District resigned.¹⁰ Surendranath Maitra, a member of Bengal Council from Rajshahi district and Satyendranath Maitra, representative of Rajshahi division in the Central Legislative Assembly also resigned from their respective seats.¹¹

With great eclat the independence day was observed. At Jalpaiguri¹² a large procession passed through the streets. The national flag was hoisted at Arya Natya Samaj Hall. In the evening the houses of the town were decorated with flags and illumination. Swami Bimalananda* presided over a meeting where the independence resolution was moved and carried unanimously.¹²

At Malda the flag was unfurled by Sarajoo Prasad Pehani, a Congressman, at about 8 A.M. in the premises of local Congress Office. In the afternoon a meeting was held where the resolution of the Congress Working Committee was read.¹³

Raiganj, a small town of Northern Bengal situated in the district of Dinajpur also celebrated the independence day. Here Umeshchandra Bhowmik and Sudhamoy Pramanik were the Congress leaders. A public meeting was held in the evening under the leadership of Umeshchandra.¹⁴

10. Ibid, January 17, 1930.

11. Ibid, January 17, & February 8, 1930.

12. Ibid, January 28, 1930.

13. The Amritabazar Patrika, January 29, 1930.

14. Ibid.

* Swami Bimalananda was a mendicant and a Congressman.

The meeting of the Congress Working Committee held in mid-February approved the proposal for a Country wide Civil Disobedience movement.¹⁵

Even before this meeting the members of the Balurghat Congress Executive Committee made whole-hearted efforts to popularise the Congress ideal among the masses. For this purpose, a Congress whole-timer of Dinajpur District was invited to Balurghat. This whole-timer, namely Abdur Rahaman Saiadi, took the help of Magic Slides while lecturing on the miserable condition of the Bengal Villages.¹⁶

On the national scene, Gandhi once more requested the Viceroy to introduce administrative reforms in accordance with the suggestions made by him earlier and sought an interview. But Lord Irwin refused to comply with his request.¹⁷

Consequently, on March 12, 1930 Gandhi started his historic march from Sabarmati to Dandi to violate the Salt Laws at Dandi situated on the Western Coast of India.¹⁸

On that fateful day a large meeting took place at Balurghat under the presidency of Nalini Kanta Adhikary.¹⁹ The meeting passed resolutions wishing the success of Gandhi and congratulated Vallabh-bhai Patel, Subhash Chandra Bose, J.M. Sengupta and others for their arrest. The meeting at Araidanga²⁰ in the district of Malda, held

15. Masumdar, R.C., OP. Cit., p. 300

16. The Amritabasar Patrika, February 2, 1930.

17. Masumdar, R.C., OP. Cit., p. 300.

18. The Amritabasar Patrika, March 13, 1930.

19. The Amritabasar Patrika, March 14, 1930.

20. Ibid, March 16, 1930.

under the presidency of Asutosh Kumar also wished Gandhi's success and congratulated the leaders for their arrest. It requested the Malda District Congress Committee for keeping abreast with the movement and exhorted the local people to boycott British goods. Atul Chandra Kumar, a local leader of the Congress urged the youths to organise themselves for the cause of the nation.²¹

Another meeting at Jalpaiguri²² was addressed by Swami Jnanananda, a member of the P.P.C.C. who criticised the Government for the policy of oppression and requested the Jalpaiguri people to join the Civil Disobedience movement. It is, of course, significant that Swami Jnanananda exhorted the Jalpaiguri people to break the Forest Laws which he thought was equally unjustifiable as the salt laws.²³ In this region where there were numerous forests the Swami wanted the forest laws to be broken which would have the effect of spreading the Civil Disobedience movement, particularly among the aboriginals who depended very much on forests for eking out a livelihood.

As regards the leadership of the movement we should note that youngmen and women took a leading part in shaping the course of the movement in Northern Bengal. Khagendranath Dasgupta was the secretary of the Jalpaiguri district Congress Committee.²⁴ A Civil Disobedience committee²⁵ was also formed at Jalpaiguri of which Khagendranath Dasgupta was the President and Birendranath Dasgupta

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid, March 27

23. Ibid.

24. The Amritabasar Patrika, March 21, 1930.

25. Bangabani, April 5, 1930.

was the Secretary. Sasadhar Kar was chosen as the officer commanding of the volunteer corps.²⁶ At Malda the District Congress Committee was headed by Sarajoo Prasad Behani, Priyanath Choudhury was the Secretary while Atul Chandra Kumar and Suraj Lahiri were the Assistant Secretaries.²⁷ Atul Chandra Kumar was also the Secretary of the Malda Youth Association.²⁸

The Balurghat Congress Committee²⁹ was headed by Nalinikanta Adhikary while Surendra Chandra Bagchi was the Secretary, and Satindranath Bose the Assistant Secretary. Here mention may also be made of the 'Mahila Samiti'³⁰ of Balurghat of which the president was the wife of Gopal Chatterjee, a lawyer and an Honourary Magistrate. Prava Chatterjee and Bela Chatterjee were the other leaders of the samiti.

The Darjeeling district Congress Committee was headed by Brajendra Basu Roychoudhury. Many of the leaders of the movement in Northern Bengal like Nalinikanta Adhikary, Surendra Chandra Bagchi, Ramesh Chandra Bagchi, Priyanath Choudhury were lawyers by profession. Apart from those mentioned above there were several other prominent leaders whose activities we will discuss in the pages that follow.

(Congress volunteers of Northern Bengal made full scale preparations for the protracted movement that was in the offing.

26. The Amritabazar Patrika, April 5, 1930.

27. Ibid, January 29, 1930.

28. Ibid, April 11, 1930.

29. Ibid, March 18

30. Ibid, March 27; Dasgupta, K., Swadhinata Sangrame Banglar Nari, p, 194, Calcutta, 1370 B.S.

Recruitment of volunteers who would violate the laws was one aspect of the preparations. Thus volunteers were recruited in the centres of political activities like Englishbazar,³¹ Jalpaiguri,³² Balurghat³³ etc. The leading women workers of Balurghat who already established a 'Mahila Samiti' called upon their husbands to boycott foreign goods, to take to charka and to plunge deep into the Civil Disobedience movement.³⁴ The women workers participated in the Dinajpur district political conference toward the end of March 1930 where decisions were taken to extend the propaganda work to the interior areas³⁵ since the Congress leadership by this time well realised the significance of mass base gaining political maturity from the vast experience of movements of the twenties.

In many places the Bar Associations formed the fulcrum of the movement. Lawyers like Sureshranjan Chatterjee of Balurghat gave up their practice and became Congress wholetimer.³⁶ Soon after, the boycott of courts by the lawyers came as a collective decision when in a conference held at Dinajpur in April 1930 they passed resolution to that effect.³⁷ Out of 209 Bar Associations of Bengal 71 had sent their representatives to the Dinajpur conference. The lawyers assembled pledged to take to Swadeshi and form 'Arbitration Boards' or parallel courts run by the Government.³⁸

31. The Amritabazar Patrika, April 11, 1930.

32. Bangabani, April 5, 1930.

33. The Amritabazar Patrika, March 14, 1930.

34. Ibid, March 27, 1930.

35. Ibid, March 29; April 4.

36. Bangabani, April 9, 1930.

37. Ibid, April 26, 1930.

38. Ibid.

Dinajpur town was the venue of one more conference of the period. Many important resolutions related to the boycott of foreign goods and promotion of Swadeshi were passed in the Dinajpur district political conference,³⁹ Sureshranjan Chatterjee presiding. This conference was held in the end of March 1930. Thereafter the movement flared up in the district.

