

Review Article

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The Civil Disobedience Movement (1930) in Balasore District and Political Tremor in the Princely State of Nilgiri.*

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Abstract

The Civil disobedience Movement in Balasore District deeply influenced the politics of Nilgiri. This Princely state was situated in the eastern sides of the Balasore District. In this movement a number of people from Nilgiri had participated. Gradually, the people of this princely states got unlighted and opposed illegal collection tax like *Bethi*, *Begari*, *Magan* and *Sikar*. In order to further compound the opposition, a *Yuba Sakha Samiti* was formed at Ajodhya, to provide a platform against the autocratic rule of Raja. Due to Gandhian movement in Balasore District, the democratic movement proliferated in the Balasore District. After the formation of congress ministry in 1937 in Orissa, the congress took active participation in Nilgiri affairs. Mr Banamali Das, Balaram Raj and Prana Bandhu Parida, led popular movement against the Raja. To further popularize the movement, the Prajamal presented 24 demands to Raja. But due to intervention of Bazalgatte, the Raja forced to concede most of the demands. The fulfillment of demands raised the confidence of the popular struggle. The most significant contribution of Civil Disobedience movement was the fermentation of popular movement in Nilgiri which led to the strengthening of the movement and amalgamation of Nilgiri in 1948 with Union of India.

Keywords

The Chamber of
Indian Princes,
Ajodhya,
Yuva Sakha Samiti,
Nilgiri Atchyachar,
Prajamandal
Ashram.

*Nilgiri is a small princely state in the Balasore District, Odisha. It was first state which merged with Indian Union in 1948.

Introduction

Growth of nationalism in the princely states of India was another spectacular incident in the history of National movement. Abysmal economic Political, and social conditions prevailed in most of the states. Peasants were subjugated, land revenue and taxation were

disproportionate and unbearable, education was retarded, health and other social service were backward and freedom of the press and other civil rights scarcely existed. In several states, serfdom, slavery and forced labour flourished. The state revenue was utilized for selfish and luxurious life styles of the ruler.

In order to counteract the rising tide of Indian nationalism, the British authority had formed the Chamber of Indian Princes in 1921. It was created to enable the Princes to meet and discuss under British guidance on the matters of common interest. So, the Chamber of Princes worked as a bulwark against the growth Indian nationalism.

The rise and growth of nationalism in Balasore district, whose headquarter was only 15 miles away from Raj Nilgiri, had its outcome among the people of Nilgiri. Consequently, from the beginning of Gandhian Nationalist movement, some people of Nilgiri got involved in it. Khirodananda Devagoswami, Laxmidhar Mishra and Pranabandhu Agasti, from different places of Nilgiri participated in Non-cooptation movement. With the passing of times, increasing March of Gandhian mass movement gave new dimension to the people resentment against the unjust & oppressive rule of ruler of Nilgiri. Consequently, it was found that some conscious people whose number increased with the passage of time fought against the Rajs's oppression and took part in the nationalist movement. So far as congress was concerned, its promising leader from Balasore Harekrushna Mahatab took keen interest in the Nilgiri movement from the beginning of Gandhian mass movement.

By 1930, the revolutionary consciousness had further deepened in Nilgiri. The people who had agitated against injustice of the ruler also took part in the Civil disobedience movement against the British Raj. An emotional link had been established between the agitation against the oppressive native chief and the movement against the British Raj. In the spectacular Salt Satyagraha of 1930, which took place in the seashore of Balasore, a number of people from Nilgiri took part. The people of Nilgiri, who took part in Salt Satyagraha, were Bipra Charan Mohapatra, Daitari Prasad Rath, Gajendra Nath De, Hadibandhu Raj, Jagannath Rana, Kailash Chandra Parida, Kashinath Mohapartra, Maheswar Pradhan, Nemai Charan Chowdhary, Pranabandhu Agasti and Pranabandhu Parida and Golak Nath Dey .Golak Nath Dey was a pleader

by profession. His pleader license was cancelled by the High court for his participation in revolutionary activities. He was the Secretary of Balasore District Congress Committee and also the member Pradesh Congress Committee. He volunteered the first batch of Salt Satyagraha on 1930.

The first movement against the autocratic feudal Chief of Nilgiri dates back to 1928, when thousand of tenants left the State of Nilgiri for Balasore protesting against the system of *Sikar* and *Bethi*. Their main grievances were that the Chief was again and again compelling them to render *Bethi* or forced labour for the Kheda or elephant catching operation. Their grievance was collection of Magan for the marriage of Chief's daughter. In this unrest the congress workers sympathized with the fugitive rebels by providing them with food and shelter. Dr Mahatab published anonymous booklet called *Nilgiri Atyachar* and distributed it, which raised the ferment among the people. He also wired to C.F. Andrews, the Christian Philanthropist and missionary to intervene in Nilgiri affairs. Andrews visited Nilgiri in February 1928. Through the arbitration of Andrews and intervention of political department a settlement was arrived at and the fugitives returned to their houses.

