

CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE MOVEMENT IN ODISHA

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ABSTRACT

The salt satyagraha, popularly known as “Labanasatyagraha”, was launched by breaking the salt law by the British government. The people of coastal district were accustomed to manufacture fine salt for their daily consumption and trade. But, the British government deprived them from their ancestral right, to produce salt. It created much discontent in the mind of the people, as they were not permitted to produce salt, even for their use at home. The British government introduced monopoly in salt, that increased the price of salt. Salt was imported from Liverpool, but the people were not permitted to manufacture it. So, the salt monopoly of British rule inflicted heavy economic strain, upon the people of Odisha’s coastal district. The salt tax was considered the most iniquitous of all, from the poor man’s standpoint. (1)

KEYWORDS: British Government, Increased Price of Salt

INTRODUCTION

In the Lahore session of Indian National Congress (1929), the Purnaswaraj (complete independence) resolution was passed (2) and in the Congress Committee on 2nd January 1930, it was decided to observe 26 January, as the Purnaswaraj day all over India. The Independence Day was solemnly observed on 26 January 1930, and evoked great enthusiasm all over the country.

The working committee met again at Sabarmati during 14-16 February 1930 and passed the historic Civil Disobedience resolution. Mahatma Gandhi endorsed the eleven point programme for the mass Civil Disobedience Movement. The Working Committee thus, authorized only Gandhi and his followers, to start Civil Disobedience. But, the All India Congress Committee which met at Ahmadabad on 26 March 1930, after Gandhi has began his march to Dandi, not only endorsed the resolution of the committee, but somewhat widened its scope.(3)

The Civil Disobedience started on March 12 with famous Dandi march by Gandhi ji, the great hero of Indian war of Independence. The whole nation supported Gandhi in this moment. From Sabarmati ashrama of Gujarat, Gandhi moved towards Dandi sea coast with 78 satyagrahis, to break the unfair Salt Law of British government. Only one satyagrahi from Odisha Motibas Das about 20 years of age, joined that satyagraha with Gandhi ji. After 24 days of long procession, Gandhi ji, the father of the Nation reached Dandi and broke the Salt Law on 26 April 1930(4) picking a handful of salt.(5)

The Odisha Provincial Congress Committee (PCC) leadership, which participated in the Lahore Congress included Gopabandhu Choudary, HareKrushnasn Mahatab, Nilakantha Das and Niranjan Pattanaik. Back from Lahore the PCC organized a province wide campaign, for propagating Purnaswaraj resolution.

On Independence Day celebration in Cuttack town on 26 January, the National flag was hoisted on the top of the Lingaraj temple and at many parts of the township, amidst chanting of nationalist slogan and songs. In the afternoon a

meeting was organized at Kathajodi lower bed nearly five thousand people attended the meeting. The most prominent leaders who attended the meeting was Gopabandhu Choudary, Jadumani Mangaraj, PranaKrushan Paraihari, NabaKrushan Choudary, AttalBihari Acharya and Chinarpani Mishra. Gopabandhu Choudary read out the Purnaswarj resolution and people raised their hands, to endorse the resolution en masse.(6)

In March 1930 the Utkal Provincial Congress Committee met at Baleswar, where a decision was taken to celebrate on 1st April 1930, as the breaking of the Salt Law day in Odisha, under the leadership of Gopabandhu Choudary.(7) Harekrishna Mahatab and Surendranath Das, made arrangements for the salt satyagraha at Inchudi, on the Baleswar sea coast which was only second to Gandhi's satyagraha in Gujrat, in its impact and significance.(8) On 6th April 1930, the day on which Gandhi broke the Salt Law at Dandi, the first of satyagraha led by Gopabandhu Choudhury and Acharya Harihar Das, began with a march from Cuttack to Inchudi. After reaching Inchudi (Baleswar) on 13 April 1930, Acharya Harihar Das broke the Salt Law and was arrested. After this incident, a large number of satyagrahis came to Baleswar in quick succession, to participate in the salt Satyagraha. The congress leaders like Gopabandhu Choudhury, Harekrushana Mahatab, Acharya Harihar Das, Rajkrushan Bose, Nilakantha Das and few others, who participated in the salt Satyagraha at Inchudi were arrested and sentence to rigorous imprisonment. The arrest of prominent congress leaders, led to participation by large mass of people. (9)

The Civil Disobedience Movement got tremendous support, from the people of Odisha. One of its reasons was its wider sea coast; because of the new Salt policy of the government people could not prepare salt as earlier. The new resolution of the congress helps people to prepare salt, without any difficulties. (10)

It should be pointed out here that probably the salt issue, had already been taken up by Gopabandhu Das, as well as H.K Mahtab. Gopabandhu Das has focused on salt problem in the Bihar and Odisha's Legislative Assembly. (11)

The idea of salt Satyagraha was suggested by H.K.Mahatab to Gandhi ji, when he was at Baleswar prior to the Civil Disobedience Movement. (12)

An exaggeration has been made, in the history of freedom Movement in Odisha, volume III that person like H.K Mahatab was responsible for actually preparing Baleswar, for the salt Satyagraha. Even prior to the Civil Disobedience Movement, we find the existence of several cases of violation of salt laws in cuttack, Baleswar and Puri. And the attempts of persons like Gopabandhu and Mahatab was a mere reflection of such violation, made by the people of Baleswar. (13)

Spread of Civil Disobedience Movement in Odisha

As soon as the Civil Disobedience Movement started, the peasants of Baleswar responded enthusiastically. The movement spread to Iram, Sartha, Padampur, Basta, Kasaba, Srijanj, Bhadrak and so on. The peasant attacked the propertied classes, and started no rent campaign. The movement took a dramatic turn in May 1930, when about 600 villagers from the surrounding villages of Inchudi, carried nine mounds of contraband salt to Baleswar and sold it. The colonial police remained as a silent spectator. (14)

In the district of cuttack, Kujang was an important centre, where a large numbers of satyagrahis participated in the movement, in order to extend the scope of the campaign. (15)

The peasant of Srijanj stopped paying choukidari tax, which in turn led to a violent attack on the peasants, by the colonial police force. Around seven hundred villagers in town attacked the colonial police, when they proceeded to collect

the choukidari tax. In order to calm down the response of the peasants, collective fine was imposed upon them.

