

Popular Protests and Nationalist Movement in Mufassil Bengal: Maldah 1925 – 1934

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Abstract: *Focusing on Maldah, a northern district of Bengal, an attempt has been made in this work to demonstrate that the complexity of the nationalist movement can be gauged through an in-depth study of the localities. The study attempts to throw significant light on the different facets of nationalism. The study draws attention to the view that nationalism was not only marked by a series of urban and popular rural protests but was also a struggle where people, in a variety of positions, taking a wide range of steps, posed a severe challenge to the British authority and hegemony. The popular struggles, which converged with the Civil Disobedience movement, moved beyond the parameter of congress programme and threw up their own agendas. Focusing on Maldah, this study throws light on the popular perceptions and translations of nationalism, which were linked up with the desires and aspirations of the adivasi peasants.*

Keywords: Civil Disobedience, Nationalism, Maldah, Barind, Santal sharecroppers, Jitu Santal, Popular movements.

The Indian national movement is unique in the political history of the modern world. It is one of the biggest mass movements of our times, which mobilized millions of people belonging to all classes and sections of society throughout the length and breadth of the country. Recent trends in historiography of Indian nationalism have shifted analytical emphasis to the locality, as the crucial pivot in understanding the history of the wider region. It is felt that case studies at the regional, local or micro-level will be of help in bringing to light many dark corners of the history of our recent past and that local case studies will contribute towards a better comprehension and deeper understanding for the unfolding of diverse historical processes, their coexistence and complex inter-connections at the all-India level.

The aim of the present article is to study the various facets of nationalist movement in Maldah, a northern district of Bengal for the period from 1925 to 1942. An attempt has been made in this work to demonstrate that the complexity of the nationalist movement can be gauged through an in-depth study of the localities. Organized by the

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local political leadership, the anti-British movement channelized mass discontent drawing upon both local and national grievances. This phase of nationalist movement in Maldah was very significant because it constituted diverse facets and streams and unleashed a variety of protests. The movement was marked with mass articulation of nationalism. People became associated with the Congress-led movement with a variety of hopes and desires, bringing their aspirations and expressions to it. People related, assimilated and adapted nationalist ideology to their own social and political needs based on their own world views and experiences.

(I)

The last decade of the twentieth century is marked by the emergence of nationalist stirrings in Maldah.¹ The rise of nationalist consciousness was, no doubt, favored by the spread of western education, development of communications, introduction of local self-government as well as formation of Englishbazar (1869), Old Maldah (1869) and some year's later Nababganj (1903) municipalities.

In Maldah, the anti-Partition movement began as an urban middle class movement in which leadership and inspiration were provided by Benoy Kumar Sarkar and Radhesh Chandra Seth. The people of Maldah had begun to express their objection through numerous meetings against the partition of Bengal and inclusion of the district in the proposed province of Eastern Bengal and Assam. Legal practitioners, teachers, students were active participants of the movement.

The Non-Cooperation movement thus expanded the constituency of nationalist politics by incorporating the hitherto marginal social groups. The unrest among the *santal* sharecroppers, discontent among the rural police, no-tax campaign, boycott of law courts by the rural populace all were example of the popular politics, initiative and self mobilization at the grass roots level. Indeed, the autonomous *santal* mobilization ushered in a new era by identifying a new constituency, which gradually became formidable culminating in the open revolt of the *santals* under the leadership of Jitu Santal in the year 1932.³

(II)

The Non-Cooperation Movement confirmed the popularity of the Congress and Gandhi's rise as its undisputed leader. However, Gandhiji suspended the Non-Cooperation Movement in 1922 following the Chauri Chaura incident.⁴ By the end of 1923 the Maldah District Congress Committee was in a state of decline. On the issue of Council entry, the Maldah Congress workers sided with the 'No-Changers'. Debendra Nath Jha and Atul Kumar were perhaps the only prominent Congress leaders to support

