

WHICH OFFERED THE GREATEST THREAT TO THE RAJ – THE NON-COOPERATION MOVEMENT (1920 - 22) OR CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE (1930 - 34)? WHY? AN ARGUE BETWEEN NON-COOPERATION AND CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

Nadia Saleem¹, Kashif Mahmood Saqib², Hamid Mukhtar³

ABSTRACT

This paper shall argue that both non-cooperation and civil disobedience did not offer a threat to the Raj. In terms of tangible reasons that indicate that the Raj was not threatened by the movements we see first of all at a very broad level that the entire discourse of constitutional reform (as the input of the Raj to the discourse) and agitation politics (in the form of the two movements) was governed by the Raj. Secondly, the Raj was a national level adversary of both non-cooperation and civil disobedience, whereas the two movements were not able to carry their success from the local level to the national level. Finally, the two movements were a political tool and such were limited by those who were implementing and using them. Counter arguments that be presented tackle that two arguments that claim that the Raj was indeed threatened by the two movements and gave into their claims. The fact is that the Raj maintained diarchy till 1937, consequently keeping any semblance of federal level rule by local politicians under control. Furthermore, the British had realized that, if anything, their empire in India was fast becoming a liability. Thus it was no longer feasible for them to maintain empire in India and their moves toward constitutional reform were designed to gradually disconnect them from it.

Keywords: Non-Cooperation, Civil disobedience, Raj. Constitutional reforms, Agitation politics.

INTRODUCTION

Non-cooperation and civil disobedience movements have an important place in the history of sub-continent. They both offered a sound intimidation to the British Government in this region. They would need to have been movements that forced the Raj to change its attitude and strategies to the natives of the sub-continent. According to Oxford English

¹ Lahore College for Women University, Lahore

² Assistant Professor, School of Law, University of Okara

³ Assistant Professor, School of Law, University of Okara

Dictionary the term Raj is used to refer to the period of dominion i.e. British rule in the Indian subcontinent between 1858 and 1947. The principal actors at this level would refer to Government officials appointed by the Britain. Examples of such factors include the Viceroy, Ministers and the Provincial Governors. The term movement has developed a much specialized and well defined political meaning in modern age. According to Wikipedia “A political movement may be organized around a single issue or set of issues or around a set of shared concerns of a social group”. On the other hand, in this paper movement will refer simply to the non-cooperation and civil disobedience events of 1920 - 22 and 1930 - 34 respectively.

This paper presents actual causes that establish that both movements did not threaten the Raj. Likewise, this paper shall also present counter arguments to claims that the Raj's constitutional reforms indicated their giving in to the demands of the two.

In terms of actual causes that specify that the Raj was not threatened by the movements, we see first of all at a very wide-ranging level that the entire discussion of constitutional reform and agitation politics (in the form of the two movements) was governed by the Raj. Secondly, the Raj was a national level adversary of both non-cooperation and civil disobedience, whereas the two movements could not transmit their success from local to national level. Movements were a political tool and such were limited by those who were implementing and using them. The counter arguments claim that the Raj was indeed threatened by the two movements and gave into their claims. The fact is that the Raj maintained diarchy till 1937, consequently keeping any likeness of federal level rule by local politicians under control. Thus it was no longer practicable for them to maintain empire in India and their moves toward constitutional reform were designed to gradually disconnect them from it.

THE BRITISH RAJ: LEADING THE DIALOGUE OF CLASH

Now we see the detail, the first argument that proposes that the Raj was threatened by the two movements. Rothermund (1962, pp.507) argues that the communication between the Raj and national politics in India was a treatise of constitutional reforms and agitation politics. Implicit in his article on this subject is the fact that it was the Raj that initiated the discourse and governed it in a very real sense. The critical point to note is that agitation politics was at best a response to the Raj's constitutional reforms. So at a very essential level the Raj was controlling the very interaction that nationalist politics had with it. The cycle of the discourse actually begins with the Morley-Minto reforms of 1892 (Rothermund, 1962). According to Rothermund, this set of reforms was insufficient that sparked off small scale agitation. The next stage of the cycle was initiated by the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms and resulted in the non-cooperation movement of 1920 - 22. The non-cooperation movement was a reaction to this reform package. The reforms introduced diarchy but "unclear" the lines, implying that the provincial level was not as powerful as it should have been. The central legislature still held on to an official bloc that meant that any

law or change not completely agreeable to the Raj. Furthermore, the more essential matters of finance, foreign policy and defense were under the control of the federal government; only soft issues were left to the provincial and local governments.

Rothermund (1962, pp.512) the related stage of the cycle was initiated by the review of the Montford reforms and the declaration of final territory status. In this case the nationalist reaction came in the form of civil disobedience. Nehru Report was the initial reaction to the constitutional development. It indeed sketched the demands and reactions of the political parties of sub-continent. Rothermund (1962, pp.513). It was not given any "attention" by the British government this led to the civil disobedience - a reaction to the fact that the British would not consider the views of Indian politicians. Thus, it can be seen that in cases, non-cooperation and civil disobedience, it was the Raj that initiated the moves to which the two movements were a reaction. It was the Raj's actions that precipitated the two movements and further that the following agitation's tone was governed by the nature of those actions. In essence then, the discourse of constitutional reform and agitation politics was governed by the Raj.

