

SALT SATYAGRAHA IN BENGAL AND CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE MOVEMENT

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ABSTRACT: The Indian national movement was undoubtedly one of the biggest mass movements modern society has ever seen. It was a movement which galvanized millions of people of all classes and ideologies into political action and brought to its knees a mighty colonial empire.

As a mass movement, the Indian national movement was able to tap the diverse energies, talents and capacities of a large variety of people. It had a place for all - old and young, rich and poor, women and men, the intellectuals and the masses. People participated in it in varied ways:

Key Words: mass-movement, ideologies, remarkable, colonial empire, participated,

OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this work is to make a comprehensive and critical study of the different aspects of history of salt in Britain, Bengal on a much generalized background of Britain salt policy.

1. To set up a new outline in this field;
2. To propose new way for the freedoms and future etc
3. To present an authentic and interesting accounts on the development of salt
4. To examine critically the declination and destruction of salt industries under the excise systems
5. To study the socio-economic impact of the salt on the life of people.

METHODOLOGY

The modern scientific historical methodology will be followed to carry on research on the history of salt in Bengal during the British Rule. All possible efforts will be made to collect as much materials as possible from various primary and secondary sources available in the Bengal Presidency State Archives Bhubaneswar, Orissa State Library Balasore and National Library Calcutta. After consulting all available sources the collected materials will be critically examined to bring out relevant and significant facts. Then facts will be presented in a systematic and interesting manner to produce a good research paper. In the conclusion there will be an overall assessment of the development, decline and end of the salt industry in relation to the impact in each phase and course.

INTRODUCTION:

MOVEMENT of civil disobedience was the second largest mass struggle of Indian National Congress under the leadership of Gandhiji. He summoned the

common people to disregard the provisions of Salt Act in a disciplined manner. Explaining the power of civil disobedience, he said: 'Supposing ten persons from each of the 7,00,000 villages in India come forward to manufacture salt and to disobey the Salt Act, what do you think this Government can do?' Gandhiji reached in Dandi of Gujrat with thousands of his followers, he had a whole nation, aroused and expectant, waiting restlessly for his final signal. On 6 April 1930* by picking up a handful of salt, Gandhiji inaugurated the Civil Disobedience Movement, a movement that was to remain unsurpassed in the history of the Indian national movement for the country-wide mass participation it unleashed. Mere salt was the main factor of this vast movement which was directed in India from the Himalaya to Kanyakumari.

The participation of women in this movement was remarkable incident. Their spontaneous participation in the movement despite of ignorance, ego and superstitions was peerless. According to the Secretary of India - 'Nothing disturbed me more than the great awakening among Indian women and the part they had begun to play in politics.'¹

The torture of the British administration was much than the Non-cooperation movement. Lathi-charge, arrest, jail, firing on houses, physical torture to women and armed operation were the instruments to prevent movement. The vastness of Salt Movement, skilled leadership, people's dedication and determination compelled the British Government to set Gandhi - Irwin Treaty (5 March 1931). Indian National Congress earned sufficient honour by this treaty from the Indians and also from the world.

SALT SATYAGRAHA IN BENGAL

Six districts of Bengal province - Nowakhali, Chattagram, Barishal, Khulna, 24 Parganas and Medinipur were highly affected by this movement. Out of these Medinipur played a vital role in the Salt Satyagraha movement. In Medinipur salt production centers in Pichhabani of Contai, and Narghat of Tamluk attracted the concentration of whole India. In this phase the number of martyrs in Medinipur was 59 and the number of convicts was 1,429 according to government publication. The following points were the main factors of such courageous and historical aspects.

Although the Civil Disobedience movement was called off, the activities were in process in Medinipur under the direction of Zilla Board and awareness to mass remained in continuous process. Besides these, the giving up of the Union Board and stopping of *Chowkidari' Tax was performed successfully under the leadership of Birendranath. The people were inspired by this movement and supported the Salt movement spontaneously. The Congress candidates were elected in the Zilla Board, Local Board and Provincial Law Board. The organisation became stronger by this result.

THE ROLE OF MASSES IN SALT SATYAGRAHA

The following are the remarkable aspects of the Salt Satyagraha:

Role of Women : The women participated in the Salt Satyagraha spontaneously under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. The participation of women

in Medinipur is notable. Some of the salt production centres was directed by the women. Sheulipur of Bhagawanpur, Ghoramara of Moyna Thana and Baraduari of Nandigram Salt Production centre were directed by the women. One of them became the martyr. She was Smt. Urmibala Poria of Ketugram village in Keshpur Thana. She was murdered by the police.