Chittaranjan on the issue of Council entry.⁵ After the demise of C. R. Das in 1925, a bitter factional squabble in the Bengal Congress cropped up between Subhas Chandra Bose and Jatindra Mohan Sen Gupta and their respective followers. This factional rivalry had its imprint in the nationalist politics of Maldah as well.⁶ Although the District Congress was in a moribund condition during this time, nationalist ideas remained in circulation among various sections of the population. In November 1924, Lord Lytton, the Governor of Bengal came to Maldah where he defended the repressive policy of the government in very clear terms.⁷ On the day of his arrival a complete hartal was observed at Maldah. The Congress volunteers organized the shopkeepers, porters, boatmen and cartmen who also participated in the strike.⁸ The district administration took every possible step to foil the strike. The police were ordered to remove the *hartal* placards. The merchants and shopkeepers were asked not to join the strike. However, the effort of the administration failed. The town looked deserted on the day of arrival of Lord Lytton.⁹

The Barind region, on the other hand, was seething with discontent. The *santal* sharecroppers of Barind believed that the administration was backing the landlords and moneylenders who were responsible for their misery. Meanwhile, they had already been irked by a series of civil and criminal cases in which they had been faring badly.¹⁰ In March 1924, a crowd of about two thousand *santals* besieged a bevy of eight constables at Gajol *hat* until one of them fired from the musket and scared away the offenders.¹¹ The district administration apprehended that the situation became so worse that the *santals* might confront the administration any day unless some precautionary measure was taken. It was observed that the extension of section 49A of the Bengal Tenancy Act failed to produce any significant result as the moneylenders were reluctant to give loans to the *santals* on the security of their land. In such a situation, it was felt, the government would have to come forward to give loans to the *santals* to pacify their discontent.¹²

However, the situation did not improve much. The Swarajists led by Kashishwar Chakraborty of Dinajpur took the opportunity and began to organize the *santal* sharecroppers.¹³ Several meetings of *raiya*t were held in the Barind region. In March 1924, subscriptions were raised to meet the expenses of a visit of Kedar Nath Chakraborty, secretary of the Raiyat Association.¹⁴ A meeting of the *raiya*t was held at Jagdala in Bamongola p.s. on 18 March 1924. Its object was to stop payment of miscellaneous demands of the zamindars beyond the legal rent. This meeting was attended by about 1200 *santals*.¹⁵ Around November 1924, the *santals* were showing signs of restiveness. A meeting was convened on 26 November 1924 by one Sagiruddin Sarkar of Noapara in Bamongola p.s. The *santal* tenants of Jadunandan Choudhury were asked not to pay any *abwab* to the zamindar. This meeting was largely attended by the *santals* of Habibpur and Bamongola. Subscription of one *anna* per bigha was also raised to cope with the zamindar.¹⁶

The period also came to be marked by unrest and excitement among the students and youth political workers in Maldah. In 1927, the Maldah Youth Association was established as a response to the call of Subhas Chandra Bose. The leading figures of the Association were Atul Chandra Kumar, Jyotirmoy Sharma and Sudhir Kumar Raha. The Maldah Youth Association was affiliated to All Bengal Youth Association of Calcutta¹⁷. One of the patrons of the Association was Sarjoo Prasad Behani, president of the District Congress. The chief organ of the Maldah Youth Association was the 'Mahananda' – a bi-monthly journal published under the editorship of Sudhir Kumar Raha. The members of the Association made use of the Saraswati Library started by Dwarka Prasad Behani, son of Sarjoo Prasad Behani. This library had a good collection of published work considered objectionable by the government at that time. A gymnasium was organized at Mokdumpur ostensibly to give training in physical exercise and use of *lathis*.¹⁸

Thus it seems that the younger section of the nationalist activists in Maldah was eager to take part in a fresh spate of nationalist struggle. In late 1927 the 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 protest from all the political parties in India and resulted in a successful nationwide boycott. In response to the call of Indian National Congress, the people all over India observed *hartal* on the day of the arrival of the Commission in India.¹⁹

