

The Impact of Non-Cooperation Movement on Tripura (1920-21)

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Though Tripura was a princely state situated in the extreme north-east of India, yet it played its role in the national freedom movement. Different ripples occurred here at different times in the perspectives of national movement.

Gandhian call :—Under Mahatma Gandhi's inspiration the Congress adopted, in a special session held in Calcutta in September, 1920, the famous resolution on non-cooperation which recommended the renunciation of government titles and the boycotting of the legislatures, law-courts and government educational institutions leading up at a later date to the non-payment of taxes. The attainment of Swaraj (self-rule) was also proclaimed.¹

It took up constructive tasks, like Khadi, removal of untouchability, prohibition of liquor, and national education. Use of Hindi and other Indian languages broke the barrier between the educated and the masses. Thus a secular party organisation based on mass support, decided to fight the imperialists under Gandhiji's leadership with a novel weapon.²

Infiltration:—Tripura's non-cooperation and Khilafat movement adopted some sort of same character. In early 1921 Khilafat and non-cooperation agitators began to infiltrate into Tripura from the adjoining British districts of Tipperah, Noakhali and Sylhet. It was also reported that some workers came to Agartala in April, 1921 to collect subscriptions but they were summarily sent back like other political agitators. But these measures could not stop anti-British political activities conducted inside the State.³

Students' participation:—The remarkable feature of this movement was the students' agitation. In Belonia, Kailashahar, Agarala, students participated in strikes. Some of them raised anti-British slogans and 'bandemataram'.⁴ This strike wave was recorded in the Administration Report that "Non-Cooperation and Khilafat movements..... caused great excitement among the school-going children, a large percentage of which were misguided to leave the schools..... A number of private schools in the Zamindaries were affected."⁵ (Emphasis mine)

Teachers' role:—Teachers enrolled themselves as non-cooperators and kept contact with others. They visited the various places inside and outside the state and held Swadeshi meetings to emphasise the Gandhian programme of village reconstruction through

self-help. In the programme late Bipin Bihari Sarkar, a teacher of Brajendra Kishore Institution and some chosen volunteers took the leading role. It is revealed from a confidential Police Report of the year, 1921⁶ that this teacher invited pleaders Basanta Kumar Chakraborty of Keshigarh, Nagendra Chandra Shur of Noakhali Bar and Suniti Debi, Uma Debi; the volunteers of the "Nari Karmi Mandir, Calcutta, for discussion of non-cooperation campaigns among the men and women of Tripura. They established contact with the women folk of Belonia and held meetings. To put a stop to the anti-British activities of the teacher, proper vigilance system was introduced.⁷

Boycott of Courts :- The boycott of courts was another feature of Non-Cooperation and Khilafat Movement. The lawyers of Tripura boycotted certain courts at this time. In this boycott, the pleaders of Belonia⁸ and Kailashahar took the leading role. They did not attend the courts for sometime.

Arbitration Court :- To set up private arbitration courts for the settlement of private disputes was an important landmark in the Khilafat and non-cooperation upsurge. In defiance of the established government court a parallel court in the name of "Hindu-Muslim Sammilani" or popularly known as "Dharma Sabha" was set up in Kailashahar during this time. Its president was late Satish Chandra Chaudhury, a Hindu and its Secretary was late Abdul Mutabir Majumdar, a Muslim. It is clear from its constitution that the Sammilani aimed at the communal harmony in the locality. To popularise it, Satish Chandra Chaudhury made extensive tour in the various places of the State. During his itinerary he preached the cult of non-violence and Hindu-Muslim unity in the Gandhian ideal. The litigants were prevented from going to the government courts and made the arrangement of the trial of cases by themselves.⁹ Notices were issued to persons like Arjan Ali of Lakshmipur, Kailashahar and others who instead of filing cases to this body, filed in the government courts and asked them to justify their actions. Arjan Ali gave satisfactory answer and therefore no action was taken against him.¹⁰

That the Sammilani exercised much influence over the rural masses is clear. The king Birendra Kishore Manikya was particularly perturbed by this change of event. So; necessary actions to stop its activities and to prevent it from interfering in non-compoundable cases or "police cases were taken by" the Durbar.¹¹ As a result, the Maharaja lost a certain handsome revenue of the courts, the general public faced unusual happenings, the litigant

public suffered loss due to the temporary suspension of practice by the pleaders and the worst result of the non-cooperation and Khilfat agitation in Tripura was unsatisfactory council elections under the Reform Scheme.¹²

Rural unrest :- Certain rural areas of Tripura were filled with new enthusiasm. Two factors at least played indelible impression upon the peasants and labouring classes. The first was the after-effects of the great war (First World War) continued to manifest themselves all round, during the year, in disturbed economic conditions which proved most trying to the middle, peasants and labouring classes.¹³