Some of the remarkable women were Padmabatidevi of Contai; Tarangini Das, Ahalya Maity and Digambari Maji of Khejuri; Smt. Dhira Das, Soudaminy Pahari and Bhagabati Sasmal of Bagwanpur; Kusumkumari Mondal, Sukhadamoyee Roychowdhury, Saraswati Mishra of Patashpur; Smt. Lakshmimoni Hazra of Mahishadal; Swayambari Bera, Soudamoni Maity of Nandigram; Charushila Jana, Prabhavati Sing, Yogmaya Banerjee of Sutahata; Prabhavati Maiti, NalinibalaDas, of Moyna; Suhasini Debi of Tamluk; Indumati Bhattacharyya of Panskura; Nanibala Maity, Jaminibala Sen of Debra and Smt. Charushila Devi, Jyotirmoyee Ganguly and Kshemankary Devi etc. of Medinipur town. Students' participation: In the Salt Satyagraha movement the participation of students were larger than in the Non-cooperation movement. Their activities were greater also. Some of the notable students were Hrishikesh Gayen, Binoykrishna Hazra, Nityagopal Maity (Bhagwanpur), Sushil Kumar Dhara (Mahishadal), Nabin Chandra mahapatra (Egra), Sudhir Chandra Das, Mrityunjoy Bhunia (Contai), Shyamacharan Bera, Prasanna Kumar Tripathi (Patashpur), Surendranath Pradhan, Girish Chandra Santra, Kritwibas Giri (Ramnagar), Gunadhar Bhowmik (Tamluk) and many more.

The Salt Satyagraha movement was directed in Medinipur jointly under the leadership of the local and outsiders. Some of the outsider-leaders were Dr. Surendranath Bandyopadhyay, Pratap Chandra Guharoy, Mihirlal Chattopadhyay, Nibaran Chandra De Sarkar, Prafulla Chandra Ghosh, Jitendranath Mishra, Bhagabati Charan Som, Lalmohan Mitra, Akshay Kumar Chattopadhyay, Prabhat Kumar Ganguly, Chapal Talukdar etc.

In the history of this district's struggle for independence, the first incident of police-firing was happened in the Salt Satyagraha. In 1st June 1930 three persons were killed by police-firing at Pratapdighi. The martyrs were Ramkrishna Das, Kartick Chandra Mishra and Upendranath Mishra. It was the second incident of police-firing in Bengal province. Ashutosh Dolui a volunteer of Diamond Harbor, 24 Parganas district was the first martyr of Salt Satyagraha in Bengal.

The torture of the police was horrible. They began to firing houses, rapping to women and shooting to general people. The first incident of firing on house was held on 11 April 1930. The storehouse of paddy of Jhareswar Maity in Rasulpur village of Contai was burnt. A large number of houses in Moyna were burnt by the police.

In case of punishment, Medinipur secured second place in Bengal. As per information from the Bengal Legislative Assembly the following is the statistics in this regard.

Calcutta - 2,289, Medinipur - 1,429, Moymonsingha - 1,812, Bankura - 635, Howrah - 619, Faridpur - 595, Bakhargang - 557, Burdwan - 538, 24 Parganas - 532, Nadia - 446, Khulna - 417, Rangpur - 416, Dhaka- 366, Dinajpur - 329, Hoogly - 300,

Jashohar - 268, Pabna - 209, Tripura - 208, Rajshahi - 88, Bagurah - 102, Birbhum - 94, Murshidabad - 88, Noyakhali - 83, Jalpaigury - 74, Chattagram - 48, Maldaha - 46 and Darjeeling - 5.

Gandhiji started towards Dandi with several Satyagrahis on 12 March 1930 for Salt Satyagraha. Out of them, Durgesh Chandra Das was the representative from Bengal. Even the representative from Orissa Matilal Das was actually the resident of Jhargram, Medinipur. Medinipur was the only district where maximum number of arrest of leaders from outside was happened. Even there was maximum number of salt production centre in Medinipur district. The number of Salt Satyagraha in the whole district was 73.

PICHHABANI AND NARGHAT SALT CENTRES

Two major salt manufacturing centres of Medinipur districts were in Pichhabani of Contai and Narghat of Tamluk. Pichhabani Centre: This centre was skillfully directed by the District Leader and Provincial leaders. Several leaders from abroad and many volunteers were arrested in this centre. It was the largest centre in the district and one of the big centres of Bengal province. Arrest, punishment and fire on the house were happened for the first time here due to Salt Satyagraha and Civil Disobedience. On 11 April, Dr. Surendranath Bandyopadhyay was arrested along with Jhaleswar Maji and Surendranath Das of that locality. Each was imprisonment for two years and penalty of Rs. 250/- with condition of another six months' imprisonment for the non-payment of the penalty money. The police regiment burned the paddy-storehouse of Jhaleswar Maji in Rasulpur. In spite of those the movement continued as before.

