



Non-Violent Non-cooperation Movement in Midnapore: Context Panskura Police Station.

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ABSTRACT: The year 1920 is an important chapter in the history of India's freedom struggle. The direct struggle started from this year after the end of the application cycle. Until then the struggle was confined to the urban intellectuals, the educated middle class. But now the intensity of the struggle spread to the common people. In 1920, the Non-violent Non-Cooperation Movement led by Gandhi gave a much brighter image to the Congress. This was the beginning of the first all-India mass movement. Before this, no other political movement could deeply touch the people of all walks of life and all regions of India. Not only this, the Non-cooperation Movement also set a great precedent as a precedent for Hindu-Muslim united struggle. In 1920-20, the Non-Cooperation Movement also took a large form in Bengal. This movement was active in Midnapore District of Bengal. In this movement, the National Congress organization started to get stronger in various police station of Midnapore district. My topic in this article is how active was the non-violent non-cooperation movement in Panskura police station of Midnapore district.

KEYWORDS: Non-Cooperation, Non-Violent, Satyagraha, Untouchability, Harijans, Charka, Khaddar, Maffassal Cities.

I. INTRODUCTION:

Due to the First World War (1914-18) the socio-economic condition of people of all communities in India deteriorated. The price of goods in the market increased. In 1914 the price index at the all-India level was 787, in 1920 it rose to 281 [1]. During the war, food production was reduced. Because, twice in 1918-19 and 1920-21, food grain production was disrupted naturally. As a result, the financial condition of rural areas became deplorable [2]. Trade and industry declined due to disruption of agricultural production. Strikes started demanding higher wages in Kolkata's jute mills, Jamshedpur's steel factories or Assam's tea

plantations [3]. Gandhi's arrival was welcomed by many in this atmosphere of moral and external anarchy in India. Gandhi was then known as a successful fighter against the British in South Africa. At that moment Gandhi's fame spread across India. He was fully aware of the pluralistic nature of Indian society and was careful that no community or class was left out [4].

II. BACKGROUND:

Gandhi spent a long time in South Africa before coming to India in 1915. He developed his political thoughts, meditative ideas, and uncompromising struggle against injustice in South Africa. When Gandhi first came to India, he was not a well-known figure. He was not a very familiar face to the political leaders or thinkers of India, except for a few notables like Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Rabindranath Tagore. So he went out to India to establish himself in his homeland and to discard the *sahebi* left the dress and wore hand woven cotton clothes. He chose the third class of the railway for the journey [5]. He then reached out to more common people through the Satyagraha movement. He used to say that Satyagraha is the power of the soul or the power of love and the source of that power is truth and non-violence. He did not believe in subjugating the adversary to protect the dignity of truth. He believed that it was through this behavior that the conscience of the ill-wisher could be awakened [6]. Through these three *satyagraha* movements, - Champaran, Kheda and Ahmedabad, he became known at the village level all over India [7]. Three other issues touched Gandhi's heart – Hindu-Muslim unity, abolition of untouchability and elevating the status of women. He referred to the so-called untouchables as Harijans. About the India of his dream, Gandhi once wrote, "I shall endeavor to build an India which even the poorest man will consider as his own. The application of him in the work of building up will not fail. There will be no high or low caste in India. All communities will live in full



unity. Women will enjoy equal rights to men. ... That is the India of my dreams" [8].

In 1919, the Government of India enacted a repressive law called the 'Rowlett Act'. This Act gave the right to imprison any person without trial and without being charged in a court of law. The Act was introduced despite the opposition of every Indian member of the Central Legislative Council (CLC). Three members of the CLC resigned their membership in protest. They are - Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Madanmohan Malbiya and Mazhar-ul-Haq [9]. Gandhi strongly opposed this act and formed an organization called 'Satyagraha Sabha' in 1919. Its members were subject to arrest and imprisonment for defying the Rowlett Act. As a result, there was widespread resistance against the Rowlett Act throughout India. The sky resounded with the sound of Hindu-Muslim alliance [10].

From mid-April 1919, Gandhi's *satyagraha* began to decline. Pressure mounted on Gandhi to call off the movement. The *satyagraha* failed as a political movement. Because, the repeal of the Rowlett Act has not been completed. In fact the whole of India was not affected by the movement. The movement was fruitful in the cities while the countryside waited. So this movement could not influence the people in the rural area [11]. It can be said again, the local leaders did not have the power to control people in the face of public outrage at that time. So this kind of face-to-face leadership (Gandhi's Satyagraha) is not enough to organize a movement at the national level in a large country like India. At this time Gandhi had no control over the Congress. From the failure of the 'Anti-Rowlett Act Movement', Gandhi realized the need for a political organization like the Congress. So his next step was to take the Congress leadership [12].

