

CHAPTER – 6
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Part-I

Swarajya within a year --- this promise of Gandhi was evaporated with the withdrawal of the Non-Co-operation Movement on February 11, 1922. As a result the soaring expectations of the nation were doomed in an abyss of frustration, and a sense of inconceivable disillusionment swept over the country. There followed demoralization in the nationalist ranks. Viceroy Lord Reading who was very much disturbed since the launching of the Non-Cooperation Movement, now breathed a sigh of deep relief when he came to know the Bardoli Resolution of the Congress Working Committee in respect of the dropping of of the Civil Disobedience Movement. This is evident from what he writes, “The Bardoli Resolution left the organization without any clearly defined and intelligible objectives. From that moment disintegration and disorganisation set in, enthusiasm evaporated, disillusionment and discouragement prevailed in the ranks of the Congress party”. So the Viceroy now felt no hesitation in giving orders to arrest Gandhi on the charge of spreading disaffection against the Government.

The active phase of the Non-Cooperation Movement virtually came to an end with its withdrawal on February 11, 1922; and this end was

confirmed with the arrest of Gandhi on March 10, 1922. All the nation was now struck dumb. In this crisis people asked about the efficacy of the Gandhi-strategy and also about the future course of the movement. Now the grave pertinent questions were: would the Congress give up non-cooperation and return to the much criticized moderate policy of political mendicancy towards the Government? In this context it was the question of much importance what would stir up the spirit of the nation now getting lapsed into passivity and how this stirring up would be done. At this stage there ensued a debate over fixing the future course of action of the movement. One section of the Congress headed by C.R. Das and Motilal Nehru advocated the programme of entering into councils and thereby exposing the sham reforms of the government. They were sure that this would stir the people, and keep up their spirit of resistance to colonial rule. The other section of the Congress headed by Vallabhbhai Patel, Rajendra Prasad and C. Rajagopalachari were in strong favour of no-entry into council and of continuing the non-cooperation programme thoroughly. At the Gaya session (December, 1922) the Congress was divided into two factions viz the council-entry faction and the council-boycott faction. These two factions were later came to be known respectively as 'no-changers' and 'pro-changers'.

But this division made no noticeable change in the Congress in its essential character and in national thinking and belief. Both the groups were then as imperialist as before; they remained loyal to Gandhiji. They remained all along alert to keep the unity of the Congress; and they did not do anything that might threaten the unity of the party. But in one respect there was a radical difference: the pro-changers were not content with the Gandhi-strategy of constructive programme bearing the sole objective that would slowly prepare the nation for the resumption of the suspended civil disobedience. Now they were intent on opening a new front in the movement by entering into the councils, as they had now the firm conviction that they would thus transform them into arenas of the councils political struggle by continuous and consistent obstruction if and when their proposals for reform were rejected. On the other hand the No-changers were dead against council-entry lest that should be detrimental to the constructive programme among the masses as a result of which the preparation of the nation for the second phase of the movement might be neglected. After the split of the Congress in two contending factions C.R. Das, the fountain-head of the Pro-changers took prompt steps in respect of council-entry. Das, Nehru and their close associates resigned their respective offices in the Congress, and on January 1, 1923 they formed the Congress-Khilafat *Swarajya* Party within the

Congress. And though they had very little time to organize the party for contesting the elections of November they attained a brilliant result in the Central Legislative Assembly and also in some Provincial Councils. It is really noteworthy that the *Swarajists* captured 42 seats out of 101 seats. In the Central Province they won an absolute majority and in the Bengal Council the *Swarajya* Party became the largest party.

From the very release of the Election Manifesto (October 14, 1923) the *Swarajya* Party attracted the attention of the nationalists, and since then it was expected that the *Swarajists* would fight hard for the redress of the wrongs done so long to the Indians by the British. In the first session of the newly formed Central Legislative Assembly the *Swarajists* raised a number of reform-proposals relating to self-government and civil liberties, and also proposals for the release of political prisoners and the repeal of repressive laws. There were also proposals for the development of indigenous industries. But it is a pity that in most cases the proposals were left unheeded though in every case they raised tumultuous uproar. This was the common picture of the activity of the *Swarajists* in the Councils.