The boycott campaign was a great success in Maldah. Preparations were made well in advance to make the *hartal* of 3 February a success. A meeting was held on 30 January 1928 at the Gandhi Dharmasala to discuss on boycott of Simon Commission. Sarjoo Prasad Behani, president of the District Congress Committee, spoke on the occasion and tried to convince the audience the nature and aim of the Commission. He appealed to the students and young men to be untied in their struggle for freedom and make *hartal* a thorough success.²⁰ The *hartal* of 3 February in Maldah was a success from nationalists' point of view. Market, shops, hotels were closed. The students did not attend schools. Most of the pleaders did not attend the court as well.²¹ The agitation in Maldah, however, continued even after the strike. The District Congress organized a procession on 20 February 1928. The procession started from the Congress office and passed through the principal streets of the town. A public meeting was held on the same day which was presided over by Upendranath Moitra, a local pleader of repute. The meeting denounced the Simon Commission and resolved to concentrate immediately on the boycott of British textiles.²²

Thus, the years 1928 and 1929 witnessed significant development in every sphere of Bengali life. Besides youth and student, there arose the peasantry and industrial workers. Acute economic depression had started in India as repercussion of world economic depression (1929 -1933). There was everywhere a feeling of unrest. On 13

September 1929, Jatin Das sacrificed his life in his epic hunger strike of 64 days after being convicted in the Lahore Conspiracy Case. There was great reaction among the people of Bengal after the death of Jatin Das. The people of Maldah too were deeply moved by the sacrifice of Jatin Das. On receipt of the news of his death, Atul Kumar, the assistant secretary of the Maldah District Congress, circulated printed handbills in the town to commemorate and pay homage to the martyr.²³ A meeting was organized on 15 September 1929 by the District Congress in memory of Jatin Das. Priyanath Choudhury, the secretary of the District Congress and Atul Kumar spoke on the meeting eulogizing the noble sacrifice of Jatin Das for his country.²⁴ Such was the political atmosphere of Maldah on the eve of the Civil Disobedience Movement.

In such a situation, the Lahore Session of the Congress in December 1929 gave a new voice of militant spirit. A resolution was passed declaring *purna swaraj* to be the goal of the Congress and 26 January 1930 was fixed as the first "Independence Day". With its adoption began the preparation for another civil disobedience²⁵.

Observance of the Independence Day on 16 January 1930 was, in fact, a dress rehearsal of the Civil Disobedience Movement. From the beginning of the month of January 1930, the Maldah District Congress Committee started preparation for the celebration of the Day in a befitting manner.²⁶ With a view to involving the entire district it formed a central sub-committee for the general propagation of the Congress aims and methods as decided at the Lahore Congress of 1929.²⁷ At a meeting held on 13 January it was also resolved to establish branch Congress committees, volunteer corps and *khadi* board. Moreover, Ramesh Chandra Bagchi, a member of the Legislative Council from the district resigned. Surendranath Moitra, a member of Bengal Council from the Rajshahi district and Satyendranath Moitra, representative of the Rajshahi Division in the Central Legislative Assembly also resigned from their respective seats.²⁸

The people of Maldah observed the Independence Day with great enthusiasm and unprecedented excitement. In all parts of Maldah national flag was hoisted and the pledge of Independence was taken. A massive rally was organized by the District Congress at Englishbazar where Sarjoo Prasad Behani, president of the local Congress hoisted national flag. In the afternoon a meeting was held where the resolution of the Congress Working Committee was read to the people.²⁹

Mahatma Gandhi's Dandi March from 12 March to 6 April 1930 provided the signal for the countrywide Civil Disobedience. The reverberation of the movement was felt in Maldah as well. A meeting was held on 12 March at Araidanga. It was presided over by Asutosh Kumar who wished Gandhiji's success. Atul Kumar, assistant secretary of the District Congress, urged the youths to organize themselves for the cause of the nation. He appealed to the students to join the movement and to boycott the examination.³⁰