On April, 15, a hartal was observed at Raiganj⁴⁰ which protested against the arrests of the national leaders. Shops were closed. Carters and coolies did not work. Since the lawyers joined the strike the court looked deserted. Satyagrahis from Dinajpur, in accordance with the resolutions adopted in the district political conference came over to Raiganj and paraded the streets along with the local volunteers. A fairly attended public meeting was presided over by Sudhamoy Pramanik in which a Satyagraha Committee was formed. Flagrant violation of salt laws was initiated when the volunteers sold openly packets of illegally manufactured salt.⁴¹

The 'Mahila Samiti' volunteers of Balurghat picketed in front of liquor shops and cloth stores on 'hat' days. Consequently, at times there were no transactions either of foreign cloth or of liquor.⁴²

39. The Amritabazar Patrika, March 29; Ibid, April 4.

40. Ibid, April 18, 1930.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid, May 1, 1930.

The spirit and morale of the lady volunteers of Balurghat remained unabated throughout the period. Picketing of the type we have mentioned continued even after the proclamation of prohibitory orders.⁴³ Picketing was organised even in the month of December despite the requests of the sub-divisional Magistrate of Balurghat to withdraw it.⁴⁴ The Congress workers of the district drew much inspiration from the visits of Subhas Chandra Bose who was in 1930 the president of the W.P.C.C.⁴⁵ During his visit in December 1930 Bose contacted persons of various economic and social stations including the Marwari businessmen of Dinajpur to parley on boycott of foreign goods and promotion of Swadeshi.⁴⁶ The Marawaris of Northern Bengal, however, joined many of the movements launched by the Congress taking considerable interest in the boycott of foreign goods which draws our attention to the economic aspect of the movement.

Strikes were observed in the district of Malda also which protested against the incarceration of the national leaders.⁴⁷ Atul Chandra Kumar, a most zealous leader of the district had informed the authorities that he would sell contraband salt on a fixed date. This led to a search of his house. The search party included the District Magistrate, the Superintendent of Police, the Excise Inspector and Sub-Inspector and a posse of constables although it yielded no result.⁴⁸ Atul Chandra Kumar eventually surrendered before the

43. Bangabani, December 8, 1930; Ibid, October 26.

44. Ibid, December 8, 1930.

45. Ibid, December 23, 1930.

46. Ibid.

47. The Amritabazar Patrika, May 30, 1930.

48. The Amritabazar Patrika, May 30, 1930.

Sub-divisional officer and refused to be released on bail though offered.⁴⁹ Salt was however sold in various areas of Malda and the people purchased it from the Satyagrahis with much eagerness and preserved it religiously.⁵⁰

As days passed by and the movement gathered momentum the authorities became harsh to the men and women participating. The police arrested Ramesh Bagchi, the Malda leader who had earlier resigned from his seat in the provincial legislature and Ramesh Chandra Ghosh on July 11, 1930.⁵¹

A number of students were arrested at Gayerkata and Domohini in the district of Jalpaiguri in the month of July 1930.⁵² All of them had violated the section 144. The authorities wanted to restrict the Press. Under the Press ordinance Rs. 1,000/- was demanded as security deposit from Sarala printing works wherefrom the local nationalist weekly 'Muktibani' and several other leaflets and brochures of the Congress were brought out.⁵³

Participation of the youths on a large scale gave the movement an unique character. In the district of Malda about 12 volunteers all of whom were very young were arrested. They refused to be released on bail. Two of them were fined Rs. 50/- each in default of which they were to suffer $1\frac{1}{2}$ months of rigorous imprisonment.

49. Ibid.

50. Ibid, April 18, 1930.

51. Bangabani, July 13, 1930.

52. Ibid, July 17, 1930.

53. Ibid, July 9, 1930.

The convicted boys did not pay the fine and went to gaol smilingly. These brave boys were Ramraghab Lahiri and Sudhansu Lahiri who led a procession of about 50 youngmen carrying national flags. The District Magistrate ordered them to disperse. Since they refused they were arrested by the Magistrate who was present in the village at that time.⁵⁴ The authorities in this period stopped the grants-in-Aid received by the Balurghat High School which amounted to Rs. 250/- per mensem since the students and the school authorities joined the Civil Disobedience movement.⁵⁵ The movement had already spread to the interiors of the sub-division even affecting the agrarian sector which became evident when the collector of Dinajpur notified the sell of 140 pattanis as the pattanidars suspended the payment of Tax to their Zemindars.⁵⁶

Once again the whole of India witnessed great excitement. As the movement spread like bonfire, the Government resorted to terrifying oppression. In Northern Bengal also police oppression became the order of the day.

In the Balurghat sub-division of Dinajpur District the police searched the local Congress office on January 17, 1931. Some articles including national flags and books of accounts maintained in the office were seized.⁵⁷ On that day police raided the Congress office at Patnitala, Kantabari and Suripukur and the library at

54. The Amritabazar Patrika, May 30, 1930.

55. Bangabani, November 25, 1930.

56. Ibid, November 24, 1930.

57. Bangabani, January 19, 1931.

Chandpur.⁵⁸ The house of Benoybhusan Sarkar, the Secretary of Patnitala Congress Committee was searched where the police seized many letters, leaflets, books etc.⁵⁹ In many places the search was conducted by a contingent of armed police led by the Superintendent of police, Dinajpur district.⁶⁰ Benoybhusan Sarkar, Avoycharan Das and Bholanath Sarkar were among the arrested.⁶¹

Despite the police oppression the Congressmen at Balurghat observed 26th January, 1931 as the independence day, National flag was hoisted at private houses, the local Civil Court, the Post and Telegraph office and at the office of the Sub-Registrar.⁶² The police however, removed the flags from the Government buildings.⁶³

Another round of search operation was conducted thereafter. Almost all the Congress workers were arrested on that day. The houses of prominent Congress workers like Nalinikanta Adhikary, Surendranath Bagchi, Ramakanta Samajdar, Susilranjan Chatterjee were searched.⁶⁴ In this sub-region the movement had penetrated into the tribal masses also. Baidyanath, a Santal Congressman of some importance surrendered and courted arrest at the time.⁶⁵

The town of Balurghat and the villages like Patnitala and Gangarampur were the storm centres. From various places including

58. Ibid, January 20, 1931.

59. Ibid.

60. Ibid.

61. Ibid; The Statesman, January 21, 1931.

62. Bangabani, 29th January, 1931.

63. Ibid.

64. Ibid, February 4, 1931.

65. Ibid.

those numerous people were arrested. The following table shows some of the prominent Congress workers arrested at the time and the punishment they received.⁶⁶

TABLE I

N A M E	P U N I S H M E N T
Sarojranjan Chatterjee	6 Months Simple Imprisonment
Susilranjan Chatterjee	6 " " "
Ramakanta Samajdar	6 Month and Fine of Rs. 100/-
Jatindranath Basu	6 Months Simple Imprisonment
Abdul Jabbar	6 " " "
Baidyanath Santal	6 Months and Fine of Rs. 100/-
Tarakeswar Guha	4 Months Simple Imprisonment
Dhirendranath Biswas	4 " " "
Kalipada Pal	4 " " "
Rabindranath Mitra	4 " " "
Naresb Bandopadhyay	Released
Bibhuti Kar	Fine of Rs. 100/-
Kalipada Bagchi	Fine of Rs. 200/-
Falguni Mitra	Not Available
Maharaj Basu	5 Months Simple Imprisonment
Kamalapati Chattopadhyay	5 " " "
Chittaranjan Guha	5 " " "
Girijaprasanna Das	5 " " "

66. Ibid, 15th & 18th February, 1931.

(In the other parts of the region also the movement was joined by the people. In the month of February, 1931 a hartal was observed at Jalpaiguri. On that day the participation of women in a large procession was among the highlights.⁶⁷ The Congressmen also arranged for a meeting at Arya Natya Samaj Hall on the hartal day.⁶⁸