Gandhiji was released from Jail on February 5, 1924. An uncompromising No-Changer as he was he did not believe in the efficacy of the Council-entry of the *Swarajists* and also in some of methods of their

Council-warfare, yet considering the gravity of the situation and the service, however wrong, that the *Swarajists* had been rendering to the nation he brought the strife between the two factions to an end, and permitted the Pro-changers to carry on their work in the Councils as an integral part of the Congress, in addition to this they were given a majority of seats in the Working Committee.

Part – II

The Non-Cooperation Movement virtually came to end with its withdrawal on February 11, 1922. All India was then dismayed and struck dumb thinking about the future course of the national movement. In this crucial stage C. R. Das, the dear '*deshabandhu*' of Bengal, as President of the *Swarajya* Party asserted that they were not giving up non-cooperation; on the contrary they would continue it in a more effective way by continuous and consistent obstruction to every work of the government in the council and thereby they would make the government work through the Council impossible. Das also added that the council-entry of the *Swarajya* Party was outwardly a sort of co-operation with the government, but practically it was a very different form of non-cooperation much more powerful and effective and even much superior to the Gandhi-method of non-cooperation. This was how Mr Das, the dear son of Bengal, made it clear to all the disillusioned

and demoralized nationalists that the *Swarajya* Party would open a second front in India's struggle for independence. This assertion of Das created a sensational awakening of the nationalists, particularly those of Bengal. Now in all Bengal there started ebullient discussions as to the future course of the Movement in the following non-active phase which in the words of Das, the President of the CKSP would open a new front in the battle for independence. A greater section of the Bengal nationalists and the Congress Committees of all levels supported the Congress Khilaphat *Swarajya* Party (CKSP) whole heartedly. All Midnapore welcomed the CKSP with high expectations. It was expected that striking additional forces would now be added to the movement which was now getting lapsed into passivity, and that something truly beneficial might come to Bengal. Midnapore cherished high hopes in *Deshabandhu* C. R. Das, the President of the CKSP and in *Deshapran* Birendranath Sasmol, the Secretary of the Bengal Branch of the Party. Meanwhile Sasmol had already earned a great name in Midnapore for his humanitarian and relief services during the devastating flood and recurring epidemics in Contai, and for his leadership in the anti-Union Board agitations and heroic success. Sasmol laboriously endeavoured to organize the party in the *thanalevels*. He explained the aims and objectives of the party in their proper contexts. These endeavours of Sasmol infused a great

enthusiasm among the people of Contai, and brought about a solid transformation that prepared them for a cool and calculated gallant fight in their struggle for independence. This was how Contai was being changed into a new Contai during the so-called non-active days of the *Swarajya* phase of the Movement.

The aims and objectives of the CKSP and particularly its novel method of continuing a new type of non-cooperation movement through entry into the Councils drew the attention of the nationalists. So discussions went on in respect of the organisation of the Congress committees and the exposition of the *Swarajya* ideology to the people, and also in respect of appealing to them to support the new party and co-operate with it for bringing about a new movement to transform the colonial administration.

Contai was all along a hot-bed of nationalist activities, and the Contai-people were all along sensitive and responsive towards the changes in nationalist politics. The Bardoli incident and the consequent suspension of the Non- Cooperation Movement was to the nationalists a bolt from the blue. Yet they were sure that the abrupt suspension of the movement did not mean the total extinction of the fire of nationalism. On the contrary it was the beginning of a more effective movement than the former resembling the mythological phoenix that burns itself to be reborn out of its own ashes.