Hadibandhu Raj of Ajodhya played an important role in this movement. Hadiabndhu Raj was sentenced for two years imprisonment by Raja of Nilgiri on the fabricated goat theft case to discourage and punish him for playing an important role in this movement. Dr Mahatab has made the following eulogistic remark about the movement, "To leave homes and to go on self exile as a technique of Satyagraha, was widely known all over India after Bardoli Satyagraha of 1930. The people of Nilgiri and Orissa may justly feel proud of the fact that they learnt and implemented the technique earlier".

But the Civil Disobedience movement in Balasore District profoundly influenced the politics of Nilgiri. An Association called Yuva Sakha Samiti was formed in 1931 at Ajodhya. This association

undertook the programme like Harijan Upliftment and Literary campaign, which pointed to the impact of Gandhian constructive and reform activities. The Samiti also organized common dinner in the locality, where both high and low class people ate together so as to give a clear message against the casteism. The most interesting dimension of the dinner was the ration was contributed by villagers itself. This dinner itself ensured a community gathering and organized discussion on different themes ranging from national movement to the rotten administration of the State. This activity of Ajudhya invited the wrath of the rulers, which resulted in the conviction of a few of its activists. The ruler of Nilgiri proceeded against Hadibandhu Raj and others for spreading activities of Harijan Upliftment on the ground of violation of ancient custom and usages and pressuring the Harijan Communities not to support such programmes.

In a meeting at Ajudhya (1st May 1938) a group of leaders like Hadibandhu Raj, Maheswar Pradhan, Pranabandhu Agasti and Banamali Das (the first being involved earlier in the Samiti right since Civil Disobedience movement and thus convicted and the fourth one was a student activist doing his matriculation) address to a gathering of 200 odd people and announced the formation of Yuva Sangha. The meeting essentially preached the cult of congress and resolved to send out volunteers to villages in the state to carry on propaganda. The major demands of the congress were (a) popular control of state Budget (b) reduction of land revenue (c) right to cut timber from state forest (d) introduction of prohibition on the state. In fact behind the reorganization of Sangha, the moral and ideological support of local intelligentsia and the rural rich, apart from the support of the congress activists of the province and particularly of Balasore district, were very much apparent there and it can be termed very crucial from the point of sustenance of the movement. In order to curb the popular movement in the formative phase in the State, the king asked for prior approval of the administration. Apprehending repression from the

king, the headquarter of the Samiti was shifted to Alasuni, which was beyond the boundary of Nilgini. On 23rd May, 1938 Pranabandhu Agasti, Giridhar Panda and Chitta Mishra were arrested on the ground of giving seditious speeches. In order to further curb the movement, the ruler also arrested the organizer of Samiti. But the arrested leaders went on hunger strike inside the jail protesting against the harsh treatment meted out to them.

The popular movements in Nilgiri attracted the attention of Congress in the Province. A Pradesh Congress Committee meeting was organized on 9th June 1938 at Cuttack which sympathized with the people of Nilgiri. This was called Nilgiri protest meeting. Dr. Harekrushna Mohatab and Pradesh Congress Committee firmly committed to the cause of Nilgiri.

The Prajamandal Samiti started functioning from 1938. Sri Krushna Chandra Mohanty became the president of the Committee. This association established close rapport with the congress. The congress leaders and District Congress Committee of Balasore regularly came to Ashram to encourage and empathize with the leaders of Nilgiri.

Due to the influence of Balasore Congress Committee and Gandhian reformist trend, association demanded welfare measures to be introduced by the state. On 22nd April 1933 the States People's Committees reached Balasore to conduct an inquiry in to the discontent of Nilgiri. In this meeting Sarangadhar Das asked the people to violate prohibition order of the ruler. This encouraged the tribal people to support the movement with bows and arrows. But the state dismissed Purnachandra Naik, who was a teacher, for participating in the movement. The rent free tenures of some Brahmins were withdrawn for their support to the movement.

The effect of the congress creed and Gandhian struggle reached Patna (near Ajodhya). Here the people opposed the payment of exorbitant revenue imposed by the ruler Sarangar Das advised the tenants to remain firmly nonviolent. He further pointed out that the tenants would get full support of the congress if they follow the congress creed. The meeting gave a call to observe Nilgiri Day on 27th July 1938.