Both the non-cooperation and civil disobedience movements had demands that were of national significance. The two movements were popular at local level. The Raj was a national level opposition to the groups initiating non-cooperation and civil disobedience - mainly Congress. If Congress was going to fight for more control of government they would have to grab the important functions still retained by the central government. With the introduction of Diarchy, the Raj gave token powers to local provincial level legislatures but retained most crucial functions of government (e.g. finance, taxation, foreign policy). Thus if Congress were going to win any control or wrest more power from the Raj (swaraj), it would have to tackle the Raj at the national level where it really counted. It needs to be demonstrated that both movements were locally successful but nationally ineffective. The case of non-cooperation is easy to see. Brown (1989, pp.274) discusses in some length the fact that local grievances were vented on the basis of the nationalist cause that Gandhi had initiated in the form of non-cooperation. In fact, as "The national movement became entangled with local-level politics".

The example of Assam tea can be observed, where labourers on tea plantations left work, complaining of low remunerations. There isn't a straight link between remunerations and swaraj.

According to Zavos the local level grievances slipped into the non-cooperation movement. Another very appropriate example is that of Chaura Chauri, where local grievances were expressed by burning down of the local police station and the bloodbath of twenty-two officials. This expression of localized non-cooperation in fact was the last straw as far as Gandhi was concerned and he went so far as to suspend non-cooperation. In the case of civil disobedience, the Congress politicians at a local level tailored it to their needs. Most congress politicians were unsure about what civil disobedience really meant

in terms of its national goals Brown (1989, pp.274). In fact, Congressmen weren't at all keen to boycott local institutions that they had worked so hard at getting themselves elected to. Provinces like Assam, Punjab, Bihar and the south were relatively unaffected by the civil disobedience campaign Brown (1989, pp.278). The most fruitful event in the civil disobedience movement was the salt satyagraha. However, this issue was effective in the province of Gujarat, where coastal communities could and did traditionally produce their own salt. Another point of interest is the fact that for the sake of Congress unity, the Provincial Congress councils were allowed discretion in terms of the implementation of civil disobedience again local level discretion, contributing to the lack of a more nationally directed movements Brown (1989, pp.276).

As an additional factor that compounded the situation of the movements was the disparate appeal to minority communities. This is appropriately demonstrated by the lack of genuine support of the movements from the Muslim community. In the case of non-cooperation, the Muslim community seemingly supported it. Though this was far from true - it was happenstance that the Khilafat movement's main struggle was scheduled with the non-cooperation movement. In the case of civil disobedience, the Muslim community lent no support to the movement (Minault, p.139). In part, it was a case of alienation - the symbols and language of civil disobedience (and non-cooperation) were decidedly Hindu in tone. But civil disobedience saw next to no Muslim support (Brown, p.279). It meant that a certain deficiency of support in such areas where Muslims were in majority, for the civil disobedience movement. The above analysis shows that the two movements did not have national level importance. The emphasis of the movements was weaker to the problems and issues of the local area. There was not any occasion when the movements threatened the Raj. For many times there was a situation of local level aspersion.

CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE AND NON-COOPERATION MOVEMENTS INFLUENCED INSIGHT

According to Zavos (pp.130) Gandhi formulated his philosophy of satyagraha to adopt more than political doctrines. It was a philosophy that strong religious connotations were geared toward the fulfillment of individual spiritual insight. The ultimate quest of a satyagrahi was to attain truth. In Gandhi's view, the only reason the Raj was able to maintain any impression of control over the Indian subcontinent was due to the flaccid reception of this control by the folks of the Indo-Pak subcontinent. If we accept this as truth, it was the duty of the Indian folks to free them from the authority of the British Raj. The philosophy itself was powerful. It could have presented the Raj a huge threat. But it wasn't. Perhaps this is a major weakness of the philosophy - that it was too vague to be completely manageable.

Looking concisely at non-cooperation, it is clear that Gandhi was not able to affirm control over the movement and it degenerated into the use of local interests and violence. In the case of civil disobedience, the intent of those implementing it was never the finer

points of the philosophy itself. Nehru in fact intended for Gandhi to come back to the Congress organization and try to unite it (Brown, pp.267). The immediate aim was not to bring about swaraj, it was to unite the Congress organization. The philosophy was used for the raise of local interest. According to Low (1966, pp.145) There was also the further point of acceptance of this philosophy. The fact is that most congress politicians were keen to use the political set up created by reforms that the Raj had instituted. It was not so easy for them to give up their political gains. For them to commit to an abstract philosophy that may or may not pay off in the end was a risk - as compared to some of its instantaneous political capital. In the name of satyagraha local level politicians promoted their political positions but where it constrained them or went against their vested interests, they would just as easily jettison the philosophy.