Since the formation of the CKSP it became a question of great importance to the nationalists which one of the two factions of the Congress --- the Council-entry faction or the Council-boycott faction --- would be beneficial to the nation. In a meeting held at Saraswatitala in the Contai town one Iswarchandra Jana, a staunch follower of Sasmol and an advocate of *Swarajist* principles and ideology, forwarded the argument that it was a great necessity that the Council-entry group only would be able to prevent the undesirable elements from capturing vantage positions and thereby weakening the Congress and the movement; besides this group would put pressure on the government to pass reform laws for the benefit of the people¹. On the other hand the Council-boycott group forwarded the logic that Council-entry would lead to the neglect of the constructive work programme of the masses and that the Councils would only be turned into co-operative machines of the government for petty reforms and piecemeal legislations. In the meeting the debate over entry or no-entry into the Councils went on for a while but it reached no clear cut conclusion. Practically it was difficult to decide which one of the groups was to be favoured and supported as both the groups were anti-imperialist and truly national in thinking and belief, and both were loyal to Gandhiji and true followers of his ideals and principles, and both had the firm conviction that

it was not immediately possible to embark on a general mass civil disobedience movement; and to both the groups the unity of the Congress was deemed as a sacred matter. But in spite of all these similarities there was only one grave difference of paramount importance --- the difference of the questions of Councils-entry which according to the 'pro-changers' was to open a new front in the struggle for independence. It was deduced from the general impression of the meeting that all Contai was in favour of accepting the policy and method of the pro-changers in continuing the movement². That is why at the end of the meeting Mr. P. N. Banerjee, president of the meeting appealed to the audience to support the *Swarajya* Party and to elect their *Deshapran* Sasmol and his close associate Mahendranath Maity to the Bengal Legislative Assembly³.

From the beginning of the *Swarajya* phase of the movement Contai made no distinction between the two groups of the Congress as there was practically found no difference of one from the other in respect of their basic characteristics except on the question of Council-entry; besides both the groups were always aware of the fact that they would not do any such thing that might threaten the unity of the Congress⁴. Above all both the groups fully acknowledged and accepted the essentiality of the unquestionable leadership of Gandhiji⁵. That is why the national movement of Contai during

the *Swarajya* phase was practically a part and parcel of the national movement with some regional variations.

The split of the Congress into two groups made no noticeable impact of the nationalists of Contai as it was fully known to them that the *Swarajya* Party was formed within the Congress, and they were proud of the fact that their *Deshaprana* Sasmol was the Secretary of the Bengal Branch of the *Swarajya* Party. As a result the Contai Congress started to reorganise the existing committees of all levels, to recruit new members, to explain the *Swarajya* ideology and the aims and objectives of the Party⁶. In this situation there was formed the *Swaraj Karmi Sangha* i.e. the *Samiti* of the *swarajist* workers⁷. The *samiti* was to disseminate the true essence of *swaraj*, and to prepare the people to make them collectively alert in respect of the ensuing election of the Councils⁸. The *samiti* would also implement the objectives of the Party in respect of creating villages free from social wrongs and inequalities⁹. In addition to this there was formed an Advisory Committee consisting of some distinguished persons of the subdivision to supervise the activities of the *Karmi Sangha* and to guide the members of the *Sangha* in respect of discharging the duties as were entrusted to them¹⁰. Besides the Contai Congress committee divided the big *thana* committees into at least two branches with a view to giving direct attention to the fact that the *Swaraj*

ideology was being properly propagated and followed and the recruitment of new members for the *Swarajya* Party was going on¹¹. In this connection it is to be noted that the wearing of *Khadi* was now made a condition of membership of the Congress. The Contai Congress now took the attempt to introduce two thousand charkas in the Villagers, and it was resolved that charkas and monetary help would be given to those persons who were willing to spin in charkas¹².

The Contai Congress Committee directed the *thana* committees including their branches to restore and reorganise the existing village committees, and to see it that they were following the *Swarajist* ideology and the multi-faceted Gandhi-programme of social reconstruction properly and whole heartedly¹³.