The program of this movement had two aspects - negative and positive. Negative aspects included rejection of government titles, resignation of government nominated members from local self-government bodies, boycott of government functions, boycott of government-run schools and colleges, boycott of legislative elections, boycott of foreign goods etc [13]. Among the positive programs were establishment of indigenous educational institutions, formation of arbitration boards, elimination of untouchability, prohibition of drugs, establishment of Hindu Muslim unity, wide circulation of khaddar etc. Gandhi reminded the countrymen that 'the movement will be

conducted in the path of absolute non-violence and truth' [14].

III. SPREAD OF MOVEMENT:

The status of the first all-India anti-imperialist movement can be seen in the Non-Cooperation Movement. In January 1921, under the leadership of Lala Lajpat Roy of Punjab, the student society of Lahore started a class boycott movement. Here the Akalis led the co-operation movement. On February 20, 1921, 100 Akali Mahants were killed by guards at Nankala. The various feudal states of Rajasthan started strong peasant movements during this time. In 1921-22, the movement of the Bhil community under the leadership of Motilal Tejawat became widespread [15]. The scale of this movement was also widespread in the United Provinces. By July 1921, 137 national educational institutions were established here. Notable among these was Kashi Vidyapeeth.

Enthusiasm rose between the Muslim traders in the Bombay Presidency and the farmers of the Hindu provinces. 2 leaders emerged from the Hindu minority named Jayaram Das and Swami Govindananda. The non-cooperation movement reached its peak in the state of Bihar. "The leaders of Bihar understood the true meaning of non-violence", Gandhi remarked in Young India on 2 March 1921. By June 1922, 41 high schools and 600 primary and middle schools had been established. Besides, special initiatives were taken in the distribution of spinning wheels, looms and cotton. The abstinence plan also succeeded [16].

According to Sumit Sarkar, "Non-cooperation in the province of Assam acquired a strength which no subsequent phase of the national movement could ever reach" [17].

IV. MOVEMENT IN BENGAL:

The non-cooperation and caliphate compromises were matters of greater strength and unity in the case of Bengal. Bengali political leaders recognized Gandhi much later. Surendranath and Bipinchandra were not supporters of Gandhi. In 1921, Bipin Chandra left the Congress. The fact that Bengalis were not very interested in non-cooperation was reflected in Bengali literature not leaving much impression on this movement. Later, when Chittaranjan supported non-cooperation, there was considerable



enthusiasm and excitement in Bengal. Although Chittaranjan was the lifeblood of the Non-Cooperation Movement in Bengal, other Gandhian leaders were - Shyamsunder Chakraborty, Prafulla Chandra Ghosh, Suresh Bandyopadhyay, Nripendra Chandra Bandyopadhyay and others. Nripendranath spread the spread of education and Charkakata movement by establishing 'Saraswat Ashram' [18].

A massive strike began in East Bengal under the leadership of Jatindramohan Sengupta. They disrupt rail and steamer transport. On March 24, 1921, 669 prisoners escaped from Rajshahi Jail and announced that 'Gandhiraj has arrived in India'. In Jhargram the Santal subjects plundered all the heartland and forest land under the zamindars. In 1922 the Santals of Jalpaiguri attacked the police post [19].

In February 1921, non-cooperators attempted a jute boycott in the countryside. The reasons were to damage British-owned mills, reduce the price of food grains and encourage khadi [20]. They encouraged farmers to grow paddy and cotton instead of jute. Farmers struggling against indigo cultivation were drawn into this movement. It was led by Someshwar Prasad Chowdhury.

A major wave of non-cooperation in Bengal arose in November 1921 around the visit of the Prince of Wales to India. For this, the November 19 strike in Calcutta was a huge success. Control of the roads passed to the volunteers. Several policemen resigned under pressure from the administration. Satyagrahis in Calcutta carried out mass imprisonment to counter the repressive policy. Chittaranjan Das's wife Basanti Devi was also arrested at this time [21]. In early 1922, 349 volunteers were arrested. Among them were 123 mill workers, boatmen and lower class Muslims [22].

V. MOVEMENT IN MIDNAPORE AND PANSKURA:

At the Bezwada session of the Nikhil Bharat Congress Committee (March 31 to April 1), it was decided to collect one crore rupees for the 'Tilak Swaraj Bhandar', collect 30 lakh Congress members from the public and distribute twenty lakh Charkas. It is also true that this target should be reached within a year [23]. District Congress Committees were newly formed to formulate this

agenda. Birendranath left the barrister's profession and vowed to serve the country forever [24].