Chandpur incident :- The second was the "Coolie" trouble at Chandpur. Non-Cooperation attained strength suddenly in Assam tea garden labourers.¹⁴ Rumours had spread that Gandhij Raj was coming to allow them land in their villages from where they were evicted forcibly. They arrived at the East Bengal port of Chandpur on May 20-21, 1921 on their way home but they had to face severe Gurkha assault and torture. The situation reached a climax when it led to Railwaymen's strike and general hartal. The strikes paralysed railway and steamer services under the non-cooperators like J. M. Sengupta of Chittagong and Hardayal Nag of Chandpur.¹⁵ The repercussion of this strike and general hartal on the mind of the people of Tripura can be imagined from a confidential letter of the Minister of Tripura to the then Political Agent. This Minister, P. K. Dasgupta, wrote that on 26th May, he received a wire from the Commissioner of Chittagong to the effect that European Staff at Akhaura was starving and asking for some supplies. The Durbar had to send certain provisions for the European and the Railway Staff at Akhaura. This hardship was caused by a combination of N. C. O. agitators and Indian Railway Staff on strike. Akhaura bazar also went on Hartal for a day.¹⁶

Peasant unrest :- The price rise and Assam-Bengal Railway strike as a result of the after-effects of the First World War¹⁷ and Chandpur trouble¹⁸ respectively provided an occasion for peasant unrest in Tripura. Feudal oppressions of the princely state machinery also knew no bounds. Already Mahatma Gandhi's call was there. These multiple factors contributed to the peasant agitation. Tipperah Gazettee had published the news that "Noornagar" people had determined to stop the "Khajana". This no-tax agitation had its repercussions on border areas of Tripura. This was a cause of misgiving between Thakur Mahim Chandra, an influential officer and P. K. Dasgupta, the Minister.¹⁹ The non-com-

promising attitude of the peasantry was not a new phenomenon here. The Tripura peasants had a long tradition of resistance stretching back to Samsher Gazi, who mobilized the peasants on a non-communal line for establishing an Independent Kisan Raj in 1767-68.²⁰ The present peasant awakening in connection with the no-tax movement paved the deck clear for Purta Bartma No. rent and the Prajamandal agitations of the 30's and 40's of the twentieth century respectively.²¹

Simna Bazar Disturbance :- Simna Bazar Disturbance was another instance which shows that the Bazar people were also influenced by the non-cooperation. Monday was the established market day. But a new bazar purported to be a rival of the Teliapara garden bazar had been started to be held on Fridays at Simna.²² C S Greegnell, Manager, Teliapara T. E. ascribed the change of days to non-cooperators who wished to cause trouble in his garden. He wrote to B A. Corbett, the Political Agent of the State for consideration of the Durbar to fix the market day of Simna other than Friday.²³ In response to the letter of the Political Agent, the Dewan B. K. Sen informed that the measures were being taken to persuade the promoters of the new bazar to desist from holding any bazar at Simna on Friday. The Sadar Collector, Akhil Chandra Majumdar was asked to go there and investigate the causes of trouble. Under such exciting circumstances the Collector interviewed all kinds of peasant-sellers of Simna bazar. He found that some vegetable and fruit vendors like satyaram Tripura, Gopal Chandra Tripura, Rajaram Sardar Tripura and Mahanta Tripura Chaukidar, who were interviewed were the participants from the tribal community in the non-cooperation Simna bazar disturbance.²⁴ The Collectors' effort to stop unauthorised Friday market at Simna had failed in his attempt.²⁵

The Minister's narrative - Late P. K. Dasgupta, the Minister of Tripura's narrative revealed some major non-cooperation activities from 26th May to 3rd June, 1921.²⁶ A resolution of boycotting Agartala bazar was taken at Akhaura under the presidency of Babu Dhriudera Nath Datta of Comilla Bar. One Naziruddin Ahmed of Taragaon who was the dismissed police officer of the State and pleader Hrishikesh Roy of Nabinagar Bar exchanged hot words with the Minister. They including pleader Mahim Chandra Das and others were the brain behind the agitation. The Maharaja's regular supply of fish was stopped. The Naib who purchased fish for Rajbari on 30th May, 1921 was threatened with assault and his fish was looted.²⁷ A boat could not be obtained

for the Minister of Mogra to go to Agartala as the local non-cooperators would not allow the boatman to go. The State was in great difficulty for want of kerosine, petrol etc.²⁸

