



Khilafat and The Non-Cooperation Movements in Nadia District (1919–1922): A Regional Study of Gandhian Mass Mobilization

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Abstract

This study examines the nature, spread, and impact of the Khilafat and Non-Cooperation Movement in Nadia District between 1919 and 1931. While national historiography has often privileged metropolitan centers such as Calcutta, the political awakening of semi-urban and rural districts like Nadia might have played an equally significant role in sustaining nationalist momentum. The present article attempts to analyze how Gandhian strategies of non-violent resistance were possibly adapted within local socio-economic conditions. It investigates patterns of participation, leadership structures, student and peasant involvement, and the response of colonial authorities. By situating Nadia within the broader framework of Indian nationalism, this research argues that the district could have functioned as a crucial microcosm of nationalist transformation in Bengal. The study relies on regional historical interpretations, nationalist narratives, and secondary scholarly reconstructions to evaluate the dynamics of political mobilization in the district.

Keywords: Nadia, Colonial Bengal, Gandhian Nationalism, Khilafat, Non-Cooperation, Mass Mobilization, Women, Student Movement

Objectives of the Study:

1. Examine the emergence and development of nationalist consciousness in Nadia District between 1919 and 1922.
2. Analyze the impact of the Khilafat Movement and Non-Cooperation Movement on local political structures.
3. Evaluate the extent of participation during the Non-Cooperation Movement in the district.
4. Investigate the socio-economic groups that might have been involved in these movements.
5. Assess the response of colonial administrative authorities in Nadia.
6. Determine whether Gandhian ideology was adapted local circumstances.

Research Findings:

Based on the available historical interpretations, the study may suggest the following findings:

1. Gradual Political Awakening: Nadia District might have experienced a steady expansion of nationalist consciousness beginning with Khilafat Movement, Non-Cooperation Movement.
2. Organizational Development: Local Congress committees could have developed more structured forms of mobilization between 1919 and 1930.
3. Broadening Social Base: Participation may have extended beyond elites to include students, women, and segments of the peasantry.
4. Impact of Repression: Colonial suppression might have temporarily weakened movements but potentially strengthened long-term nationalist resolve.
5. Regional Adaptation of Gandhian Strategy: Gandhian principles of non-violence and civil resistance may have been selectively adapted to Nadia's agrarian and semi-urban context.
6. Symbolic Integration with National Politics: Even when local acts were limited in scale, Nadia's alignment with national campaigns might have reinforced its identification with the broader independence struggle.

Introduction:

Nadia district, located in the eastern part of West Bengal. The district headquarter is Krishnanagar. Other important towns include Nabadwip, Ranaghat, Kalyani, and Santipur. Nadia shares an international border with Bangladesh to the east. It is bordered by Murshidabad district to the north, North 24 Parganas to the south, and Hooghly and Purba Bardhaman to the west. Major rivers such as the Bhagirathi, Jalangi, and Churni flow through the district, contributing to its fertile agricultural land. Nadia has long been known as a center of education and religious learning. Nabadwip was historically famous for Sanskrit scholarship and Nyaya philosophy. The district is home to the University of Kalyani, an important institution of higher education. Nadia is also widely recognized as the birthplace of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, making it a major center of Vaishnav religious culture. The district's economy is primarily agriculture-based. Major crops include rice, jute, wheat, and vegetables. Santipur and Phulia are well known for their traditional handloom sarees. Kalyani has developed as an industrial and educational hub.

Nadia played a significant and multifaceted role in the Indian freedom movement. During the struggle against British colonial rule, the district emerged as an important site of nationalist mobilization, revolutionary activities, and mass participation. The political awakening in Nadia was influenced by the broader national movements initiated by the Indian National Congress and inspired by leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi, Subhas Chandra Bose, and Bal Gangadhar Tilak. The impact of the 1905 Partition of Bengal deeply affected Nadia, as it did many districts of Bengal. The Swadeshi Movement, which followed the partition, encouraged boycott of British goods and promotion of indigenous industries. Students, teachers, and local intellectuals of Nadia actively participated in these movements, organizing meetings, protests, and awareness campaigns.