Within the district the Civil Disobedience took the forms of violation of orders, prohibiting meetings and demonstrations under section 144 and picketing of shops selling foreign cloth and excisable drugs and liquor. At Englishbazar almost 200 volunteers were recruited and from April to December 1930 they organized picketing before excise shops and shops selling foreign goods. Sometimes they organized Satyagraha before the local *thana* with prior notice to the police. Sometimes they assembled in an open place, read all prescribed books, and thus stirred the sentiment of the local people against the British Raj.³¹ To make the boycott of foreign goods a success, the Maldah Congress workers persuaded the local merchants not to sell them further. Some merchants signed a pledge to that effect.³² It was recorded in a government report that Congress organization was expanded and agitation in the rural areas of the district was 'greatly intensified'. The propaganda for non-payment of taxes to the Union Boards was 'widely spread' and several Union Board members have resigned.³³

To counter the nationalist upsurge, the district administration resorted to repression. Armed police pickets were posted at various places. A large number of Congress volunteers were arrested and convicted. Picketers at the A.C. Institution, Maldaha Zilla School and Siddheswari Institution of Chanchal had to endure severe police atrocities.³⁴ The police arrested two Congress leaders Ramesh Chandra Bagchi and Ramesh Chandra Ghosh on 11 July 1930.³⁵ Ramesh Chandra Bagchi had earlier resigned from his seat in Provincial Legislature. Atul Chandra Kumar, the youth leader of the district Congress, was arrested on the charge of selling contraband salt. He refused to be released on bail though offered.³⁶ Salt was however sold in various areas of Maldah and the people purchased it from the *satyagrahis* with great enthusiasm.³⁷ One of the significant features of the Civil Disobedience Movement in Maldah was the participation of a large number of students and youths in the movement. The police arrested twelve students in Maldah on 25 May 1930 who were selling contraband salt and read out the book 'Deshar Dak' publicly.³⁸ Ramraghab Lahiri and Sudhansu Lahiri, two youth leaders of the District Congress, led a procession about fifty young men and students carrying national flags. The District Magistrate ordered them to disperse. They defied his orders and courted arrest.³⁹

The first phase of the Civil Disobedience Movement (1930 – 1931) ended with its withdrawal by Gandhiji after his pact with Irwin signed on 5 March 1930. However, the movement continued in Maldah even after the Gandhi – Arwin Pact. The eleventh death anniversary of Bal Gangadhar Tilak was observed at the Gandhi Dharmasala. Pramatha Nath Choudhury, vice-president of the District Congress Committee, presided over the meeting. Krishna Gopal Sen, secretary of the Congress Committee, delivered a speech advising the audience to adopt the teachings of Tilak.⁴⁰

This broader national struggle in urban Maldah had a reciprocal bearing on the movement of *santal* sharecroppers in the Barind region. At that time, the Barind region

was seething with unrest. Rising prices, zamindari appropriation of land from *santal adhiars* in fear that the coming settlement would give long-standing *adhiars* a secure right to tenancy, widespread evictions, and rent and cess increases resulted in the outbreak of intense peasant struggle in Barind. In November 1930, rumour about the collapse of the government began to pour into Barind from the *santals* of adjacent Balurghat who were far better integrated with the Congress movement.⁴¹

In December 1930, the *santals* of Barind, under the leadership of Jitu Santal, started plundering crops from the fields. They disobeyed the orders issued by the district administration asking them to refrain from such activities. Situation became tense; several cases were started against Jitu and his men. About 100 *santals* were arrested from Doba of Habibpur p.s. and sent to jail. The situation was brought under control by deploying armed forces in Barind.⁴² The *santals* had noted with grief that while the rest of the district was receiving assistance for seeds and weeding, the *santals* in Barind were being pressed for arrear loans and taxes.