Reports from Divisional Collectors :- Late Hem Kumar Chaudhury, the Collector of Kailashahar, reported the difficulty in obtaining provisions from Sham-Sernagar to Kailashahar. The non-cooperators of Sylhet persuaded the grocers of Balaganj to stop the sending of food stuff in Tripura also. The Collector of Belonia reported an agitation on the Noakhali border urging people not to take out permits for export of forest produce from the Division.²⁹ In Kailashahar Division, non-cooperation meetings were held in Ganganagar, Muktail eand Manikbhandar Mouzas. The said mou as were within the seven miles from the British tea gardens.³⁰ These meetings were contrary to the Minister's directive which was forwarded to the Divisional Officers, Belonia, Sonamura, Udaipur, Kailashahar for prohibiting such meetings by injunctions. Though in some of these meetings harmless doctrines were preached, yet "there was a dangerous innuendo at the bottom of all such Vapourings."³¹

The anxiety of the Durbar :- The whole situation was causing extreme difficulty and anxiety and the Durbar were compelled to ask for early assistance from the Imperial Government. The propaganda work and its results had been very acute. The authority of law and order seemed to be dormant in the midst of the general excitement caused by the non-cooperation movement and people had begun to count upon the authority more of the agitators than of the Government.³²

Review :- Tripura cannot claim the credit of independent movement as it was the percolation from the British districts of Noakhali, Comilla, Sylhet.³³ But a wave of unprecedented enthusiasm swept Tripura, Men, Women, Hindu, Muslim, middle peasant and labouring classes showed the willingness to endure hardships. The induction and involvement of the tribes gave the movement a new orientation. It took the all India character of mass movement in stead of elitist emphasis. What really caused the British anxiety was the mass awakening in all parts of India.³⁴ Here anti-imperialist struggle was its central focus ; but the local government had to incur loss in revenue and to face untoward scene as it was the co partner of the British government and the independence of Tripura was really a myth and not a reality. Locating the spots of action, one will find that the movement was concentrated in such places where rail or motor link with the adjacent

ish districts was readily available. That the movement was radical and uneven was due primarily to the geo-political situation of the state. Tripura was an outlying princely State, seldom led by top leaders ; but the movement instilled the spirit of re- nce and all pro-British and Pro-Maharaja sentiments were vily shaken. The Gandhian call had conquered the fear of this l Raj.³⁵ Viewed, in this historical perspective the importance he movement is immense.

Notes & References

R. C., Majumdar, H. C. Raychaudhuri and Kalikinkar Datta, *An Advanced History of India*, Macmillan India Limited, Madras, Bombay, Calcutta, Delhi, Reprinted 1982. Page-971. Bipan Chandra, Amales Tripathi, Barun De, *Freedom Struggle*, Sixth reprint 1983, New Delhi, Page-135.

K. D. Menon, (ed) : *Tripura District Gazetteers*, Agartala, 1975, Page -121.

Satyendranath Majumdar recounts the incident of strike call in Brajendra Kishore Institution, Belonia. He is a revolutionary and fled from British India at that time. (Interview conducted with him on 24.4.1986 at Belonia, Tripura).

Report on the *Administration of the Tripura State for 1920-21* A. D. Agartala Sl. no. 172, Page-30.

B. no. 1

Sl. no. 15 : 1921 A.D. Political Deptt. Khilafat and Non-Cooperation Movement, Tripura Secretariat Archives, Agartala. Naib Daroga, L. Bhattacharjee's letter dt. 14.10.21 A. D. addressed to Superintendent of Police for appropriate action.

It was a socio-cultural organisation of Calcutta established to popularise Gandhian ideals of self-help through village reconstruction programme among the womenfolk. In pursuance of this programme Basanti Debi, the wife of C.R. Das, came to Belonia sometimes in 1921. This fact is pointed out by Mr. Bhupendra Datta Gupta when an interview was conducted with him at Belonia on 11.7.1986. Also Mr. Asoke Chaudhury edited *Paribartan*, 27th Aug. - 2 Sept. 1986 Calcutta, "Tathyakosh" by Smt. Maitreyi Mukhopadhyaya, Page -41.

File, Tripura Secretariat Archives. Op. cit. letter of late Chandramadhab Datta Gupta, Asstt. Secretary Bar Library.

Belonia. "Pleaders did not attend the court There was a tendency to participate in the boycott as a result of discussion of the issue of non-cooperation among the nearby British." (Emphasis mine) (Unpublished).

9. Order on the Confidential Report of the Superintendent of Police, Tripura, No. 680 dt. 20th June, 1921, Tripura Secretariat Archives, op. cit.
10. Notice of the Sammilani-Seha no. 105 dt. 12.2.31 T. E. It was signed by Abdul Mutahir Majumdar as Secretary and Abdul Gani Majumdar as officiating president in absence of Satish Chandra Chaudhury. (Unpublished).
11. K. D. Menon, : *Tripura District Gazetteers*, op. cit, Page-123.
12. Report on the Administration of Tripura. op. cit. Page-30.
13. Resolution on the Administration Report of Tripura for the year 1329 T. E. (1919-20 A.D.) Column i), Agartala.
14. Prabhat Kumar Mukhopadhyaya, *Bharate Jatiya Andolan* (Freedom Movement in India), Calcutta, 1367 B. E. Ist edn. Page -164.