CONSTITUTIONAL REFORMS

Many would be that the very fact that the Raj was considering and implementing small scale reform was a direct result of nationalist agitation (agitation that included the non-cooperation and civil disobedience movements). It is certainly true that there did seem to be some recognition on the part of the Raj that in the long run reform was required. But was it necessarily the result of nationalist politics, especially its two most clear manifestations in the form of non-cooperation and civil disobedience the first response to this claim lies in the fact that the Raj maintained principle control of the most important aspects of India's domestic and foreign policy, despite their reform. The primary manifestation of this reform lay in the concept of Diarchy, which officially lasted till 1937. Diarchy gave only a token level of power to the provinces - most critically the function of finance. According to Ali (2002, pp. 26-27) More importantly this played very neatly into the Indian setting. India's most "natural" state is one of fragmentation or at best a loose federation. The Indian subcontinent has however fluctuated between empire and a collection of smaller states. The only times it comes together in the form of an empire is under threat of force - like it was under the Mughals and the British. Toward the end of the Mughal Empire's existence, there was a decline in the level of cohesion - it was a more regionally dominated, with a weak centre. The British Raj was keen to keep the centre strong or at least seemingly so. By giving the provinces a sense of autonomy they would ensure that the empire remained intact. By playing into the regional affinity and giving the regional level a false sense of autonomy, the Raj was protecting itself.

There was also an understanding of the expense of empire. The fact was that the India, along with other parts of the British colonial empire, was becoming a liability. According to Tomlinson (1980, pp.55-56) the war years had prompted the British to encourage some degree of local industry in India, in order to aid the war effort (along with the raising of troops for war). This meant that India had to be given some degree of independence in its financial and industrial decision making. But this had a side effect, in that the use of Indian troops for foreign expeditions was to be paid for by the British

taxpayer. Whereas for a period of time India had proved to be a rather profitable investment, it was now becoming costly to preserve. So it was only a logical step for the British to gradually start letting go of the Indian colony. Therefore, the running of constitutional reform was less reforming than it seemed and also more a significance of external factors affecting the entire British empire.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion it can be said that both non-cooperation and civil disobedience did not offer a sound threat to the Raj. At a very broad level, it was the Raj that administrated the very discourse of politics and set the manner for the demands that the nationalists could twist. Moreover, the two movements were weakened in their nationalist level influence because of their agitation at the local level for local requirements. Furthermore, it was established that the governing philosophy behind each movement was very vague and was used as an instrument for political gain while not directly against the Raj. To conclude, the argument suggesting that the Raj was giving in to the anxieties of nationalist agitation by restructuring was counter-argued on two counts: a) the reforms were weakened and b) the British were looking to lower their level of association in their Indian control.

The movements did not present a direct hazard to the Raj. They did indicate the political prospective of the Indian inhabits but they were weak on numerous counts as pointed out above. Implementing a national level political strategy in a country the size of India and with the strong regional propensities of India was a very difficult responsibility. Undertaking non-cooperation and civil disobedience, Gandhi and indeed the Congress had set itself a very difficult task, something which they weren't exactly able to achieve.

REFERENCES

- Ali, I. (2002). Past and Present: The Making of the State in Pakistan', in Imran Ali, S. Mumtaz and J.L. Racine (eds), *Pakistan: The Contours of State and Society*. Karachi: Oxford University Press.
- Brown, J. M. (1990). *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*. New Haven: Yale University Press,
- Brown, J. M. (1994). *Modern India: The Origins of an Asian Democracy*", 2nd Edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Gopal, K. (1966). The Development of the Indian National Congress as a Mass Organization, 1918 – 1923". *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 25(3), 413-430 Retrieve from <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2051999>
- Low, D. A. (ed.) (1977). *Congress and the Raj: Facets of the Indian Struggle 1917–47*. London, Heinemann
- Low, D. A. (1966). The Government of India and the First Non-Cooperation Movement 1920–1922. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 25(02), 241-259 Retrieve from <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2051326>
- Minault, G. (1982). *The Khilafat movement - Religious Symbolism and Political Mobilisation in India*. New Delhi, Columbia University Press
- Oxford English Dictionary, online edition Retrieve from <http://www.oed.com/>
- Ravinder, K. (1969). Class, Community or Nation? Gandhi's Quest for Popular Consensus in India. *Modern Asian Studies*, 3(04), 357-376 Retrieve from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X00002791>
- Roberts, W. H. (1923). A Review of the Gandhi Movement in India. *Political Science Quarterly*, 38(2) pp. 227-248 Retrieve from <http://www.psqonline.org/article.cfm?IDArticle=3427>
- Rothermund, D. (1962). Constitutional Reforms Versus National Agitation in India, 1900 – 1950. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 21(4), 505-522
- Retrieve from <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2050880>
- Tomlinson, B. R. (1980). *The Political Economy of the Raj, 1914-1947*. Retrieve from <http://www.historytoday.com/christopher-baker/political-economy-raj-1914-1947>
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_movement
- Zavos, J. (2000). *The Emergence of Hindu Nationalism in India*. New Delhi, Oxford University Press