Congress Committees were formed in Midnapore Sadar, Kanthi, Ghatal and Tamluk Sub-Divisions shortly after the formation of District Congress Committees. After that, Thana Congress Committee was formed in most of the 33 police stations in the district. In Bezwada, the Congress workers tried to carry out the course of action that the Nikhil Bharat Congress Committee had directed to follow with great enthusiasm. Birendranath Shasmal traveled to different parts of the district and tried to collect members through public meetings at different places. He said, "First we visited Tamluk, Panskura, Maina, Mahishadal, Sutahata and Nandigram police stations of Tamluk subdivision. ... Gather Congress members and form the Thana Congress Committee" [25]. So it can be said that the Thana Congress Committee was formed in Panskura long before other places in the district.

The Tamluk Mahakuma Congress Committee was also formed in this phase. Mahendranath Maiti became the president and Chandicharan Dutta became the secretary. Sub-Divisional Congress Committees formed Thana Congress Committees in different police stations. Surendranath Bhattacharya, Radha Govinda Chakraborty, Rajnikanth were the prominent figures in Congress management at that time in Panskura police station.

As per the decision of Bezwada session, the tide came to collect Congress members in Midnapore district. First, prominent people of the society like teachers, lawyers etc. came forward to collect members. Tamluk's veteran lawyer Mahendranath Maiti, advocate Chandicharan Dutta, Rajnikant Pramanik, Srinath Chandra Das, Kanthi's advocate Bipinbihari Adhikari and others joined them. Ghatal's chief advocates Mohini Mohan Das and Mantoshan Roy left the legal profession and became members of the Congress, setting an example. Many advocates in Panskura police station also left the practice and joined the Congress. These are Rajnikanth Pramanik, Pashupati Samant, Dharanidhar Maiti and others.

The teachers of Midnapore district also accepted the membership of the Congress at this time to strengthen the movement. Among the non-cooperative teachers were Nikunja Bihari Maiti, Pareshnath Maiti, Girishchandra Maiti,



Pramathanath Bandyopadhyay, Ishwar Chandra Mal, Aghorchandra Das, Pachulal Ghosh and Padmalochan Sahu. Along with teachers, students also joined the movement by leaving schools and colleges. Ashutosh Mukherjee, the tiger of Bengal, said, "About 50,000 students from Bengal left schools and colleges and joined the movement during the non-cooperation movement [26]. Prominent non-cooperative students include Vipracharan Maiti, Ramendranath Guriya, Kumar Chandra Jana, Ajay Kumar Mukherjee, Satish Chandra Samant, Hemchandra Maiti, Jyoti Patnaik, Hansdhavaj Maiti, Avinash Chandra Das, who dropped out of Tamluk subdivision [27]. There was no college in Panskura during the Non-Cooperation Movement. During this time the students of the school participated in the non-cooperation movement.

As most of the students who joined the Non-cooperation movement left school and college on the eve of their final exams, they wanted private arrangements for their final exams. At the office of the 'Bangiya Provincial Rashtriya Samiti' (BPRS) in Calcutta arrangement Deshbandhu Chittaranjan's efforts gave certificates to students who passed out of Hapit 'National University' [28].

VI. NATIONAL SCHOOL

'Nation formation is not possible without the introduction of national education' - this thought prevailed in the minds of the best people of Bengal especially since the time of the Swadeshi Movement. Like other districts of Bengal, efforts to establish national schools in Midnapore district were strong [29]. Under the leadership of Kumar Chandra, the students learned programs such as untouchability, exclusion of foreigner etc. Later these students came forward for the recruitment and arbitration of Congress members. The meritorious students who passed out from this school are - Jugal Halder, Gunadhar Jana, Rajani Pramanik, Charu Das etc.

Another National School was established at Kankurdah village in Mahishadal police station. The founder was Gunadhar Hazra. He left the post of vice-principal of a school established by the British and took charge of the headmaster of this national school. A few days later, he was arrested for being associated with Swadeshi activities while he was the headmaster of this school. He passed away in May 1922 while in the Presidency Jail. No national school was established in Panskura police

station during this period but the students of this police station were involved in various anti-British activities. For example, in Panskura's Kaloi, Siddha Bazar, Keshapat, Mansapukur, Chaitanyapur, Raghunathbari, Kolaghat, Ghoshpur etc., prominent Congress leaders used to form teams with the students and train them in spinning yarn, weaving khaddar or making soap. The Satyagrahis used to distribute their produce in different parts of Thana and encouraged common people to use indigenous products. As a result, Panskura particularly participated in foreign exclusion [30].