In February 1931, Jitu started collecting subscription from people of the locality to establish Gandhi Bank to give loans to the *santal* sharecroppers on payment of Rs.1 as application fee. A case was filed against Jitu, Gopal Santal of Kokabirni and Ragad Santal of Tulshidanga. They were, however, acquitted on trial for want of sufficient evidence.⁴³ In November 1931, a riot broke out between the agents of the Shah Zamindar of Porsha and the *santals* of Kulandanga of Bamongola p.s. Amin Shah, zamindar of Porsha, had purchased land in auction from Maldah Court. When his men came to take possession of the land, the *santals* attacked them with bows and arrows. A case was started against the *santals* and arrests were made.⁴⁴

With the re-launching of the Civil Disobedience Movement in early January 1932, Maldah once more became involved in it. The movement was renewed with great vigour, but evidently evoked less enthusiasm. The government retaliated with repressive measures; all front ranking leaders and thousands of volunteers were arrested. Four new ordinances were promulgated by the government. Numerous Congress workers were served with notice under new ordinances. In Maldah, Atul Chandra Kumar, Ramesh Chandra Bagchi, Krishnagopal Sen, Debendranath Jha, Dwarkadas Behani, Priyanath Choudhury and Baidyanath Sarkar were served with prohibitory orders.⁴⁵ In spite of this, picketing was going on and meetings were held in protest against the arrest of Mahatma Gandhi, Subhas Chandra Bose and Sardar Patel. A procession at Kaligram was organized against the arrest of Kasturba Gandhi.⁴⁶ By defying the orders of the district administration, the Congress volunteers observed the Independence Day and hoisted the National Flag on 26 January 1932.⁴⁷

During 1932, the techniques of the movement were almost the same and it is significant enough that women hailing from urban and rural areas rose to the occasion

and participated even in the *thana-gherao* movement to lodge protest against misbehaviour and atrocities of the local police. Surendrabala Roy of Harishchandrapur led a procession of women at Patnitola to hoist the national Flag at the Congress office on 26 January 1932. The police ordered them to disperse which was unheeded. Surendrabala Roy and two other women volunteers were arrested. Later she was convicted, sentenced to one year of imprisonment and sent to the Berhampore jail.⁴⁸ Amongst the other women activists names of Sudharani Misra of Shershahi, Tarubala Sen and Uma Roy of Englishbazar should be mentioned.

To suppress this nationalist upsurge, the district administration intensified its repressive measures. In February 1932, a Congress volunteer named Amulya Ratan Goswami was arrested at Kalipur *hat* while distributing Congress leaflets.⁴⁹ On 15 May, the police raided many houses in Maldah in search of prohibited books and leaflets.⁵⁰ When Gandhiji started his fast on 20 September 1932 in protest against the proposal for separate electorates for the depressed classes, numerous Congress workers followed suit. In Maldah hundreds of people prayed for Gandhiji's success. Debendranath Jha along with many other Congress volunteers fasted on 20 September 1932. In the afternoon, a large public meeting was held at Station *ghat* where the speakers discussed the Congress programmes.⁵¹

The success of the Civil Disobedience Movement in Maldah provoked another kind of movement threatening the multi-class platform so assiduously nurtured by the Congress leadership. This type of movement emerged among the *santal adhiars* of Barind region of Maldah led by Jitu Santal. It is to be noted that the Bengal Congress did not come out with concrete agrarian programmes. On occasions, its leaders thought about and devised plans, but no such attempt was made to formulate them as a coherent policy to include the agrarian masses in the Congress by way of forwarding their interests. At times, it did express an inclination to champion the tillers of the soil, but failed to evolve an agrarian strategy of mobilizing peasants.⁵² The Bengal Congress as well as its Maldah counterpart continued to be dominated by middle class people with rentier ties, mostly urban Hindus. For this reason, the Bengal Congress never sanctioned a no-rent agitation on fear of disturbing rural social equilibrium.

Nonetheless, when Jitu Santal raised his banner of rebellion in 1932 in Barind region, his first programme was the stoppage of payment of rent to the zamindars.⁵³ The District Congress leaders did make scattered attempt to mobilize the *santal* sharecroppers. The local officials also blamed 'outsiders'----the Congress leaders----for creating a disturbance in the tribal belt. In fact, the external manipulation thesis was dear to the heart of colonial officials. It was a stereotypical belief that *adivasi* villagers egged on by self-seeking politicians perform destructive acts in a fit of mindless fury. In this belief not only is the possibility of any independent initiative on the part of the peasant/tribal denied, even his actions are depoliticized and rendered free of any underlying rationale.