In the month of January 1931 Subhash Chandra Bose, the then Mayor of Calcutta went out for a tour of Northern Bengal. En route to Malda from Berhampore he was served with an order under section 114 Cr.P.C. which prohibited him from entering the district of Malda.⁶⁹ Since he disobeyed the order he was arrested. The 'on the spot' trial that followed sentenced him to seven day's simple imprisonment.⁷⁰ The incident took place at Amnura station of Rajshahi district.⁷¹

Meanwhile the First Round Table Conference which held its sessions between November 12, 1930 and January 19, 1931 was boycotted by the Congress and the movement continued.⁷² But the Gandhi-Irwin Pact signed in March, 1931 eased the tension for the time being despite the fact that it was unpopular with leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose, since it shelved the demand of complete independence.⁷³

67. Bangabani, February 17, 1931.

68. Ibid.

69. The Statesman, January 20, 1931.

70. Ibid.

71. Ibid.

72. Mazumdar, R.C., OP. Cit., p. 303.

73. Ibid, p. 304-306.

By virtue of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact many Congress workers arrested earlier were released. At Balurghat people rejoiced at the release of leaders like Sarojranjan, Susilranjan, Benoybhusan, Kamalapati etc.⁷⁴ Among the workers of Jalpaiguri Charuchandra Sanyal, Khagendranath Dasgupta and Ajit Chakraborty were released from Dum Dum Central Jail.⁷⁵ Awaiting them at Jalpaiguri was hero's welcome.⁷⁶ Earlier there had been a movement at Jalpaiguri which demanded immediate release of political prisoners in general and the ailing local Congressman Dhirendranath Dutta in particular.⁷⁷ The Congressmen Summoned a meeting at Arya Natya Samaj Hall on March 19, under the presidency of Srinath Hore.⁷⁸ It was addressed by Suresh Chandra Pal, Phabaranjan Ganguli and Sasadhar Kar all of whom demanded release of detenees.⁷⁹

However, in April 1931 Lord Irwin was succeeded by Lord Willingdon as the Viceroy and repression was in full swing once again.* At this Gandhi was irritated and threatened to boycott the

74. Bangabani, March 12, 1931; Ibid, March 18.

75. Ibid, March 23.

76. Ibid.

77. Ibid.

78. Ibid.

79. Ibid.

* Some important reasons behind this departure from the earlier policy are as follows :

- i) A change of attitude towards India owing to increased conservative influence over the Government following the formation of the national Government led by Ramsay McDonald.
- ii) British bureaucracy had not taken kindly the pact between Gandhi and Lord Irwin and under the new Viceroy bureaucracy got a chance to exercise increased amount of influence for the purpose of undermining the pact.
- iii) Lord Willingdon had gained sufficient experience as to the methods of containing political movements while serving in Bombay and Madras.

Second Round Table Conference to be held in London.⁸⁰ But after a meeting with the Viceroy Gandhi changed his mind and decided to join the Second Round Table Conference.⁸¹ The Congress approved the decision.⁸² Even during the months following Gandhi-Irwin Pact political activities were not suspended in Northern Bengal. It was decided to hold a conference of Congress workers of Northern Bengal at Atrai in the district of Dinajpur.⁸³ A provisional Reception Committee was formed for the purpose which included Rajanimohan Sanyal and Nirendra Chandra Dutta respectively as the president and the secretary.⁸⁴ The conference held its sessions on 24th and 25th May 1931 under the presidency of S. Chattopadhyay.⁸⁵

In the same period, at Kishanganj in the adjoining district of Purnea elaborate preparations were made for the meetings to be addressed by Rajendraprasad and Moulana Abdul Bari.⁸⁶ The latter being invited by the Darjeeling District Congress Committee made a trip to Siliguri where a large procession received him.⁸⁷ There he stayed at the house of Mirsa Samsuddin, a local leader.⁸⁸ In the evening of May 11, 1931 the Moulana addressed a large meeting where he explained the reasons behind the economic depression

80. Masumdar, R.C., OP. Cit., p. 306.

81. Ibid, p. 307.

82. Ibid, p. 307.

83. Bangabani, May 5, 1931.

84. Ibid.

85. Ibid, May 20.

86. Ibid, May 7.

87. Ibid, May 13.

88. Ibid.

prevalent at that time.⁸⁹ It is to be noted that he touched upon the question of communal harmony also and advised the Muslims to join the Congress.⁹⁰

Earlier on April 2, Satindranath Sen who was in Darjeeling Jail for some time was released.⁹¹ The Siliguri Congress Committee invited him to visit that town.⁹² On his way to Siliguri Satindranath was warmly received at the interim stations.⁹³ At Siliguri with the financial assistance of Deonarayan Singh and Sivnarayan Singh* a Congress office was built, Satindranath was requested to inaugurate that building.⁹⁴ He also addressed a large meeting.⁹⁵ Satindranath thereafter visited Jalpaiguri where a procession escorted him to the house of the vice-chairman of the local municipality.⁹⁶

Similar enthusiasm was noticed at Siliguri when J.M. Sengupta paid a visit in the month of April 1931.⁹⁷ On April 9, he explained before the Congress workers of Siliguri the decisions of Karachi session of the Congress. A procession followed him through different streets of the town and saw him off at the local railway station.⁹⁸

89. Ibid.

90. Ibid.

91. Bangabani, April 4, 1931.

92. Ibid, April 9.

93. Ibid, April 5.

94. Ibid, April 9.

95. Ibid, April 5.

96. Ibid, April 9.

97. Ibid, April 11.

98. Ibid.

* Both Deonarayan Singh and Sivnarayan Singh were prominent Congress workers of the area.

Such visits of the front rank leaders were morale boosters to the Congress workers of Northern Bengal.

The workers of Siliguri did very good work towards the implementation of the Congress programme. Due to their untiring efforts the tobaccoists of the Siliguri town resolved not to sale cigarettes. Many of them surrendered their stock to Siunangal Singh.⁹⁹ The Congress workers also arranged for a meeting of the local merchants who pledged not to sale foreign clothes.¹⁰⁰ It is interesting to note that the Siliguri workers succeeded in spreading their activities to villages as well. In a well attended meeting at Atharokhai village they explained the objectives of the Congress.¹⁰¹

One of the highlights of the period was the district Muslim Conference of Dinajpur held at Sitabganj on June 7, 1931 under the presidency of Amiruddin Chowdhury of Palurghat.¹⁰² The Congress workers volunteered to make the conference a success. The proceedings were dominated undoubtedly by nationalist elements. The conference adopted some important resolutions. It envisaged large-scale participation of Muslims in Congress programmes, introduction of joint electorates in Bengal and abolition of Purdah of Muslim women.¹⁰³

99. Ibid, May 23.

100. Ibid.

101. Ibid, May 14, 1931.

102. Ibid, June 10 & 14, 1931.

103. Ibid.

The sessions started with the reading out of prophetic messages from the quran. Thereafter a daughter of Moulvi Kader Baksh, a Dinajpur pleader, recited poems of Tagore and Kazi Nazrul Islam.¹⁰⁴ Mosammat Nabuatenneha, wife of Kader Baksh read her paper which emphasized the necessity of female education.¹⁰⁵ In his presidential address Moulvi Amiruddin Chowdhury criticised the indifference of a section of Muslim community toward the nationalist movements and struggle for freedom.¹⁰⁶ The Moulvi advocated mixed electorates and communal harmony and pointed out the importance of national education, boycott of foreign goods and female education.¹⁰⁷

Congress workers in Northern Bengal during the period were engaged in multifarious activities. The fifth death anniversary of Chittaranjan Das was observed with much enthusiasm. Meetings in this connexion were held in Malda, Dinajpur, Siliguri and Jalpaiguri.¹⁰⁸ At Siliguri a procession was organised by the Congressmen.¹⁰⁹ This was joined by Kols, Santals, Oraons and Rajbanshis which justifies our conjecture that Congress had by this time enlisted the support of tribal peoples of Northern Bengal. Earlier we have referred to the arrest of Baidyanath Santal at Palurghat. In the month of June 1931 Jitu Santal, Arjun Santal and some of their comrades were arrested at Malda under section 420 and 120 of I.P.C.¹¹⁰

104. Ibid.

105. Ibid.

106. Ibid.

107. Ibid.

108. Ibid, June 20.

109. Ibid.

110. The Advance, August 26, 1931.

Jitu Santal of Malda and his associates were influenced by some Congressmen. At a later date they rose in rebellion. This armed rising of tribal peasants is discussed in a separate chapter.