In Gandhi's words "Swaraj of a people means the sum total of the Swaraj of individuals. And such Swaraj comes only from performance by individuals of their duty as citizens"¹⁴. Gandhi makes it clear when he says that Swaraj refers to a nation's ability to manage its own affairs. This Swaraj is no philosophical obstruction; on the contrary it is a concrete geometrical square with four inter-related sides and four right angles. The four sides of the Swaraj-square are political independence, economic independence,

social equality and moral elevation. This Swaraj can be attained and established by awakening the mass into a sense of their power and dignity.

The *Swarajist* phase of the Non-cooperation Movement, though a short-lived passive phase, was highly remarkable for its striking socio-political and socio-economic activities. The Contai *Swarajists* learnt from Gandhi that Swaraj i.e. self-rule, in other words self-government was better than being in a constant state of servitude under the British rule. They had also learnt that they had all the ability to manage their own affairs and to strive against all odds to solve their own problems. It is interesting to note that this their learning had behind it the bearing that all their nationalist activities got conditioned by their traditional religious beliefs. Politics was not bereft of religion --- this belief of the Contai nationalists all along propped them to advance with a heroic religious ardour in the subsequent movements. This religious nationalism of Contai and the works of the *Swarajists* in respect of the implementation of the socio-economic regeneration of the villages drew the attention of the national leaders. On January 16, 1924 Acharya Prafulla Chandra Ray came to Contai. He made an intensive tour over Contai. In the public meetings he asked the people to sacrifice their personal interests for the sake of the country. He eloquently made it clear to all that they must have to remove the poverty of the villages

through the revival of the cottage industries. And for this they must have to devote themselves to cotton production, to charka-spinning and weaving and to the restoration of various cottage industries. Besides Ray stressed that the *Swarajists* must have to take every care for the spread of a balanced system of education through national schools¹⁵.

The *Swarajist* activities also attracted Gandhi to come to Contai. Gandhi along with Dr. Rajendraprasad and his close associate Mathuraprasad came to Contai on July 4, 1925. This auspicious arrival of Gandhi made Contai a new land and with it the Non-cooperation Movement in Contai took a new turn. Practically henceforth the Movement assumed a new character. In the meetings held in the Contai town, Midnapore town and at Kharagpur Gandhi advised the people to stick wholeheartedly and sincerely to the works related to the social construction¹⁶. Gandhi assured the people that the construction programme would start anew with the restoration of the *khadi* industry. He said point blank with the avowed assurance of an economist that all other industries would follow from *khadi*. Gandhi writes: "I would make the spinning wheel the foundation on which to build a sound village life; I would make the wheel the centre round which all other activities will revolve"¹⁷. Gandhi meant to say that *Khadi* i.e. the charka-spinning and *Khadi*-weaving industry would be the leading sector

towards the restoration of all other village industries and this would lead towards the regeneration of village economy, and would ultimately lead towards the restoration of the formal normal health and soundness of village life. Gandhi's in his writings and speeches over and over again pointed that charka was, the symbol of self-help, freedom, dignity of labour and also of social equality and unity. In Gandhi words it was 'the symbol of non-violent economic self-sufficiency'¹⁸. The charka would alleviate the wretchedness and misery of the people brought about by recurrent floods and droughts and famines.

The swarajist *samaj* bespoke of a voluntary form of socialism in which every one would fulfil his wants and enjoy his rights without hampering those of others. This *samaj* was just a contrary to a communist *samaj* which advocates violence to achieve its ends.

The Contai *Swarajists* devoted themselves to the general welfare of women and the restoration of their basic human rights and also to the eradication of caste-distinctions and caste-inequalities. They held before the society that men and women complement one other, but it is the domineering of men that has developed a sense of inferiority in women¹⁹. As a result of the domineering attitude of men women had been reduced to second-class citizens. According to the *Swarajists* this is very much