After the formation of Congress Ministry, the movement in Nilgiri received further momentum. The broad supports of the congress to popular movement often lead to the poor coordination of the state administration with the police. Besides, Ministry's refusal to provide police assistance to the Nilgiri State also strengthened such thinking on the part of the administration. As a result, the state police often suspected the District police and thus kept aloof from them in providing information or planning joint strategy against the movement. Due to the strategy of the congress, the ruler recognized the Prajamandal on 29th July 1938. According to agreement, it was decided to allow the formation of an elected Prjaamandal for redressal of popular grievances and cancellation of fines imposed on the leaders till their cases were settled. This provided short lived lull in the Prajamandal movement.

By this time the Prajamandal Ashram at Alasuni became a nerve centre of political activity. It was the official headquarters of Prajamandal Movement. The congress leaders frequented the Ashram and gave necessary advices to the Prajamandal workers. For the safety of Ashram more than 60 volunteers were camping in this centre. For the sake of safety and security lathis and axes were reserved in the camp. Daily news Rana Dak (War Cry) was published. It was edited by Goura Chandra Das. He was Secretary Balasore District Congress Committee. He was regularly coming to the centre and coordinating with the Prajamandal workers in the state. The Ashram was regularly receiving letters from Mahatab, Sarangadhar Das and Radhanath Rath. The volunteers were receiving secret Dak from Khantapara Police station.

Regular training of volunteers was another programme of the Ashram. Drills were regularly conducted under expert guidance. In the evening hours processions were started, exhibiting lathis, bows, arrows, congress flags and giving anti royal slogans. Gradually branches of Ashram were extended to Ajodhya, Iswarpur and Nilgiri. Similarly, a primary congress committee was formed on 1st Aug 1938 at Garimal. Its objectives were further congress organization in the State. Gradually, the Ashram was used to operate rural level congress units initially being afflicted to the Prajamandal.

With the march of time, the Prajamandal became a strong centre and exerted pressure on Raja to fulfill several demands. The Garimal Ashram remained a nerve centre for mobilization of popular demands. Banamali Das became an emerging leader and popularized the movement in the state. But Raja arrested him and wanted to sabotage the popular movement in the state. So massive demonstration were organized to protest the arrest of popular leaders. On 8th Aug 1938 Purina Chandra Naik led a peaceful demonstration shouting- Nilagiri Atyaachar Dhwanasa Hau (Down with oppression of Nigiri) Matali Raja Dhwanasa Hau (Down with drunken Raja) Biswasghatak Dhansw Hau (down with traitor).

Batches of volunteers were dispatched on subsequent days. But satyagrahis were forced out of Nilgiri with brutal lathi charge and elephant attack. On 9th August 1938, Arjun Jena was brutally assaulted and got injured along with many others. In fact after every suppression, the state administration was facing increasing number of satyagrahis on the next days. After 9th August 1938, the administration had to take recourse to firing and terror by letting loose elephants to capture satyagrahis. However, the (District Congress Committe) D.C.C, which was closely monitoring the situation, advised the satyagrahis to remain non-violent.

In order to check further deterioration of situation, Mahatab initiated a negotiation between Durbar and Prajamandal. The Prajamandal presented 31 demands to the Durbar. But the Durbar agreed to concede 24 demands and immediately rejected 7 demands. This attitude of Durbar aggravated the explosive situation in the state. Now the Prajamandal decided to leave the state while intensifying protest against the Durbar. However, the crises were averted due to intervention by the political agent Bazalgattee. The Raja was forced to concede most of the demands by 28th Aug 1938. By October 1938, the ruler agreed to concede 6 out of 7 demands. However, the demand on Budget and measures of responsible Govt was partly conceded. The agreement raised the prestige and popularity of the congress in the State.

The growth and spread of nationalistic movement in Nilgiri State was a significant event in the history of freedom movement in India. From the Civil Disobedience Movement to Quit India Movement we see rapid march of nationalism and growing participation of people in anti durbar movement. Formation Yuva Sakha Samit at Ayodhya, worked as new platform against the Durbar. Moreover several leaders came forward to lead the popular movement in Nilgiri. They were, Hadibandh Raj, Pranabandhu Agasti, Laxminarayan Mishra, Kailash Chandra Mohanty. These leaders received their political training during this period. These leaders played most heroic role against the Durbar, during the integration of Nilgiri in 1947. Moreover the role played by Congress and its leaders like H.K Mahatab and Sarangar Das helped the people of Nilgiri to realize their dreams.

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