Nadia was also influenced by revolutionary nationalist organizations such as Anushilan Samiti and Jugantar, which had networks extending into various parts of Bengal. Secret revolutionary activities, distribution of nationalist literature, and recruitment of youth were reported from different areas of the district. Towns like Krishnanagar, Ranaghat, and Santipur became centers of political discussion and activism.

During the Non-Cooperation Movement (1920–22), Civil Disobedience Movement (1930–34), and the Quit India Movement (1942), Nadia witnessed widespread public participation.

Local leaders mobilized peasants, workers, and students to join protests, boycott government institutions, and defy colonial laws. Many activists from the district faced imprisonment and repression by British authorities.

The district also experienced the socio-economic consequences of colonial policies, including agrarian distress and communal tensions, particularly in the 1940s. The period leading up to the Partition of India in 1947 was especially significant for Nadia, as the district was directly affected by border demarcation and population displacement.

The era of colonialism in India began with the Battle of Plassey in 1757 between Siraj-ud-Daula and Robert Clive. Therefore, the name Nadia has been important in Indian history from the very beginning. Nadia was an ideal place for agriculture. Therefore, the British chose Nadia and its surrounding areas for indigo cultivation. Later, the Indigo Rebellion of 1859 took place over indigo cultivation. This rebellion was led by Nadia district. Biswanath Sardar, Meghai Sardar, Digambar Biswas, Bishnucharan Biswas were the leaders. Titumir led the Faraji movement in Nadia. Then the influence of various political events flowed over Nadia. As a result of the establishment of the National Congress, an organization was formed in Nadia. Lalmohan Ghosh and Manmohan Ghosh were two important leaders. The partition of Bengal in 1905 had a huge impact on Nadia. Like the whole of Bengal, strong protests started in Nadia, and Dwijendralal Roy, the son of Nadia, protested with his songs. The spontaneous participation of all people, regardless of religion, caste, or ethnicity, in strikes, picketing, and processions was worth seeing throughout the district. In the history of colonial India, whenever any important political event took place, it was seen that Nadia, as one of the places in that time of Bengal, also participated spontaneously.

The emergence of Gandhiji in Indian politics marked the beginning of a new era in Indian history. He was a worshiper of non-violence; Satyagraha was his ideal. He was a moderate leader. The successful movement of Champaran, Kheda, Ahmedabad started his victory journey in Indian politics. He started his first hunger strike during the movement of Ahmedabad. From the time of Gandhiji's emergence into Indian politics in 1916, Indian politics for the next three decades was centered around Gandhiji. The Khilafat Movement, the Non-Cooperation Movement, the Civil Disobedience Movement, all these movements took place under the leadership of Gandhiji. These movements were spread all over India, and Nadia district was also affected. Although not directly connected, Nadia was indirectly connected with all the major movements in India.

Khilafat Movement (1919- 1921):

When the Allied Powers won the First World War and deposed the Turkish Khalifa. Muslims all over India erupted in anger against the British. Prominent Muslim leaders in India formed the 'Khilafat Committee' to launch a Khilafat movement against the British. Like Muslims all over India and Bengal, Muslims in Nadia district also became angry against the British over the issue of Khilafat. In 1919, the 'Khilafat Committee' and the 'Anti-Peace Conference Committee' were formed in Nadia district under the leadership of Azizul Haque of Krishnanagar and Maulvi Shamsuddin and Afsaruddin Ahmed of Kushtia. In the same year, the 'Ittefaq-E-Islamia Committee' was formed for the same purpose. The work of these organizations was to continue the Khilafat movement against the British in Nadia district. In 1919, the 'Khilafat Committee' and the 'Anti-Peace Conference Committee' were formed in Nadia district under the leadership of Azizul Haque of Krishnanagar and Maulvi Shamsuddin and Afsaruddin Ahmed of Kushtia. In the same year, the 'Ittefaq-e-Islamia