The Congress Workers at Malda also observed various programmes. The 11th death anniversary of B.G. Tilak, was observed at Malda.¹¹¹ Despite inclement weather a public meeting was held at the Gandhi Dharmasala. P.N. Chowdhury, the seniormost pleader of the bar and the vice-president of the District Congress Committee, presided over the meeting.¹¹² Kaviraj K.G. Sen, the secretary of the District Congress Committee, delivered a speech advising the audience to adopt the teachings of Tilak.¹¹³ The flag hoisting ceremony was also observed at the Congress office in the month of August 1931.¹¹⁴ On that day Ramesh Chandra Bagchi, a local leader, delivered a little speech explaining to the people the significance of the national flag.¹¹⁵

To make the boycott of foreign goods a success the Congress workers at Malda persuaded the local merchants not to sale them further.¹¹⁶ Some merchants signed a pledge to that effect.¹¹⁷

In September 1931 the Second Round Table conference started in London where Gandhi demanded complete independence for India.¹¹⁸

111. Ibid, August 5, 1931.

112. Ibid.

113. Ibid.

114. Ibid, September 2, 1931.

115. Ibid.

116. Bangabani, October 3, 1931.

117. Ibid.

118. Masumdar, R.C., OP. Cit., p. 307

The conference ended in December following which the political situation in India became tense. Gandhi confessed on his return from London that nothing was achieved at the conference.^{119*}

Police repression continued during the period. Northern Bengal also experienced the repression in various forms. A warrant issued by the District Magistrate of Dinajpur led to the search of some houses including those of Sukumar Dam, Manindralal Ghosh, Anal Ghosh and Adhar Singha all of whom belonged to Balurghat.¹²⁰ The police however, found nothing objectionable during these searches.¹²¹ The repression was intensified in January, 1932 when four new ordinances were promulgated by the Government.^{122**} Gandhi and Vallabhbhai Patel were arrested.¹²³ The Congress had already decided to revive the Civil Disobedience movement.¹²⁴

119. Ibid, p. 308.

120. Bangabani, October 7, 1931.

121. Ibid.

122. Masumdar, R.C., OP. Cit., p. 309.

123. Ibid.

124. Ibid.

* The Second Round Table Conference failed because the British Government did not pay any heed to Gandhi's demand of complete independence. The conference could not arrive at any unanimous decision regarding the communal problem also. A written request signed by most of the delegates was sent to the British premier who was to decide on it. The out come of this was the communal award of Ramsay Modonald. (Vide Masumdar, R.C., OP. Cit., p. 307 ff.).

** Gandhi was irritated at this violation of his pact with the Viceroy and proposed to meet him. The Viceroy agreed to meet Gandhi but refused to enter into any discussion regarding the repressive measures taken by the Government.

At Jalpaiguri in November, 1931 a shopkeeper and a Congressman namely Nalini Chakraborty was arrested by local police. A hartal was observed on 29th November to protest against this arrest.¹²⁵ Northern Bengal was thus prepared to respond to the repressive measures. The political workers were determined to spread the movement. (In the district of Jalpaiguri Sasadhar Kar, Ganesh Chandra Chakraborty, Girija Prasanna Sarkar etc. organized meetings in the interior villages like Singrot, Brahmanpara, Jaidhar Vanga etc.¹²⁶ On December 18th a fairly attended public meeting at Jaidhar Vanga was addressed by Sasadhar Kar who took the help of photographs to explain the objectives and works of the Congress.¹²⁷

On January 6 the Deputy Commissioner of Jalpaiguri issued an order proscribing political meetings without his prior sanction for a month.¹²⁸ The order was circulated by beating of drums. The District Congress Committee was declared unlawful.¹²⁹ The Congress office was searched and many articles were seized.¹³⁰ On January 7, the house of some Congress workers were searched.¹³¹ The police also seized a printing press.¹³² Shortly after the police had to arrest Benoy Ghosh, Shiben Bagchi and Hiralal Sarkar on charges of holding meeting violating the order of the Deputy Commissioner.¹³³

125. Bangabani, December 5, 1931.

126. Bangabani, January 4, 1932.

127. Ibid, January 4, 1932.

128. Ibid, January 9, 1932.

129. Ibid.

130. Ibid.

131. Ibid.

132. Ibid, January 10, 1932.

133. Ibid.

Numerous Congress workers were served with notice under the new ordinance. Thus at Jalpaiguri most of the leading workers like Srinath Hore, Pritinēhan Roy, Sasadhar Kar, Charu Sanyal, Ajit Chakraborty, Anil Bagchi, Swaprakash Dutta, Taranath Chakraborty, Makhan Bhowmik, Jatindranath Roy, Chandidas Chakraborty, Shiben Masumdar, Asuthosh Ghosh etc. were served with prohibitory orders,¹³⁴ At Malda¹³⁵ Atul Chandra Kumar, Ramesh Chandra Bagchi, Krishnagopal Sen, Debendranath Jha, Dwarkanath Behani, Krishnasashi Goswami, Priyanath Chowdhury and Raidyanath Sarkar and at Balurghat Sureshranjan Chatterjee, Nalinikanta Adhikary, Suresh Bagchi, Ramakanta Samajdar, Kalipada Basu, Kalipada Bagchi, Saroj Chatterjee, Susil Chatterjee, Abdul Jabbar, Raidyanath Sanyal, Panchuram Saha, Birendra Bhattacharyya, Anath Bandhu Ghosh, Krishnadas Mohanta etc. were served with prohibitory orders,¹³⁶ In the district of Darjeeling Prajendranath Basu Roychowdhury¹³⁷ was among the leaders who received notice under the ordinance.

In spite of the severe measures introduced by the authorities the political workers continued their activities. The police searched the Congress office at Siliguri and sealed it.¹³⁸ The local Congress organisation was declared unlawful. The police arrested a Congress worker named Jiach Lohar when he was trying to break the seal and enter into the Congress office.¹³⁹ Some other

134. Bangabani, January 10; *Ibid*, January 14.

135. *Ibid*, January 13; *Ibid*, January 16, 1932 & February 2, 1932.

136. *Ibid*, January 20, 1932.

137. *Ibid*, January 21, 1932.