VII. DRUG BOYCOTT AND PICKETING

According to the Calcutta University authorities' report, about 50,000 students left schools and colleges and joined the Non-cooperation Movement [31]. Among prominent students of Tamluk Subdivision who were studying in different colleges of Calcutta, many left the colleges and joined the movement. Among them, Gunadhar Hazra, Ajay Kumar Mukhopadhyay, Satish Chandra Samant, Kumar Chandra Jana, Sripaticharan Boyal, Jeevesh Dev Pattanayak etc. are notable. It was these students who joined the non-cooperation movement and strengthened the movement at the provincial level. They came forward in the work of Congress with great self-effort. All of them were conducting the movement as per the words of Birendranath Shasmal [32].

One of the programs of the Non-cooperation Movement was to boycott drug and picketing at the Excise Department [33]. These school and college dropout students came forward to carry out this program. They used to carry out this program by forcefully closing shops or vandalizing shops. Many students and common people were arrested while doing this work. In no time at all the jails were full. Not only the student body, but teachers, lawyers, and other professionals started going to jail with *satyagraha*. Due to lack of space to house the keep the jail, a temporary jail was constructed with a barbed wire fence next to a warehouse in Khidirpur area. They were sent to picket the excise shops in the maffassal cities. And when they were full in a few days, the *satyagrahis* were captured and loaded into trucks and released. They would come back again and join the *Satyagraha* [34].



VIII. BOYCOTTING OF FOREIGN CLOTHES:

In 1922, the Congress workers of the Tamluk sub-division took up a program of complete boycott of foreign cloth. They campaigned in different places of Tamluk subdivision. The program of foreign exclusion was followed by public meetings. Congress workers started taking out processions at Jorapukur, Keshapat, Kolaghat etc. of Panskura police station. A public meeting was organized in Dhekua village. Many Hindu-Muslim audiences from neighboring villages attended. Kumar Chandra Jana was the main speaker. Moved by his speech, a Muslim audience member tore his kilt to pieces in front of everyone and announced to the assembly that he would no longer wear foreign clothes.

After that, a program of setting fire to foreign clothes was adopted in some places. In the presence of Birendranath, a foreign cloth burning festival was started in the grounds of Tamluk Rajbari. Everyone brought whatever they could - new *sarees*, *dhoties*, clothes in the fire. He even took off his own clothes and throws them in the fire. Such programs were held at Keshapat and Kolaghat in Panskura. Keshapat was led by Kedarnath Bakshi, who gathered from neighboring villages. They threw the foreign clothes of their homes into the fire. A program of burning of foreign cloth was held in front of the Kolaghat Congress office under the leadership of Radha Gobind Chakraborty of Kolaghat and Gauhari Bera of Vaishnavachak. Common people in the area came forward in an exciting manner ignoring the police administration based on this program. The massive response to this program throughout Panskura proves that the Satyagrahis of Panskura followed Gandhi's instructions to the letter. In the second decade of the 20th century, the village-centred national movement began to influence the Indian national movement, with its vivid demonstration of the foreign cloth boycott program of Panskura [35].

The Midnapore District Congress Committee tried to follow to the letter the course of action which the 'Nikhil Bharat Congress Committee' had instructed in Bezwada [36]. Birendranath Shasmal alone raised public awareness in this regard by holding meetings in the entire district. He organized public meetings in every police station of Tamluk Subdivision. One such large public meeting was held at Kolaghat of

Panskura police station. Birendranath Shasmal was the main speaker of this meeting. Other speakers were Tamluk Mahakuma Congress President Mahendra Maiti and Secretary Chittaranjan Dutta [37]. The meeting was well attended. The speakers convinced the common people to do all kinds of non-cooperation with the British government. After this public meeting, the *Satyagrahis* of Panskura used to go from village to village encouraging common people to boycott foreign goods. According to *Satyagrahis*, many common people were interested in making indigenous products in their homes.