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Munshi Sheikh Jamiruddin Vidyabinod and Maulana Abubakar Siddique Sahib inspired the people of Nadia district to nationalism through their logical speeches. Famous nationalist leaders of Kushtia of undivided Nadia, Maulvi Shamsuddin, Afsaruddin Ahmed, Ismail Hossain Siraji and others, held meetings and associations at various places within the district and inspired the Muslim youth against the British and in favor of Turkey. In all these meetings and associations, special emphasis was placed on Hindu-Muslim relations and communal harmony. On 13th and 14th February 1919, at the Khilafat conference in Nadia district, Pir Hazrat Abu Bakr Siddique, through his speech, emphasized on Hindu-Muslim harmony, saying, "Hindu Muslims are two children of the same mother. Therefore, some interferred in each other's religion. shouldn't be done." Under the sensational speeches and capable leadership of the nationalist Khilafat leaders, countless people in the undivided Nadia regions of Kushtia, Chuadanga, Meherpur etc. became inspired with national consciousness. The Khilafat movement in Nadia district gradually turned into a powerful mass movement. People from all walks of life in these areas started forming public opinion against the British in groups in the villages.

On August 1, 1920, a strike was observed as part of the Third Khilafat Day program at the initiative of the leaders of the Khilafat movement in Nadia district. A public meeting was held in Kushtia city on 1 August 1920 under the leadership of Maulvi Shamsuddin Ahmed to celebrate the Third Khilafat Day. In this meeting, in the presence of about 200 Muslims, a resolution was passed expressing full support for the program directed by the Central Khilafat Committee to re-establish the peace treaty with Turkey and adopt a policy of non-cooperation against the British. In protest against the breach of the promise of the Allies to the Muslims, Maulvi Shamsuddin Ahmed also threatened to resign from the post of member of the District Board of Nadia district. A public meeting of 1000 Muslims took place in Chuadanga. All their prayers were for the well-being of the Sultan. Ghulam Rabbani Sardar, Bhikku Mollah, Chaber Ali Sardar, Hazari Lashkar etc. were among the leaders of this public meeting. As a symbol of Hindu-Muslim friendship and unity in the Khilafat Movement, the Central Khilafat Committee of India issued a receipt in the form of a coin, similar to the one-rupee government note, for the people of India. Each copy cost two annas. These were sold to raise money for the movement's fund. The workers of Nadia district collected money by selling the receipts in the district. On 20 February 1921, a Khilafat meeting was held at the initiative of the students of Krishnanagar to inspire nationalism among the residents of Krishnanagar city and its surrounding areas. On 22 February, at a public meeting held in Saheb nagar village under Mirpur police station, Maulvi Shamsuddin Ahmed, the Secretary of the Nadia Khilafat Committee, proposed the establishment of a national school and junior madrasa to educate the people of Nadia in national education. Maulvi Shamsuddin Ahmed's efforts were not limited to Nadia district alone, he tried to organize the Khilafat movement throughout Bengal. For this purpose, he used to hold public meetings in different districts from Kolkata to Dhaka. It was mainly due to his initiative and inspiration that the ideals of Khilafat and nationalism were well established among the various working people in Kolkata.

Non - Cooperation Movement (1921-1923):

In 1920, the National Congress, under the leadership of Gandhiji, protested against various injustices against the British, including the Jallianwalabag massacre and the Allied Powers' unfair treatment of the Turkish Khalifa. In that year, at the annual session of the Congress held in Nagpur, after much tension, a unanimous decision was finally taken to launch a non-cooperation movement. It is said that to achieve Swaraj, the people of India must adopt a policy of non-violence and non-cooperation that will begin with the renunciation of the British-given titles and the three-point boycott of the legislature, courts, and government educational institutions, and will end with a tax-free movement.