138. Bangabani, January 27, 1932.

139. *Ibid*.

workers including Pratul Kumar Maitra and Sakal Sing were arrested for having organised a procession violating the prohibitory orders.¹⁴⁰

✓ The Congressmen at Jalpaiguri observed the independence day on 26th January 1932 and raised the tricolour. Many workers were arrested in this connexion, while at Balurghat the celebration of the independence day and the incidents that followed created quite a furore. At about 2 P.M. on that day, large procession which included many women started from the Furi Kalibari.¹⁴¹ As we have noticed earlier the women workers of Balurghat played a very useful part in the Civil Disobedience movement of the period. Rajlakshmi Devi, Prava Chatterjee Kusumkamini Devi, Matangini Dasgupta, Jnanadasundari Devi, Rimalabala Sengupta were among the prominent workers.¹⁴² Many of the women volunteers of Balurghat participated in the independence day procession. The police ordered the procession to disperse. As the volunteers did not comply with this many of them including the women were arrested.¹⁴³

In the Balurghat Sub-division the police did not even spare boys of tender age. Thus at Tior two very young boys were arrested and brought to the Sub-divisional headquarters at Balurghat.¹⁴⁴

Shortly before the independence day celebrations at Balurghat the District Magistrate of Dinajpur ordered the police to take

140. Ibid, February 1, 1932.

141. Ibid, January 28.

142. Ibid, January 28; Ibid, January 30.

143. Ibid, January 28, 1932.

144. Bangabani, January 30, 1932.

possession of the Congress office at Balurghat.¹⁴⁵ Numerous articles were seized. Curiously enough the District Magistrate had also ordered the Congress Office to be used as a police barrack.¹⁴⁶

In the district of Darjeeling also police oppression became severe. On January 19, 1932 Brajendra Basu Roychowdhury, the secretary of the District Congress Committee, visited Matigara Hat near Siliguri. The local police all on a sudden, picked him up from that weekly market, brought him to Siliguri and served him with a notice under the new ordinance.¹⁴⁷ Roychowdhury was ordered by the authorities to stay within one mile of the Siliguri Court and not to join any meeting or procession within the specified period of one month.¹⁴⁸ The order also forbade him to write anything or make any statement on the Civil Disobedience movement. He was ordered to report at the Siliguri police station every evening.¹⁴⁹

On January 23, Brajendra Basu Roychowdhury was arrested on charges of violating the prohibitory orders and sentenced to one year's rigorous imprisonment.¹⁵⁰

A similar incident took place in the district of Malda in the month of February 1932. A Congress Worker named Amulya Ratan Goswami was arrested at Kalikapur Hat while engaged in distribution of Congress leaflets.¹⁵¹ Though Amulyaratan was released shortly after

145. Ibid, January 21, 1932.

146. Ibid.

147. Ibid.

148. Ibid.

149. Ibid.

150. Bangabani, January 24, 1932.

151. Ibid, February 9, 1932.

he was ordered to report at the police station once in a week and to stay within 6 miles of his village for a period of one month during which he was forbidden to join the Civil Disobedience movement.¹⁵²

Throughout the period the prohibitory orders under the new ordinance were violated.

At Jalpaiguri the women workers organised a procession which led to the arrest of Hariprava Sengupta, Sailabala Guha Thakurata, Sailahasini Devi and Nanibala Moulik. Nanibala was arrested with her 9 months old child in her lap.¹⁵³ All these, however, failed to contain the movement.

On March 29, 1932 five desperate Congress Volunteers went to the Jalpaiguri Criminal Court buildings and hoisted the Congress flag pulling down the Union Jack.¹⁵⁴ They shouted slogans and distributed leaflets. All of them were arrested as a result.¹⁵⁵

Repressive measures assumed a new dimension when the authorities went to the extent of putting up for auction the properties of the arrested and convicted leaders. At Balurghat Surendra Chandra Bagchi, the Congress leader and a lawyer was arrested and transferred to Dum Dum jail.¹⁵⁶ When his properties were put up for auction, there was no bidder in the mufassil town

152. Ibid.

153. Ibid, February 6, 1932.

154. The Amritabazar Patrika, April 2, 1932.

155. Ibid.

156. The Amritabazar Patrika, April 5, 1932.

to purchase his books and law journals.¹⁵⁷ Some paddy belonging to Surendranath, however, could be auctioned in the local Hat.¹⁵⁸ His elder brother Paresh Chandra Pagchi who was also a legal practitioner staying at Naogaon in Dinajpur district filed a claim petition for stopping the sale on the ground that the properties belonged, as a matter of fact, to an 'undivided Hindu family'.¹⁵⁹ This was rejected by the Sub-divisional officer of Balurghat.¹⁶⁰ The Senior Munsif of Balurghat during the same month rejected another plaint in which Satisranjan Chatterjee, elder brother of Susilranjan Chatterjee applied for stopping the sale by auction of the motor car belonging to Susilranjan what the local police had attached for the purpose of realisation of the fine of Rs. 300/- imposed on him under the newly promulgated ordinance II of 1932.¹⁶¹ On April 19, the police attached all the furniture and two iron-chests from the house of the Chatterjee family for the realisation of the fine of Rs. 500/- imposed upon Sureshranjan Chatterjee, another brother of Satisranjan who was sentenced to one year's rigorous imprisonment in addition to the fine.¹⁶² Suresranjan was in Dum Dum special jail serving his term of imprisonment.¹⁶³

In Balurghat Sub-division also restraint notices were served to many workers and numerous arrests were made. On April 15, the police surrounded the house of Malinikanta Chakraborty, a local

157. Ibid.

158. Ibid.

159. Ibid.

160. Ibid.

161. Ibid, April 7; Ibid, April 8, 1932.

162. The Amritabasar Patrika, April 22, 1932.

163. Ibid.

pleader and thoroughly searched the living room of his son Kamalendu Chakraborty who was a lawyer himself.¹⁶⁴ But the police found nothing incriminating there although Kamalendu Chakraborty was a prominent volunteer of the movement.¹⁶⁵ The police served him with a notice under the emergency power ordinance which restrained him from going 'outside the Sanitation Board area' for a month.¹⁶⁶ Kalipada Bagchi, another Congress Worker and many of his fellow workers received similar orders.¹⁶⁷

In the districts of Malda and Jalpaiguri too searches and arrests were continued. On May 15, the police raided many houses at Malda in search of proscribed books and leaflets.¹⁶⁸ Some books on the life stories of Gandhi, Chittaranjan Das, Kanailal Dutta and Aurobindo Ghosh were taken away by the police. The house of Nitya-gopal Das, Dharmadas Ghosal, Surendranath Sarkar, the three prominent legal practitioners and those of Jagadindu Bagchi, Sanitary Inspector, Khagendranath Sinha, Sasadhar Sarkar, Nanigopal Sinha, Basanta Kumar Das, Bireswar Sharma and Bireswas Karmakar were searched by the police.¹⁶⁹ In Jalpaiguri on May 20, a band of armed Gurkhas led by a police Inspector searched the Jhajranghi Congress Office for the fourth time.¹⁷⁰ A notice was also served prohibiting Akhilesh

164. Ibid, April 27.

165. Ibid; Chakraborty, Kamalendu, 'Swadhinata Sangrame Balurghat', (Article in) Madhubarni, Aswin, 1372 B.S., p. 17.

166. The Amritabazar Patrika, April 27, 1932.

167. Ibid.

168. Ibid, May 18.

169. Ibid, May 18.

170. Ibid, May 24.

Sanyal from participating in the movement. Sanyal was ordered not to leave Jalpaiguri town for one month.¹⁷¹ The police also arrested Panindranath Roy and three other picketers at Patgram.¹⁷² The Moynaguri police raided the Patgram Congress Office and the Chengrabandha Congress Office.¹⁷³ The Jalpaiguri police on May 24, searched the office of 'Janamat', a local news paper.¹⁷⁴ The houses of Jyotish Chandra Sanyal, the editor of Janamat and Rabindranath Sikdar were also searched.¹⁷⁵ In the same month many Congress Volunteers were arrested for leading a procession and distributing unauthorised leaflets at the Moynaguri Hat.¹⁷⁶ Earlier a Congress volunteer named Jogendranath Das was arrested for having posted unauthorised posters which could be seen everyday in the prominent places of Jalpaiguri town.¹⁷⁷