The incident is not duly treated in Dr. Pattabi Sitarayama's book, *The History of Indian National Congress*, (Vide Jogesh Chandra Chattopadhyaya's book, *Swadhinatar Sandhane* (In Search of Freedom), Calcutta, 1977, Page-119-124.

15. Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India- 1885-1947*, Calcutta, Reprint 1984, Page-219.
16. Minister's Confidential letter No. 566/1-16 to the Political Agent Agartala, dated 11th June, 1921 Bi/S 15 Tripura Secretariat Archives. op. cit.
17. Resolution on the Administration Report of Tripura, 1919-20 A. D. op. cit.
18. Jogesh Chandra Chattopadhyaya, *Swadhinatar Sandhane* (In Search of Freedom), Calcutta, 1977. Page-220-221.

The Non-cooperation preached the fighting spirit in the early labour and peasant movements of Tripura. It was the direct sequel of the Chandpur incident of 1921. Some of the Assam tea-garden labourers being failed to resist the torture of the British police and military, entered into the villages of northern and western Tripura. This fact is corroborated by Mr. Biren Datta, the founder of the Tripura Communist League. He came to know this later when he started his wanderings among this class and formed organisational base. What is significant was that their settlement gave an impetus

to the plain and hill tribes and the Bengali-speaking peasants. Thus the class and freedom struggle of Tripura was not due mainly to some patriotic revolutionaries alone but to this asaid class also. (Biren Datta, *Amar Smritite Tripurar Communist and Ganatantrik Andolaner Pathabhumika* 1900-1952, Calcutta, 1982, Page -21).

19. Letter from Mahim Chandra Thakur, 1920-23. B 50/S 10 Tripura Secretariat Archives, Agartala.
20. Suprakash Roy :— *Bharater Krishak-Bidroha O Ganatantrik Sangram* (India's Peasant Revolt and Democratic Struggle), Calcutta, April 1980, Page-15 (Introduction).
Kailas Chandra Singha, ; *Rajmala*, (Chronicle of Kings) Page-127.
21. Superintendent of Police's Confidential letter No. 1161 dt. 26.11.47 A.D. to Hon'ble Chief Minister. F. No. 5-2 B61/S6 Tripura Secretariat Archives.
22. Revenue Superintendent J. M. Sen's letter to the Collector in reply to latter's query dt. 5.2.31 T. E. Seha no 958/8-2, B 1/S 15 Tripura Secretariat Archives. op. cit.
23. Political Agent, B. A. Corbett's requesting letter no. 643-P/VII-4 dt. 25.4.1921 A.D. to the Minister of Tripura. Tripura Secretariat Archives. (B 1/S 15) op. cit.
24. The Sadar Collector reported his findings to the Minister-in-charge, Political Deptt. dt. 14.2.31 T. E. B 1/S 15 Tripura Secretariat Archives. op. cit.
25. The Sadar Collector's Confidential D. O. No. 1579 dt. 3. 3. 31 T. E. B 1/S 15, Tripura Secretariat Archives. op. cit. The same Collector felt that the Friday Hat would not be stopped unless a prohibitive order was passed from the Minister's Office ; "But in that case cur Monday market also is likely to be dissolved, and the local officers and State-Subjects will be put to difficulty".
26. The Minister's Confidential Note to the Political Agent no. 566/1-16 dt. 11.6.1921 A. D. B 1/S 15, Tripura Secretariat Archives. op. cit.
27. K.D. Menon, : *Tripura District Gazetteers*, op. cit. Page-122]
28. The Minister, P. K. Dasgupta's letter, B 1/S 15, Tripura Secretariat Archives. op. cit.
29. The Minister's letter to the Political Agent B 1/S 15, Tripura Secretariat Archives. op. cit.
30. The Divisional Officer's Letter no. 358/19-1 dt. 31.2.31 T.E. B 1/S 15, Tripura Secretariat Archives op. cit.

31. K. D. Menon : *Tripura District Gazetteers* op. cit Page-122.
32. Late P. K. Dasgupta, the Minister passed his comment after the observation of the mass feeling in the State. His letter no. 566/1-16 dt. 11th June, 1931 T. E. Tripura Secretariat Archives. op. cit.
33. K. D. Menon, : *Tripura District Gazetteers*. Page-121, op. cit.
34. Bipin Chandra, Tripathi, Amales ; Barun : *Freedom Struggle*, op. cit. Page- 137.
35. Tarapada Lahiri, *Bharater Swadhinata Samgram O Sampradayik Rajniti* (Freedom Struggle of India and Communal Politics). vol. I, 1st edn. January, 1986, Calcutta, Page-240, 243-245.