Narghat Centre: at the beginning of Satyagraha, leaders from abroad remained present. The local leaders also directed the movement. On 6th April the first Satyagraha was directed under the leadership of Hansadhvaj Maity along with the presence of 30 volunteers. Local leaders were arrested in this centre. Ajoy Kumar Mukhopadhyay was arrested first on 15th April. Satish Chandra Samanta was arrested in the next day. Kumar Chandra Jana and Lalit Kumar Dhara etc. were also arrested after that.

The remarkable incident is that Bhusan Chandra Samanta (Sarberia - Mahishadal) named a policeman resigned from his service in protest of horrible torture of the police and participated in Satyagraha. He was imprisonment for three months. Besides this, an woman was arrested and imprisonment for six months due to participation in Satyagraha. She was Sabitri De - a public woman.² In spite of horrible torture, arrest and imprisonment, Satyagraha was continued like Pichhabani from 6th April to 11th June.

OTHER INCIDENTS

At the time of Civil Disobedience, Salt Satyagraha, boycott of foreign goods, picketing in *Abgari* shops movement against different taxes were also accelerated. At last, congratulating the Satyagrahis considering their struggle despite of sufferings and sorrows Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru sent two letters. These two historical letters were treated as unique historical assets.

In his letter on 02-02-1931, Gandhiji wrote - 'I have made myself acquainted with your condition to the extent it was possible without a local visit. I tender my congratulation for your courage and patience with which you have borne your suffering. Out of such suffering will form a nation pulsating with life. Earthly possessions are no compensation for Loss of Liberty. It is a matter of joy that you have preferred deprivation of these to that of your liberty. I hope you will not neglect the duty of manufacturing the salt.'

STRUGGLE WITH ARMS IN MEDINIPUR (1930 -1933)

The students and the general people of Medinipur remain active in the participation of every movement organised against the British Raj in every part of the country. Not only in the struggle for independence, but also in every aspect after the independence. Even in the decade of seventy, Debra and Gopiballavpur of Medinipur district remained active in the Nakshal Movement.

In 1930 - 1931 when the Salt Satyagraha was in full cry in Bengal Province, then the armed freedom fighters tried their best to shock the imperialist administrators. Under the leadership of Masterda Suryya Sen, Chattagram Armory was looted on 18 April 1930; Writers' Buildings expedition was performed under the leadership of Binoy-Badal-Dinesh on 8 December 1930; Paharitala expedition was performed on 28 September 1932 under the leadership of Pritilata Waddedar; Frequent fighting with the police regiment in Allahabad of Uttar Pradesh was done on under the leadership of Chandrasekhar Azad etc. fell a great impact and inspired the Bengalees as well as the Indians to struggle for freedom. Now we shall elaborate the incidents relating to different movement for India's freedom based on Medinipur.

KILLING OF GOVERNMENT OFFICERS

In this phase of movement three District Magistrates were killed and seven revolutionists became martyrs. The incident is - on 7 April 1931 District Magistrate Mr. Peddy was killed by shoot of the revolutionists Bimalendu Dasgupta and Jyotijiban Ghosh. Mr. Doglas was appointed in his vacant post. Prabhangshu Pal and Pradyot Bhattacharyya, the two brave revolutionists shoot Mr. Doglas on 30 April 1932 and killed him. Mr. B.EJ. Burge was appointed in the post after the death of Mr. Doglas. He was also killed by Anathbandhu Panja and Mrigen Datta by fire on 2 September 1933. Besides these, Bimalendu Dasgupta fired on Villiers, the President of European Association. These were some of the valorous and daring ventures of the Bengalees.

MARTYRS IN STRUGGLE WITH ARMS

Seven revolutionists became martyrs by firing of the police and court's decision. They were -

Pradyot Kumar Bhattacharyya: For killing District Magistrate Mr. Doglas on 12 January 1933.

Anathbandhu Panja: For killing District Magistrate Mr. Burge on 2 September 1933.

Mrigen Datta: For participating in the killing of the District Magistrate Mr. Burge on

3 September 1933.

Brajakishor Chakraborty and Ramkrishne Roy: As per decision of the court relating to Burge Killing Case, were hanged to death.