This view consistently refuses to acknowledge both the logic of peasant/tribal resistance and its impact on the process of colonial rule. It is not appropriate, however, to view the tribal protest as merely motivated by 'external factors'. It is true that the Congress leaders, whom the local officials referred to as 'outsiders', gave an impetus to the unrest but the tribals responded to the movement with their own beliefs, aspirations and desires. The complex interactions between the Congress and the popular agitation shaped the movement at the local level.

The revolt of Jitu was organized independently of mainstream politics. However, it is interesting to note that Jitu called himself 'Senapati Gandhi'.⁵⁴ The *santals* under Jitu derived legitimacy for their actions from the supposed orders of Gandhi. There was a popular tendency among the *santals* to look upon Gandhi as an alternative source of authority. Gandhi became the symbol of their hopes and aspirations. Everything that was unjust, cruel and oppressive was fought in Gandhi's name. In fact, in the whole phase of Jitu's movement, it was Gandhi, and not Congress, whose name was frequently invoked. It was Gandhi who emerged as a phenomenon and an aura was getting created around him. In *Gandhibaba*, Jitu saw a saviour of the poor people against the oppression of the *zamindar-mahajan*.⁵⁵ Lots of rumours centred around Gandhi and he was elevated to a higher moral pedestal and divinity. In actuality, Gandhi emerged as an alternative power vis-à-vis the British.

In *Gandhiraj*, as envisioned by Jitu, 'there would be no more zamindars or zamindar's rent... zamindars will be driven away'.⁵⁶ It was the Raj—the British Raj replaced by the *Gandhiraj*—that had fascinated the *santal* sharecroppers. They mixed up the streams of movement and conceived their own ideas and programmes. Movement continued in the name of Gandhi. He was the overlord, while Jitu would be the king and in his kingdom, a basketful of paddy would be the tax due to the king. From the local newspaper source, one interesting anecdote of Jitu's struggles comes to our knowledge. As and when an aeroplane crossed over the sky of Barind region, Jitu told his followers that the British power had staged a retreat and all the aeroplanes belonged to Gandhibaba.⁵⁷

In fact, rumours about the collapse of the government had become a dominant theme in Jitu's mass mobilization drive: 'the English Raj will not remain, the Desh will come'; 'The English Raj has gone'; 'Our Raj, our Desh is coming'; and so on.⁵⁸

He situation was thus explosive and it needs but a spark to kindle a conflagration. This was provided by the Muslim zamindar of Kotwali. In October 1932 the zamindar of Kotwali demanded two-thirds of the crops from the *santals*.⁵⁹ At Jitu's instruction the *santals* refused to obey. Jitu spelt out: 'Gandhibaba asked the *santals* not to pay rent to the zamindars. All the lands now belong to *santals*'. A clash between the zamindar's *paiks* and the *santals* took place at Habibpur on 25 October 1932. The police rushed to

the spot and controlled the situation. The *santals* found that the government was on the side of the zamindar. The anti-zamindar agitation now turned into an anti-colonial struggle.⁶⁰

In December 1932, a large number of *santals* marched to Pandua⁶¹ and occupied the ruins of the Adina⁶² mosque. Jitu declared that the Adina mosque was in reality the temple of Adinath or Siva which was later transformed into *masjid* by the Muslims⁶³. Jitu stated that they would perform a *puja* (Worship) of the Goddess Kali within the mosque. At the same time Jitu, who now called himself 'Senapati Gandhi', declared the end of the British Raj and proclaimed his own government : 'The English has gone. Our Raj, Our Desh is established. We have our own Government. 'Larai' (fight) has begun to drive English and Muslims out of *barind*⁶⁴.