disgraceful and harmful to both the society and the nation. To ward off this disgrace and to awaken a sense of superiority in women they organised several meetings and arranged for *Swadeshi Yatra* performances. Mukunda Das's yatra party of Barisal staged in Contai from January 4 – 7, 1924 the *swadeshi* plays, 'Adarsha', 'Karmakshetra', and 'Brahmacharini'. The subject matter of the plays delineated the prevalent social wrongs. Their clear indication of the remedies of the maladies deeply attracted the people²⁰. In this respect the *Nihar* writes that Mukunda Babu engendered a new life in Contai society²¹. Besides in the meetings there were going on discussions in respect of the uplift of the women from their present degenerated state. In a meeting held at Saraswatitala on April 13, 1924 the speakers eloquently analysed the deplorable place of women in families and society, and pointed out how this depravity could be abated²². The *Swarajists* made protest agitations against child marriages and against the dowry system in marriages. This their protest in the *Swarajist* environment was highly favoured in the society²³.

In their programme of social construction the *Swarajists* gave an important place to the eradication of caste distinctions and caste inequalities. In their ideal picture of society and social organisation the fourfold division of the society on the basis of birth was a misnomer. They sought to defend a

purified functional system of caste division. They held the firm conviction that birth cannot determine one's superiority and inferiority as God did not create man with any such badges. To *Swarajists* the division of the Sudras into *jalchal* and *achaljal* was very much shocking and brutal. So they pleaded for inter-caste marriages, and with their initiative some such marriages were arranged. They also introduced the system of inter-dining. To the historians (both Indians and Western) this venture of the *Swarajists* was indeed revolutionary²⁴.

The *Swarajists* favoured national schools and the national system of education. According to them this education would be a balanced system of education and this would be vocationally oriented. This should be different from the western system of education which is materialistic and activist. On the other hand the *Swarajist* system of education must be a contemplative and spiritually oriented education in consonance with the religious and ethical ideals of the civilisation of the country. It would cater to the needs of the people, and it would not create any barrier between the pupils on the one hand and on the other the members of their families, society and country²⁵.

The *Swarajists* with the help of the local bodies like municipalities took attempts to raise the quality of life of the people and to promote the constructive programme of Gandhi. Practically in respect of sanitation

clearance of locked waters, health and anti-untouchability their beneficial works aroused popular enthusiasm²⁶.

The *Swarajist* phase was by nature a passive phase; but it is striking that in one sense it was not much less active than all the active phases of the national movement. It is so because during this period the Gandhian constructive works programme constructed the socio-economic and psychopolitical structure of the Contai people. Particularly during this phase the Contai people became economically self-reliant, socially organised and politically much trained in respect of participating in the national movement and also in respect of discharging their duties as fighters of freedom in the coming events like the *Lavan* Satyagraha in which the heroines of Pichhabani, the second Dandi came to the forefront of the movement. Nay, this was not all. Their heroic participation in the national movement is a long history. This startling and even romantic participation of the people is evident in the *SwarajPanchayats* i.e. Parallel Governments formed by the nationalists at Patashpur (October, 1942 – December, 1942), Khejuri (October, 1942 – December, 1942), and Contai (July, 1943 – December, 1943).

Notes &References:

1. *Nihar*, November 13, 1923, V- 23, N- 9.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid*, December 25, 1923, V-23, N-15.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Selected Works*, Vol.-VI, pp. 442-443.
15. *Nihar*, January 15, 1924, V- 23, N- 18.
16. *Ibid*, July 7, 1925, V- 24, N- 43.
17. *Selected Works*, Vol.- IV , pp. 379 -380.
18. *Ibid*, Vol.- IV , p. 393.
19. *Nihar*, April 15, 1924, V- 23, N- 31.

20. *Ibid*, January 8, 1924, V- 23, N- 17.

21. *Ibid*.

22. *Ibid*, April 15, 1924, V- 23, N- 31.

23. *Ibid*.

24. *Ibid*.

25. *Ibid*, January 29, 1924, V- 23, N- 20 & February 5, 1924, V- 23, N- 21.

26. *Ibid*, April 15, 1924, V- 23, N- 31 & April 22, 1924, V- 23, N- 32.

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