In the district of Puri, the Civil Disobedience Movement started under the leadership of Pandit Nilakantha Das, and salt was manufactured at Kuhudi, Astarang, Khandasahi and Mandanki in Kakatpur.(16)

During the salt satyagraha movement of 1930, Sambalpur played an important part. The satyagraha committee was formed under the chairmanship of Ghanashyam Panigrahi and Dayananda Satpathy, as secretary(17) They send four batches of volunteers, to defy the salt law and to prepare contraband salt at different places of coastal Odisha, including Inchudi. (18)

In Iram (Baleswar), the local activists under then presidency of local zamindars Radhanatha Padhi resolved in a meeting on 4th April, to remain ready for the manufacture of salt in the adjacent coastal line and wait till Gandhi's order. It was also decided to send a santisena to Baleswar, from Iram(19)

The district of Ganjam also contributed its due share in the salt campaign. A camp was established, under the leadership of Biswanath Das, Dibakara Pattanaik and others at Ganjam and contraband salt was manufactured. The Satyagrahis raided the salt factory at Huma. A batch of volunteers from Koraput under the leadership Radhakrushna Biswasaroy, joined Ganjam volunteers for manufacturing contraband salt. Radhakrushna Biswasaroy, Dibakar Pattanaik and Narsingh Sahu and others were arrested under the Agency Act and were confined first at Vizag jail, and subsequently transferred to the Rajmundry jail. (20)

Role of Women in Odisha Civil Disobedience Movement

The women of Odisha, play an important role in the Civil Disobedience Movement. Educated women, belonging to high family came out of their homes, in order to join congress demonstration and manufacturing of salt. A few weeks after the Dandi March began; Gandhi said the importance of some sisters, to join the good fight is to me a healthy sign. In this non violent warfare, their contribution should be much greater than men. To call women, the weaker sex is libel. If, by strength is meant moral power, then woman is immeasurably man's superior. (21)

In Odisha, Smt. Rama Devi and Smt. Malati Devi who had thrown themselves in the freedom movement, got themselves deeply involved in the salt Satyagraha. As soon as the Satyagraha started at Inchudi, Rama Devi accompanied by Malati Devi, Annapurna Devi, Kiranbala Sen, Janhavi Devi, Kanakabala Devi and Kokila Devi, reached the Satyagraha camp at Baleswar on 20th April, they led a long procession of women to the Satyagraha centre and violated the salt law, by collecting salt earth. Hundreds of women came blowing conches.(22) Volunteers from Gujrat and Bengal also joined with them.(23) The police watched the situation as silent spectators, without any interference. The spontaneous participation of women infused new life to the movement. Rama Devi, Annapurna Devi and Malati Devi and many other women volunteers visited Srijanga and encouraged the women folk of that area, for violating salt law. On 21st April seven hundred volunteers of different villagers manufactured mounds of salt at different centres. Sixty Odia ladies, also took active part in preparing salt at different centres like Tundra, Boite, Inchudi, Kuanrpur, Koligaon, Rawlpur and Kasha.(24)

The Role of Students in Odisha Civil Disobedience Movement

The role of students in the Civil Disobedience Movement cannot be denied. They left their school and colleges and took part in the salt Satyagraha movement and organization of student below seventeen years of age was established which is known as Banarsena. They made agitation in front of the wine shop. They were making understand the people to

keep themselves away from wine. They were fearless. They distributed congress papers among the common people. Loknath Naik, Bholanath Mohanth, Purusottam Singh, Baikuntha Prasad Mohanty, Sriharsa Mishra, Radheshyam Parida, Sanatan Das, Pranakrushna Rath, Prahallad Naik, Jadumani Naik are the name of the some students. The Government arrested and imprisoned the leaders. On 26th April 1930, H. K. Mahatab and Gopabandhu Chaudhury, the President and Secretary of the Utkal Pradesh Congress Committee were arrested at Balasore and sentenced to eight years rigorous imprisonment. (25)

End of Civil Disobedience Movement in Odisha

In order to suppress the non violence salt Satyagraha, the colonial government indulged in relentless repression, throughout the country. (26) The general secretary of Indian National Congress reported that, till February 1931, 950 peoples were convicted in Odisha in connection, with salt movement.(27) From various parts of the country, thousands of Indians courted arrest, faced lathis, bullets and lost their properties during 1930. But, by the end of 1930, due to mass arrest of congress leader, adverse affects of agricultural depression of peasants and various repressive measures of government, the movement began to lose its momentum and showed signs of exhaustion. With the request of Tejbahadur Sapru, V.S Srinibash Sastri and M.R Tayakar, Gandhi, entered into negotiation with the viceroy Lord Irwin and finally on March 1931 the historic Gandhi- Irwin pact was announced (28) and with this the Civil Disobedience came to an end.

CONCLUSIONS

The Civil Disobedience Movement achieved one significance gain i.e, the people of the coastal tracts were used to manufacture salt for their domestic use, but not for commercial purpose outside their villages. The economic discontent of the people was minimized, as they got the privilege of using salt.

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