It is worthwhile to mention the awakening in the Marwari Community during this period. The Marawaris of the town of Darjeeling started a society which aimed at unity, solidarity, social reform and public service.¹⁷⁸ They also planned to open a library, physical club and interestingly, business associations of sellers of piece goods, hardware etc.¹⁷⁹ The commercial interests of a section of the Marwari Community, it seems, became interwoven with

171. Ibid.

172. Ibid.

173. Ibid.

174. Ibid, May 25, 1932.

175. Ibid.

176. Ibid, May 17.

177. Ibid, April 28.

178. The Amritabasar Patrika, May 3, 1932.

179. Ibid.

national aspiration and social reforms. The society interested the Marwari public to some extent.¹⁸⁰

The period also saw disturbances in the agrarian sector and in the tribal areas. A loan Recovery Officer was assaulted at Balurghat.¹⁸¹ Altogether 17 persons were arrested in this connexion. About 15 of them were sentenced to various terms of imprisonment ranging from 6 months to $1\frac{1}{2}$ years and with a fine in some of the cases.¹⁸² Earlier in the month of February 1932, a Sub-Inspector of Excise raided with his constables, the village of Chakram in the Balurghat sub-division which was inhabited predominantly by the Santals.¹⁸³ The purpose of the enquiry was to find whether country liquor was brewed in the village. A conflict between the Santals and the excise officials ensued in which a constable and a few Santals were seriously injured.¹⁸⁴

At Gangarampur the police had to fire a few rounds to disperse a mob. The Santals here agitated against forcible conversion to christianity and assault on a woman.¹⁸⁵ Many Santals of Gangarampur were influenced by Congress¹⁸⁶ ideals and launched a no-tax campaign.

180. Ibid.

181. Ibid, April 12.

182. Ibid.

183. Bangabani, February 27.

184. Ibid.

185. Ibid, July 19, 1932.

186. Chakraborty, K., OP. Cit., p. 18

In August, 1932 amidst the tense political situation came the declaration of the British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald which provided for separate electorates for the Muslims, Sikhs and Europeans.¹⁸⁷ These communities however, could change the arrangement after the lapse of ten years, if they so desired.¹⁸⁸ Of the total number of seats allotted to the Hindus a portion was again reserved for the depressed classes who could offer their candidatures for the seats reserved for them as well as for those allotted to the Hindus in General.¹⁸⁹

In protest against the proposal for separate electorates for the depressed classes Gandhi started a fast unto death from September 20, 1932.¹⁹⁰ He would not withdraw his fast unless his demands were met. In such a situation the Hindu leaders signed the Poona pact with Ambedkar, the leader of the depressed classes according to which pact it was agreed that a total number of 148 seats should be reserved in the provincial assemblies for the depressed classes and in the central legislature 18% of the total number of seats allotted to the representatives from British Indian territories were to be reserved for the depressed classes.¹⁹¹ It was also agreed that the depressed classes should select four candidates for each seat reserved for them and subsequently from among those four candidates one should be elected on the basis of votes cast by all the Hindus of the concerned constituency.¹⁹²

187. Masumdar, R.C., OP. Cit., p. 309-10.

188. Ibid.

189. Ibid.

190. Ibid, p. 310.

191. Ibid, p. 310-11.

192. Ibid, p. 311.

The Poona pact was accepted by the Government¹⁹³ and on September 26, Gandhi withdrew his fast.¹⁹⁴

The movement however, continued during the period. Governmental fury came down on press people at Jalpaiguri. Fanindranath Sanyal and Dhirendranath Sanyal, the two brothers, were arrested.¹⁹⁵ The office premises of the Lakshmi Bank of Jalpaiguri and the house of Bhabatosh Sanyal, Joychandra Chakraborty, Rajendra Kumar Niyogi, Satish Chandra Lahiri and Pritinidhan Roy were searched.¹⁹⁶ Hiralal Sarkar, a Congress volunteer, received 4 months rigorous imprisonment for violating the order of the authorities.¹⁹⁷

When Gandhi started his fast numerous Congress Workers followed suit. At Malda hundreds of people prayed for Gandhi's success.¹⁹⁸ Many people including the leading Congress Worker Debendranath Jha fasted on September 20.¹⁹⁹ In the afternoon, a large public meeting was held at the station Ghat where the speakers discussed the Congress programmes.²⁰⁰

Movement for the removal of untouchability was one of the highlights of this period which appears to have consumed major portion of the energy of the Congress Workers in Northern Bengal in the last quarter of 1932 and even after that.

193. Ibid.

194. Ibid.

195. Bangabani, September 17, 1932.

196. Ibid.

197. Ibid, August 28.

198. Ibid, September 25.

199. Ibid.

200. Ibid.

At Jalpaiguri, a meeting was held on September 19, under the presidency of Makhanlal Bhowmik which was attended by many people of the depressed classes.²⁰¹ Here the speakers requested the upper caste Hindus to join the movement for the removal of untouchability.) A similar meeting was held at Siliguri on September 21 in which the Hindus prayed for Mahatma's success.²⁰² The Darjeeling District Committee convened this meeting. It was addressed by leaders like Siumangal Singh. A dinner was also arranged in which upper cast Hindus dined with the members of the depressed classes.²⁰³ The meeting at Malda held on September 20 appears to be of more importance since it was summoned in front of the famous temple of Pura Kali. The members of the depressed classes were allowed to enter the temple with their offerings to the goddess.²⁰⁴ The priest accepted the offerings. Prasada of the goddess was distributed among the people present there. The meeting held here was presided over by Priyanath Chowdhury, a legal practitioner of the town who was also a leader of the Congress.²⁰⁵

It is worthwhile to mention that spirit of communalism was gaining ground even in the mid twenties. Earlier in 1924 an organisation named Malda Hindu Sabha was founded of which Gosain Rudrananda Giri was the President and Asutosh Choudhury was the

201. Ibid.

202. Ibid.

203. Ibid.

204. Ibid, September 27.

205. Ibid.

Secretary. Dominated by landlords, Merchants and lawyers the organisation aimed at promoting the 'interests of the Hindus of Malda in all respects'. Although the Government view was that the 'standing and weight of the association' did not justify its recognition by the Government the Malda Hindu Sabha exercised some influence over the local Hindus, held many periodical meetings and had no less than 55 members by the end of 1929.²⁰⁶

However, in the month of May 1932 the Hindus of the district of Malda held a meeting at 'Sharafa' Buildings of Englishbasar town. At this meeting it was decided to hold the provincial Hindu conference at Malda. A reception committee was formed for the purpose of which Jyotirmohan Misra, a Zamindar of Harishchandrapur, was the chairman. The committee included Panchanan Masumdar, Asutosh Chowdhury, Gosain Rudrananda Giri, Kaliprasanna Saha, Iswarlal Ghosh, Bijoy Niyogi, Probodh Kumar Roy, Sasibhusan Kumar, Narayan Das Behani etc.²⁰⁷ Elaborate preparations were on for the conference. A pandal about 12 thousand square feet in area to accomodate 4 thousand people was erected under the supervision of Gourchandra Das.²⁰⁸ The pandal was electrified receiving connexion from the house of Gosthabehari Roy who had a dynamo of his own for the purpose of electrification of his house.²⁰⁹ Electricity was an unique device at the then Englishbasar. A volunteer organisation

206. Progs. of the Govt. of Bengal, Political Dept. (Political Branch) File 8A-17 Progs. B 452-53, December, 1929.

207. The Amritabasar Patrika, May 27, 1932.

208. Bangabani, September 7, 1932.

209. Ibid.

was also formed for the conference. Rakhalchandra Roy was the G.O.C. of the organisation. Satyendra Prasanna Sarkar, Nandalal Chowdhury and Nikunjabehari Gupta were his lieutenants under whose command the volunteers drilled and paraded.²¹⁰