Nabajiban Ghosh: Died in Faridpur Jail by beating of the police on 23 September 1936.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STRUGGLE WITH ARMS

The nature of the struggle with arms in Medinipur are: (1) this struggle remained limited with in the youth of solvent and educated families. (2) The centre of the movement was mainly the Medinipur town. (3) The direct participation of the people of rural areas in little. Out of the villagers Digambar Nanda of Mugberia, Ganesh Chandra Das of Moyna and Basanta Kumar Sarkar of Garhbeta are remarkable. The women group helped the revolutionist in various aspect and they could not participate directly in the struggle for independence. Santi, Sunuti, Bina Das and Pritilata Waddeder were some of the exceptions in Medinipur.³

It was a remarkable incident that whole male members If a family were involved in the struggle with arms. That was Jamini Ranjan Ghosh's family. His two sons Nirmarjban and Nabajiban Ghosh became martyrs in the struggle with arms. There is no such incident in the Bengal province that two persons became martyrs from the same family. In Maharastra, three persons of the Chapekar family became martyr. They were Basudev, Damodar and Balkrishna Chapekar.

Although the performance of the revolutionists of Medinipur was mainly centred in Medinipur town, but the great Kshudiram, Satyen, and Pradyot Bhattacharya's immortal contribution to the nation will remarkable for ever.

SECOND CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE MOVEMENT (1932-1934)

The participation in the movement of Civil Disobedience in the second phase was larger than Salt Satyagraha movement in Medinipur. The Salt Satyagraha was centered on the riverside but the field of movement against imposing of different taxes was shown everywhere.

The torture of police in this movement was unbearable. Mass arrest, imprisonment, looting rape, etc. were the examples of various tortures. The statistics show:

TAMLUK SUB-DIVISION: Meeting with the public - open meeting - 291, secret meeting - 1836, procession -15, *Hartal*- 33, picketing - 147, flag Satyagraha - 7, death -3. On the other hand, penalty was claimed on 912 persons for non-payment of *Chowkidary* Tax. The amount of tax was Rs. 1,050/- the amount of penalty was Rs. 10,780/-. The number of houses which were looted was 198 and the number of searched houses was 61. Total amount of loss was Rs.23,878/-. The number of arrested male and female was 720. Seriously injured male was 412 and female 103 totaling 512 in numbers.

CONTAI SUB-DIVISION: Assets of 1604 families were cocked. The number of arrested male was 3447 and female 1137 totaling 4584; imprisonment of

male 590 and female 40 totaling 630; torture on male 2522 and female 120; out of them 350 persons were seriously injured; number of death was 7. Penalty of Rs. 3,250/- was claimed on 31 villagers of three Thanas of this subdivision. 22 Congress offices were declared unlawful. The number of false case recorded was 16. On the other hand, the number of *Hartal* was 28, public meeting 951, private meeting 973 procession 877, flag Satyagraha 250 in 258 centres. Mainly the women gathered for picketing in 14 sales counters of alcoholic spirits. The number of Thana conference held was 15. ⁴

Mainly the movement for taking off different taxes was held in the second phase of Civil Disobedience in Medinipur. Salt Satyagraha was also held at that time in the limited form in Contai and Tamluk Sub-divisions.

The number of martyrs in this phase was twenty. Out of this thirteen became martyrs in the non-violent movement. One of them was a woman martyr. She was Kokila Datta of Kharagpur.

The glorious contribution of women in the second phase of Civil Disobedience movement was better than Salt Satyagraha. Some of the numerous incidents are -Smt. Sukhadayini Roychowdhury wife of Ashutosh Roychowdhury of Patashpur, Contai Sub-division was arrested in the meeting of Balya Gobindapur violating Section 144 on 4 April 1932. Smt. Kusumkumari Mondal recaptured the Congress office of Manglamaroh which was banned by the police. Five persons were killed on 4 July 1932 at Mashuria village of Bhagwanpur Thana where a public meeting was in process violating Section 144 under the leadership of Smt. Dhira Das in the '*Rajbandi Day*'. The women of Tamluk Sub-division acted as the Directors of the board, they were Smt. Suhasini Devi, Indumati Bhattacharya, Smt. Lakshminani Mukhopadhyay, Smt. Nityabala Gol, Smt. Subodhbala Kuiti. Women were appointed as Director even in the Thana level. Rakhal Chandra Maiti's wife Smt. Prabhathi Maiti of Deuli village, Moyna Thana, entered into the Thana and hoisted the National flag. She was imprisoned for six months

CONCLUSION

In 1930 - 1931, at the period of Civil Disobedience, the movement of Bengal attained its youth and numerous men and women participated spontaneously in the Salt Satyagraha. At least 59 became martyrs in those members. In the second phase of Civil Disobedience in 1932 - 1934, stopping of different enhanced taxes and in the other movements the contribution of women along with the other people is remarkable. It was perfectly and spontaneously shown in the Quit India movement of 1942. The people of Medinipur specially the students association played a vital role to compel the British imperialists to escape India by their immortal struggle. It is a historical truth that the freedom-fighting movement in Bengal has earned a remarkable place in the history of Indian freedom-fighting movements.

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