'Tilak Swaraj Bhandar' was established on the occasion of death Tilak on 1st August 1920 to preserve his memory [38]. Birendranath Shasmal was the treasurer of this treasury for some time. On his application, 27,000 taka was deposited in the said treasury from Midnapore district [39]. Gandhi came to Midnapore for this purpose on September 21, 1921. He was felicitated at Midnapore Collegiate School by a large gathering. Chittaranjan Das presided over this meeting. At the meeting, two tribals presented Gandhi with their own hand-woven khaddar cloth. In this meeting, Gandhi called for the boycott of foreign clothes and suggested burning them. Many Congress *satyagrahis* came from Panskura to attend this session in Midnapore. Hearing Gandhi's speech at this meeting, they got more encouragement and later intensified the foreign boycott program in the area [40].

IX. DISOBEDIENCE PROGRAM

Disobedience started in Calcutta. A volunteer group of five members went out on the streets to ferry customers from the Pradesh Congress office from December 3. On December 4, 10 teams came out. The police did not arrest anyone these two days. On December 5, the police arrested five groups for smuggling indigenous cloth. Chittaranjan's wife Basanti Devi and Sister Urmila Devi were arrested for declaring hartal and selling khadi on 24 December [41]. After that the movement in Calcutta became stronger. The number of volunteers is increasing day by day. Volunteers from the deprived districts came to Calcutta to join the civil disobedience. Many from the Tamluk sub-division joined the Ain Amany (Civil Disobedience) in Calcutta at this time. Radha Gobind Chakraborty of Panskura police station, Mahadev Maiti used to come to Kolkata by train almost every day for this program. He used to



participate in law disobedience programs at different places throughout the day and return home.

Congress workers of Midnapore district participated in lawlessness in Calcutta and many were arrested. The arrested persons of Tamluk Mahakumar are, - Sripati Charan Boyal, Gunadhar Hazra, Satish Chandra Samant, Gaurang Chandra Giri, Avinash Chandra Das Majumdar, Ramen Chandra Kar, Paresh Chandra Dev Pattanayak among others. In the latter part of 1921, one of the leaders of Tamluk, Kumar Chandra Jana, was arrested. The punishment is six months imprisonment and a fine of 100 rupees. The persons who joined the disobedience from Panskura Police Station are Pashupati Samant of North Ziada, Haripad Bhowmik of South Arjuna, Mahendranath Quila of Dhuliara. Haripad Bhowmik was arrested among them. He was sentenced to prison in the trial. He was a devoted Congress worker.

In this situation the Viceroy agreed to hold talks with the Congress leaders to avoid political chaos. Birendranath said, "Madanmohan Malviya came to the jail and gave the news that Viceroy of India is willing to settle with us. Now only if we agree to settle with him. ... As to the terms of the settlement, he said that the Government would withdraw the Criminal Law Amendment Act from the whole of Hindustan and those already arrested under that Act would be released. ... We cannot picket until the results of the Round Table Conference are published" [42].

After many arguments and debates, this meeting was not successful in the end. Congress leaders did not compromise with the government. A strike was observed in Calcutta on December 28, boycotting the arrival of the crown prince. Congress volunteers staged protests at various places across Calcutta.

X. CONCLUSION:

On February 1, 1922, Gandhi told the Viceroy in a letter that the three would start the mass *satyagraha* movement [43]. He will launch this movement under his own supervision in Bardauli taluk of Gujarat. But three days later on February 4, the horrific incident in Chaurichaura village in Uttar Pradesh's Gorakhpur district changed everything. Gandhi was shocked by the death of 22 policemen at the hands of the agitated

mob. He later abandoned the decision of Mass Satyagraha. On February 28, a meeting of the Nikhil Bharat Congress Committee decided to abandon the mass struggle.¹⁰⁹ Chittaranjan Das, Tilak, Nehru, Lala Lajpat Roy were enraged at this sudden termination of the movement. Jawaharlal also expressed surprise about this.

Gandhi was arrested on March 10, 1922. He was jailed for 6 years on charges of treason for three articles titled 'Tampering with Loyalty', 'The Puzzle and its Solution' and 'Shaking the Manes', published in *Young India*" [45]. Gandhi's imprisonment changed the political situation in the country. Chittaranjan, Motilal, Lala Lajpat Roy etc. were against the council boycott program from the beginning. In this situation, they think it is reasonable to enter the legislature and oppose the government [46]. Deshbandhu resigned from the post of Congress president and formed 'Nikhil Bharat Swarajya Dal'. Deshpran supported Shasmal Chittaranjan and became the Bengal branch secretary of this party.

The response to this incident among the workers of Midnapore district was profound. Congress workers of the district engaged themselves in constructive work. He continued the work of running national schools, promotion and spread of Charka and Khaddar, settlement of arbitration, abolition of untouchability, promotion of communal harmony, formation of village association's etc. [47].

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