The organisers paid much attention to the question of fund raising. For this purpose various drives were made by workers like Amarendra Krishna Bhaduri, Kaliprasanna Saha, Nrityagopal Bhattacharyya, Jatindranath Masumdar etc. Many rich people like the zamindar of Kandi promised to contribute towards the fund.²¹¹

Lalbehari Masumdar was the publicity officer of the organisers.²¹² For a detailed press coverage of the proceedings of the conference Masumdar decided to publish daily issues of his weekly newspaper 'Gourdur', from September 14, to September 21, during which period the conference was to be held.²¹³ He made an all-out effort to make these publications excellent in all respects.²¹⁴

In this period Malda became the focus of attention of the whole of Bengal.²¹⁵

The agenda prepared by the organisers deserves further discussion. It is interesting to note that issues like widow remarriage was on the agenda.²¹⁶ Some of the delegates were to

210. Bangabani, September 7, 1932.

211. Ibid.

212. Ibid.

213. Ibid.

214. Ibid.

215. Ibid, September 10, 1932.

216. Ibid, September 12, 1932.

discuss the glorious past of the community and the fact that during the respective periods of Shivaji and Chaitanyadeva many believers of other faiths were converted to Hinduism.²¹⁷ All these however, gave a distinctly communal character to the 7th provincial Hindu conference held at Malda in September, 1932.

Ramananda Chattopadhyay, the pre-eminent journalist of the time was elected the president of the conference.²¹⁸ Sanat Kumar Roychoudhury, Sarala Devi Choudhurani, Pulin Das and Asoka Chattopadhyay were among the prominent personalities invited to attend the conference.²¹⁹

The conference passed numerous resolutions²²⁰ of them the following deserve special mention.

(a) In every village there should be attempts to establish a Hindu religious organisation or a temple for the public.

(b) Everywhere among the Hindus there should be a spirit for the celebration of Hindu festivals like Durgapuja, Kalipuja, Doljatra, Janmastami, Sivaratri etc. All Hindus irrespective of their castes should celebrate these festivals and all should have equal rights in this respect.

(c) Proper attention should be paid to the study of religious texts.

217. Ibid.

218. Ibid, September 18.

219. Ibid.

220. Ibid, September 27, 1932.

(d) Every year the festivals to commemorate the religious leaders of Hindu Society should be duly celebrated.

(e) A Hindu should identify himself as a Hindu only and not as a member of any caste thereof.

(f) Intercaste marriages should be encouraged and there should not be any discrimination against any person who married someone of a caste other than his own.

(g) Widow remarriage should be encouraged.

(h) All Hindus should have the right to enter any temple and worship the deity or deities presiding.

(i) Child marriages should be discouraged in right earnest

(j) There should be concerted efforts for the abolition of dowry. Observation of funeral rites and other ceremonies should be less expensive.

(k) Physical culture should be encouraged and for this purpose physical culture clubs should be established in villages.

(l) Efforts should be made to make the Hindus conscious of the principles of hygiene.

(m) Efforts should also be made to make the people conscious of the evil effects of the consumption of liquor.

(n) There should be concerted actions wherever the communal or individual interest of a Hindu was threatened. Proper care should also be taken for the protection of women and children which should be considered the holiest duty of the Hindus.

As regards the question of untouchability the conference passed some important resolutions.²²¹

(o) In school and college hostels, Bar libraries, hotels and everywhere, the conference resolved, the so called upper caste Hindus should dine with the untouchables.

(p) Educational Institutions should be open to all Hindus irrespective of castes.

(q) The priests, Barbars, Washermen and Boatmen should serve every Hindu without any caste discrimination. Regarding the cremation of any deceased person there should not be any caste discrimination.

Some other resolutions were related to the question of economic development of the Hindus.

(r) The provincial conference as well as the local organisations would maintain a list of Hindu businessmen, manufacturers, artisans and labourers.²²² All Hindus should co-operate with and employ, as the case may be, these persons. The conference gave a call for rejuvenation of the Bengali Hindus as a community. They were urged to engage themselves in manual work. Entrepreneurship was to be encouraged. For this purpose there should be an exhibition every year in different towns and villages in which articles prepared or manufactured by Hindu artisans should be displayed. The Bengali Hindus should take up employment in ships and steamers shaking off superstitions and prejudices.

221. Ibid.

222. Bangabani, September 27, 1932.

The conference provided great impetus to communal politics in Northern Bengal. In this period numerous meetings of Hindus were held in Northern Bengal. On September 25, a fairly attended meeting at Balurghat²²³ was presided over by Bhubanchandra Masumdar. The venue of the meeting was the courtyard of the temple of Bura Kali. Nalinikanta Adhikary, Kalinarayan Sanyal and Baidyanath Santal addressed the meeting emphasising the need of removal of untouchability. A sensation was caused when Rajlakshmi Devi, a so-called 'upper caste' Hindu woman of advanced age, garlanded Baidyanath Santal, the tribal leader.²²⁴

The meeting, however, expressed its concern over Gandhi's illness and prayed for his recovery and long life. It also resolved that caste discrimination should be abolished in temples, educational institutions and community wells. Baidyanath Santal announced that on October 2, the Santals as well as the 'upper caste' Hindus would assemble again to celebrate the birthday of Gandhi.²²⁵

Another meeting at Balurghat in the month of September was presided over by an old cobbler of the town.²²⁶ A procession was organised in which cobblers, sweepers, Santals, the so called untouchables and the so-called Hindus of 'upper castes' joined.²²⁷

223. Ibid, September 28.

224. Ibid.

225. Ibid.

226. Ibid, September 27.

227. Ibid.

Police repression, however, did not wane during the closing months of 1932.

The Balurghat police searched the house of Benoybhusan Sarkar on October 28, although they found nothing objectionable.²²⁸ (The Deputy commissioner of Jalpaiguri ordered Bireswar Jha, a Congress Volunteer of Jalpaiguri to stay out of the district for one month.²²⁹ Jhabura Bairagi, the secretary of Dhupguri Congress Committee was appointed special constable for three months.²³⁰)

Some overt activities of the revolutionaries in Northern Bengal during this period stirred the political environment. In 1932 Nirmal Chakraborty of Raikutpara Jalpaiguri was arrested and sentenced to three years rigorous imprisonment on charge of carrying firearms.²³¹ The judgment in this case was delivered in November 1932. On November 18, the Superintendent of Rajshahi jail, C.A.W. Luke was shot at by two revolutionaries.²³² This happened at Rajshahi.

After the above incidents police oppression intensified in Northern Bengal districts. In this connexion several arrests were made. Ajit Basu, a high school student was arrested in connexion with the arms recovery case of Jalpaiguri in which Nirmal Chakraborty was convicted.²³³ At Malda Nanigopal Singha, a student of the

228. Ibid, October 3, 1932.

229. Ibid, November 15, 1932.

230. Ibid.

231. Ibid.

232. Majumdar, R.C., History of Modern Bengal Part-II, p. 261.

233. Bangabani, November 15, 1932.

A.C. Institution was arrested and sent to Rajshahi jail.²³⁴ It was suspected that Nanigopal had some connexion with the incident at Rajshahi. Kaliranjan Das, a student of the same school was also arrested.²³⁵ At the town of old Malda Hansagopal Agarwala was arrested.²³⁶ All these persons were sent to Rajshahi jail.