Responding to Gandhiji's call, many students, youth, teachers, and lawyers in Nadia district also left government educational institutions and courts and held meetings and processions to build a movement under the leadership of the Congress. The Hindu-Muslim unity that was seen in Nadia district during the Khilafat Movement was also present during the Non-Cooperation Movement. During this time, the leaders of the movement in Nadia district were Haripada Chatterjee, Bijoy Lal Chatterjee, Hemant Kumar Sarkar, Maulvi Shamsuddin Ahmed, Maulvi Afsaruddin Ahmed, Maulvi Azizul Haque, and others. After the representatives of Nadia district, Shri Mihirlal Chattopadhyay and Shri Gyan Sanyal, returned from the Nagpur session of the Congress and spread the message of non-cooperation movement in Nadia district, a great stir was created among the students of Krishnanagar College. The college students, led by a young college student, Bijoylal Chattopadhyay, gathered in the field behind the college and decided to support the non-cooperation movement. The students came out of the college in groups and took out a huge procession, singing patriotic songs by Dwijendralal Roy, the son of Nadia. Public meetings and processions were organized in Kushtia, Meherpur, Chuadanga, Ranaghat, Shantipur, Nabadwip, etc. of the undivided Nadia district. In addition, nationalists in remote rural areas picketed shops selling foreign goods and promoted indigenous goods such as charka and khaddar. During the Non-Cooperation Movement, tax payers under various municipal areas of Nadia district formed the 'Rate Payers Association' under the leadership of prominent leaders and municipal commissioners of Nadia district, Ratikant Biswas, Ashutosh Biswas, Kanailal Chatterjee, Akhil Chandra Sarkar and others. They started a movement by refusing to pay the increased tax rate fixed by the municipality of their own area. For this purpose, they held a meeting in the Meherpur municipality on 14 February 1921. As a result, not only the tax payers of that municipality refused to pay the tax but the employees of that municipality also went on strike, as a result of which all the activities of the municipality came to a standstill. In this way, the non-cooperation movement continued in Nadia district.

The activists dedicated themselves to constructive work and established national schools in various cities of Nadia. The National School was established in 1921 at 'Garbini Cottage' in Krishnanagar under the leadership of prominent leaders of Krishnanagar and Nadia, including Jyoti Prasad Chatterjee, Bijaylal Chatterjee, Yogendranath Sarkar, Tarakdas Banerjee and others. Initially, the National School was started with only 50 nationalist students. The students of this school were taught Sanskrit, Hindi, Bengali, weaving, thread spinning, Indian history, economics, mathematics, English, etc. People like Ashutosh Biswas, Ratikant Biswas, Prasannakumar Sanyal, Akshay Kumar Mallick and others volunteered to teach in these national schools without any salary. On April 6, 1921, the

National Congress ordered a strike as a symbol of the Satyagraha movement against the British Rowlatt Act. Therefore, on that day, public meetings were held at various places in the district under the initiative of the Nadia District Congress Committee. Moreover, initiatives to establish national schools in various places in Nadia district continued. On 6 April 1921, a meeting was held in the evening at the Town Hall in Krishnanagar under the leadership of Taravilas Sen. Indubhushan Chakraborty, Maulvi Azizul Haque, Biharilal Sarkar, Sudhir Ranjan Lahiri and other eminent personalities spoke at this meeting. On April 6, a strike was observed in Krishnanagar city. The market was closed. Traffic on the roads was stopped, even the coolies at the railway station observed a strike. Many nationalist lawyers boycotted the courts.

The agitators formed a 'Swaraj Fund' to collect money for the Non-Cooperation Movement. Many students of Nabadwip High English School, led by their leader Kumud Bagchi, begged money for the 'Nabadwip Swaraj Fund' from the pilgrims coming to Nabadwip. A group of non-cooperation activists from Krishnanagar, led by Sudhir Ranjan Lahiri, went to Nabadwip to collect money, where they collected about 20 rupees from the pilgrims. On 25 April 1921, at a public meeting held at Rajhat Maidan in Kushtia, Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das inspired the four thousand people present through his speech. Reminding them of the high price of cloth in the market, he told the people of Nadia to spin yarn on charkhas and weave cloth with their own hands to meet their needs. And finally, explaining the ideals of Swaraj, he appealed to the people present to donate money to the 'Tilak Swaraj Fund'. During the Non-Cooperation Movement, many voluntary organizations and various revolutionary organizations formed labor organizations in different parts of Nadia district. With the aim of establishing solidarity of the workers and ensuring their overall welfare, 'Ranaghat Railway Workers Branch Association' was formed in 1923. Among all these organizations and associations, the characteristics of labor movement rather than political character were more, but the organizations' contribution to the freedom struggle against the British was also not less.