The *santals* now resorted to violence. Houses of *zamindars* and *mahajans* were attacked. Police outpost was attacked at Habibpur. From Habibpur the outbreak spread in other areas of *barind* like fire⁶⁵. The long oppressed *santals* of *barind* at last found in it a chance of getting free from the *zamindars* and moneylenders and establishing themselves as a free people. A magical vision of the breakdown of English power was projected by Jitu : 'Our bows and arrows will carry three *kos* and the guns of the English will not fire'⁶⁶.

The district administration sent a large group of armed police force to Pandua to put down the revolt of *santals* of *barind*. The then District Magistrate ordered the *santals* to leave the Adina mosque, but they refused to obey. A pitched battle followed between Jitu's men and armed police force who opened fire after the *santals* refused to come out. Six *santals*, including Jitu himself, were shot dead, while a police was killed by a poisoned arrow and some others were wounded⁶⁷. The police entered the mosque and arrested the *santal* rebels. In this task the police were assisted by some *zamindars* and *mahajans* of Maldah. The prominent among them was Abul Hayat Khan Choudhury, the zamindar of Kotwali⁶⁸. The revolt of Jitu which aimed to establish a Santal Desh came to an end.

The Civil Disobedience Movement in Maldah, as our discussion shows, throws significant light on the different facets of nationalism. The study draws attention to the view that nationalism was not only marked by a series of urban and popular rural protests but was also a struggle where people, in a variety of positions, taking a wide range of steps, posed a severe challenge to the British authority and hegemony. The popular struggles, which converged with the Civil Disobedience movement, moved beyond the parameter of congress programme and threw up their own agendas. Focusing on Maldah, this study throws light on the popular perceptions and translations of nationalism, which were linked up with the desires and aspirations of the *adivasi* peasants. The Nationalist

ideology was given a particular flavour in the course of its assimilation by the *adivasi* peasants to meet their political aims. The popular translations of nationalism pitted the *adivasi* peasants not only against the colonial but also against their internal exploiters.

Thus, the phase of Civil Disobedience movement in Maldah, when the movement moved out of the confines of the educated sections to assume a mass character, becomes very significant in revisiting historiography on nationalism. This study questions the binary paradigm of elite/subaltern nationalism and charts out the complexities of the process. It was not the nationalist elites which had taken initiative to organize popular protests. In fact even preceding the Civil Disobedience movement, there was a strong tradition of popular protests in Maldah, which were independent of the nationalist organization. But, at the same time, one cannot overlook the widespread political ferment at the time of Civil Disobedience movement, which was writ with general defiance and contempt of authority that affected the movement. Popular protests intensified and radicalized as a result of its interaction with the civil disobedience. Thus this study does not accept some of the basic premises of subaltern historians like the duality of nationalism (i.e. elite and subaltern nationalism), and popular autonomy. Although it accepts the specificity of the popular level and popular translations of *swaraj*, it highlights the process of interaction of nationalism with popular struggles.