Earlier we have referred to the appointment of Jhabura Bairagi as a special constable. The authorities were dissatisfied with his performance on that capacity. Therefore he was entrusted with the task of stopping the circulation of unauthorised leaflets in the Hats of Chouhari, Doukimari and Bhabdam.²³⁷ He was also ordered to report at the local police station on every monday.²³⁸ (At Jalpaiguri Kamakhya Das and Ajit Basu were arrested again under the Bengal ordinance. Their houses were also searched by police.)²³⁹

In the month of March 1933 the annual session of the Congress was held in Calcutta. But the police arrested about a thousand delegates including the president elect Madan Mohan Malavya.²⁴⁰ In Malavya's absence Nellie Sengupta became the president.²⁴¹ The Calcutta Congress passed resolutions on Civil Disobedience, boycott of foreign textiles and complete independence.²⁴² Gandhi on May 8, 1933 started his fast for 21 days for the purpose of purification

234. Ibid, December 11, 1932.

235. Ibid, December 10.

236. Ibid, December 11.

237. Bangabani, January 1, 1933.

238. Ibid.

239. Ibid, January 3, 1933.

240. Chandra, B. et al., OP. Cit., p. 189.

241. Masumdar, R.C., OP. Cit., p. 312.

242. Ibid.

of his mind and also with the object of drawing the attention of people to the necessity of development of the untouchables and depressed classes.²⁴³ He was released by the Government.²⁴⁴ Then at Gandhi's request Civil Disobedience movement was suspended for 6 weeks.²⁴⁵ Eventually the movement was withdrawn by the Congress. There would be, it was decided, no 'group violation of law' any longer and only individual satyagraha could be continued.²⁴⁶

It is now worthwhile to give an account of the movement in Northern Bengal during the closing months. In the month of December 1932, the Santals in the district of Malda rose in rebellion making the famous Adina Mosque their citadel.²⁴⁷ The rising was put down. Even earlier the Santals were fired upon by police at Gangarampur.²⁴⁸ These however, prompted the authorities to introduce severe measures. In January 1933, two contingents of Gurkha soldiers were brought to Malda. One of these contingents flag marched through the disturbed areas of Pakua, Gazol, Bulbulchandi and Adina.²⁴⁹

(In the month of January several arrests were made in the district of Jalpaiguri. On January 15, a procession was organised violating the section 144.²⁵⁰ This led to the arrest of Purnachandra Roy, Surendra Roy, Tulu Barman of Patgram, Ananta Roy and Harish

243. Ibid, p. 313.

244. Ibid.

245. Ibid.

246. Ibid, p. 314.

247. The Pioneer, December 16, 1932.

248. Bangabani, July 1932.

249. Ibid, January 8, 1932.

250. Ibid, January 18.

Chandra Seal of Vitargarh and Sachindra Basu of Jalpaiguri. The house of Satyendra Sen, the secretary of the Trading Bank, was searched on the same day.²⁵¹ Sukumari Sen, the daughter of Satyendra Sen and Kalidas Roy, a teacher of Sonaulah School were arrested. A few letters and books were seized in this connexion.²⁵² The house of Asutosh Basu was also searched.²⁵³ However, Kalidas Roy and Sukumari Sen were released on January 17.²⁵⁴ j

Despite police repression the independence day was celebrated at Jalpaiguri with much enthusiasm. On 26th January, 1933, three processions were organised in three different quarters of the town.²⁵⁵ One procession was led by Satischandra Pasak. Some of the participants including Satischandra were arrested when the procession reached the court compound. Another Congressman named Sisunath led the second procession. When this was proceeding toward the police station the police intervened and arrested Sisunath along with some other volunteers while the third procession led by Shibendra was stopped near the railway station. Shibendra and many of his fellow volunteers were arrested. The police on that day arrested altogether 30 volunteers.²⁵⁶ The day following witnessed the search of many private houses by police including those of Bibhuti Chakraborty and E.K. Basu.²⁵⁷ The Congress Workers in the interior areas like

251. Ibid.

252. Ibid, January 21.

253. Ibid.

254. Ibid.

255. Bangabani, January 28, 1933.

256. Ibid.

257. Ibid, January 30.

Patgram, Bhitargarh and Chengrabandha observed the independence day.²⁵⁸ Some persons were arrested at Patgram also. Satish Chandra Foy, Ratikanta Roy and Chandimani Roy were among the arrested.²⁵⁹

The Indian National Congress during the period established All-India untouchability league and the servants of the untouchables society.²⁶⁰ At Balurghat also an organisation was founded with the same objects.²⁶¹ This was led by Nalinikanta Adhikary and Jatindranath Basu. A 'Swadeshi Sangha' was also established. Both of these were supposed to work as branches of the National organisations. The 'Sangha' was headed by Surendranath Bagchi by then a much known Congress leader of the sub-region.²⁶²

The Congress Volunteers at Jalpaiguri resorted to some unique tactics with a view to propagating their ideals. During the celebration of Sivaratri festival at Jalpesh temple some volunteers camped there, raised the national flag and distributed unauthorised leaflets.²⁶³ As a result some volunteers including Bibhuti Chakraborty, Gouri Sankar Roy and Abinash Ghosh were arrested. The police seized the flag hoisted by them.²⁶⁴ On March 24, 1933 the Jalpaiguri volunteers arranged a procession at 'Fanskata Fair' a periodical gathering of much importance held at Patgram area, violating prohibitory orders.²⁶⁵ The police opened fire to

258. Ibid, January 30.

259. Ibid.

260. Chandra, B. et al., OP. Cit., p. 187.

261. Bangabani, January 8, 1933.

262. Ibid.

263. Ibid, February 25.

264. Ibid.

265. Ibid, March 28.

disperse the procession. One person was killed and some others were injured.²⁶⁶

A few days after the firing at the 'Mela' the Jalpaiguri police in a round up operation arrested 12 youngmen.²⁶⁷ In search of weapons they raided the houses of Rajani Sen, Srinath Hore, Nagen Das, Upen Karmakar, Surendra Gope, Sasibhusan Sikdar, Surendra Basu, Girish Maitra, Panchanan Dutta, Dhiren Kusari and Madhusudan Dasgupta.²⁶⁸

The authorities issued an order prohibiting anti-Government processions, meetings and demonstrations within the jurisdiction of Balurghat and Patnitola police stations.²⁶⁹ Violating these orders the Congress Workers arranged a meeting which was presided over by Kalipada Bagchi. A resolution passed by this meeting protested against the arrests made all the country over. Curiously enough the police did not arrest a single person joining this meeting.²⁷⁰

The Bengal Provincial Hindu Sabha during the time built up a good following particularly in the district of Malda and picked up issues like assault on Hindu woman²⁷¹ and defilement of Hindu temples²⁷² by Muslims in the district and agitated for sometime.

266. Ibid, March 28.

267. Bangabani, April 3, 1933.

268. Ibid.

269. Ibid.

270. Ibid.

271. Ibid, July 10.

272. Ibid, July 19.

They however devoted some attention to widow remarriage and propagation of Hindu faith among the Santals of the district who rose in armed rebellion in December 1932. A meeting of the Santals was convened at Dharmapur on April 10, 1933 in which Swami Premananda* explained to them the principles of Hindu faith²⁷³ while at Shersahi village two widow remarriages were arranged by one Bhuban-Mohan Dey, a Hindu Sabha worker.²⁷⁴

In the fag end of the month of July 1933 the political workers of Northern Bengal received the news of the demise of Jatindramohun Sengupta. The Bar Association of Malda²⁷⁵, Balurghat²⁷⁶ and Siliguri²⁷⁷ mourned the death of the leader. By then the campaign had virtually stopped.

273. Bangabani, April 24, 1933.

274. Ibid, June 21, 1933.

275. Ibid, July 25, 1933.

276. Ibid, July 26 & 31, 1933.

277. Ibid, July 30, 1933.

* Swami Premananda was a member of a Hindu religious organisation named Maldaha Hindu Mission.