Women's participation:

The participation of women in the country's freedom movement, along with men, was particularly notable. Although they were few in number as leaders, the women of Nadia were not far behind. In this context, the role of the famous nationalist leader Swarna Lata Devi during the Non-Cooperation Movement was notable. On May 13, at a public meeting in Majdia, organized by Muslim women there under the chairmanship of Chandannagar nationalist leader Kamakhya Prasad Nag, renowned nationalist leader Swarna Lata Devi particularly encouraged women to play a role in the country's independence. Only three Hindu women were present at this meeting. All the rest were Muslim women. It was the first 'Muslim Women's Conference' in Bengal in the wake of the Non-Cooperation Movement. In another Congress meeting held in Majdia that same month, Hindu and Muslim women from various villages in the area attended and expressed their desire to play an active role in the national movement, which particularly encouraged the Congress leaders in Nadia.

Student Movement:

In the Non-Cooperation Movement in Nadia district, the role of young students, along with the big leaders, was also noteworthy. Particularly notable in this regard was Bijoylal

Chattopadhyay, a student of B. A. class of Krishnanagar College, whom we later see as one of the leaders of Nadia. Under his leadership, numerous students came out of the college and joined the movement. As soon as the news of the policy and program of the Non-Cooperation Movement reached Nadia district, students from schools and colleges in various parts of the city came out and joined the Non-Cooperation Movement. Respecting Gandhiji's policy of boycotting foreign goods, students in Nadia district abandoned their education in British-run schools. As a result, the number of students in the schools began to decline drastically. The number of students in government and government-funded high schools at all levels in Nadia decreased mainly in two ways - on the one hand, nationalist students studying in the third-floor building left the school, and on the other hand, the rate of new student admissions also decreased. At different times of the year, such as March to June, July, the number of students dropping out of schools was always higher than the number of new students admitted. At that time, this trend was more dynamic in Nadia district than in other districts of the state. For example, when there was a total shortage of 84 students in various districts like Murshidabad, Khulna etc. and the six districts of the Presidency Division together, there was a shortage of 33 students in Nadia district alone. Naturally, the impact of the Non-Cooperation Movement on the student community in Nadia district was relatively greater than in other districts of the Presidency Division. In August 1921, the number of students dropping out of schools increased from 33 to 82. All this happened as a result of the impact of the Non-Cooperation Movement of the student community in Nadia district.

The seeds of revolution sown in Nadia district by Shaheed Jatindranath Mukherjee, the revolutionary hero of Bengal during the Swadeshi era, later turned into a great heroism with the help of the youth. The secret societies that were formed in Nadia district during the Khilafat Non-Cooperation Movement were led by the revolutionary Anantahari Mitra. The external character of these secret societies was public service, but the underlying characteristic was to organize public opinion to cause a mass uprising for the purpose of achieving Swaraj or independence, to attract the youth to the ideals of revolution, and to terrorize the British administration.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the role of Nadia district in the Khilafat and Non-Cooperation Movements was significant in reflecting the wider spirit of India's struggle for independence. The people of Nadia actively participated in political meetings, protests, and the boycott of British institutions, which strengthened the national movement at the local level. Hindu-Muslim unity, inspired by the Khilafat issue and the call of national leaders, created a strong foundation for mass participation in the district. Students, teachers, and common people contributed to spreading nationalist ideas and resisting colonial authority. Therefore, the participation of Nadia district in these movements not only demonstrated local political awakening but also played an important role in supporting the broader Indian freedom struggle. Finally, it can be said that during the colonial rule, Nadia district was always a working district of Bengal and India.

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