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4. On 5 February 1922, at Chauri Chaura in the Gorakhpur district of UP, a mob about 2000 villagers led by the Congress volunteers attacked a police station killing and burning the entire police staff consisting of two Sub Inspector of Police, eighteen Constables and one Chowkidar.
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6. *Gourddot*, 2 October 1925.
7. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 26 November 1924
8. *Ibid*, 27 November 1924.
9. *Ibid*.
10. *Gourdoot*, 27 January 1924.
11. GB, Home Poll. Conf. File No. 240 / 1924, report by R. Douglas, District Magistrate, Maldah, WBSA.
12. *Ibid*.
13. GB, Home Poll. Conf. File No. 622 (1-2) / 1926, enclosure I, Report of Maldah S P, 26 December 1926, WBSA. Kashishwar Chakraborty was a Dinajpur based *swarajist* pleader and very active among the Dinajpur *santals*.
14. *Maldaha Samachar*, 27 March 1924.
15. *Ibid*.
16. GB, Home Poll. 234 / 1924, Md. Karim, Additional District Magistrate, Maldah to R. Douglas, District magistrate, 8 December 1924, WBSA.
17. *Maldaha Samachar*, 7 August, 1927.
18. Lalbihari Majumdar, *Jibansmriti*, *Gourdoot*, 22 April 1953.
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27. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 17 January and 8 February 1930.
28. *Ibid.*, 29 January 1930.
29. *Ibid.*, 14 March 1930.
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31. *Bangabani*, 3 October 1930.
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33. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 27 June 1930.
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35. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 17 July 1930.
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38. Malay Sankar Bhattacharya, *Studies in Microhistory, op.cit.*, p.121.
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40. *Ibid.*
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42. Gb, Home Poll. Conf. File No. 403 (1-10) / 1930, WBSA.
43. *Gourdoot*, 21 May 1931.
44. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 27 November 1931.
45. *Bangabani*, 10 and 14 January 1932.
46. *Maldaha Samachar*, 29 January 1932.
47. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 29 January 1932.
48. Kamala Misra, *Ekti Pushpita Pranam Surendrabala Roy – ke*, in R. Ghosh ed., *Swadhinata Sangrame Maldaher Abadan*, Maldah, 1398 B.S.
49. *Bangabani*, 9 February 1932.
50. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 18 May 1932.
51. *Bangabani*, 25 September 1932.
52. Bidyut Chakraborty, Peasants and the Bengal Congress 1928-38, *South Asia Research*, 1985; 5; 29, downloaded from <http://ier.sagepub.com> on 11 may 2008.

53. GB, Home Poll. Conf. File No. 629 (1-3) / 1932, WBSA.
54. A. B. Chaudhury, *State Formation among Tribals : A Quest for Santal Identity*, Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, 1933, p.126.
55. Chittabrata Palit, *Six Lectures on Santhal Society*, Corpus Research Institute, Kolkata, 2009, p.98.
56. GB, Home Poll. Conf. File No. 629 (1-3) / 1932, WBSA
57. Lalbihari Majumdar, *Jibansmiriti*, *op.cit.*, *Gourdoot*, 9 January 1953.
58. (GB, Poll. Conf. F.N. 629/ (1-3)/ 1932. To the *santals*, the anti-foreign message had been very familiar indeed for a long time. As the songs of the rebellion of 1855 had it: 'Saheb rule is trouble full/ Shall we go or shall we stay?' On the continued use of rebellion theme in *Santal* songs and discussion, see Martin Orans, *The Santal: A Tribe in Search of a Great Tradition*. Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 1965, pp. 30-31.
59. A. Mitra (ed.), *Maldah: Census 1951*, New Delhi, 1954, p. Ixxiv; Diptimoy Sarkar, 'Maldaher Santal', in Gopal Laha (ed.), *Madhuparni, Maldaha Zilla Sankhya*, Balurghat, 1985, p. 149.
60. Ashim Kumar Sarkar, '*Nationalism, Communalism and Partition in Bengal: Maldah 1905-1953*', *op.cit.*, p. 86.
61. Pandua is situated at a distance of 17km. from Englishbazar on the road to Balurghat. It was for sometime the capital city of Bengal during the reign of Muslim Sultans. It was also known as Firuzabad at that time : see J.C. Sengupta ed., *Maldah District Gazetteer, op., cit.*, P. 261.
- 62 This celebrated mosque was built by Sultan Sikandar Shah between 1364 and 1374 AD : see *Ibid*.
63. Lalbihari Majumdar, *Jibansmiriti*, *op.cit.*, 10 September 1949.
64. *ibid*; Prabal Ray, '*Maldaher Santal Gana – asantosh*', in *Joar, Malda*, 1991, P. 10.
65. A.B. Chaudhuri, *State Formation Among Tribals*, *op. cit.*, P. 153; Lalbihari Majumdar, *Jibansmiriti*, 7 October 1949.
66. GOB, Poll. Conf. F.N. 629(1-3) / 1932.
67. The Statesman, 16 December 1932.
68. Lalbihari Majumdar, *Jibansmiriti*, *Gourdoot* 10 September 1949.