

Non-Cooperation and Khilafat Movement during Colonial Days in Barak Valley of Assam: A Historical Study.

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ABSTRACT: *The Middle Class played significant role to follow the Gandhian call and techniques during Non-co-operation and Khilafat Movements. Gandhian movement left a great impact in the valley. The contiguous area of Barak Valley plains had a similar response to the Gandhian call during the period of 'Non-cooperation Khilafat' Movement in 1920-21. When Assam was upgraded to the status of a Governor's province in 1921, the Barak valley was already a part of Assam. The Barak Valley was populated largely by the Bengalees. The holy alliance between the Congress and Khilafatists served a common anti-British platform to outwit the colonial policy of 'Divide and Rule'.¹ The year 1920 was observed as the Khilafat Day, marked by hartals, prayer, meeting and renunciation of titles and honorary posts in numerous places. The leaders who played a dynamic role were mainly Government officials, small businessman, teachers, doctors, vakeels who belonged to the Middle Class family. According to official sources, these two areas like Barak valley and Sylhet were the adjoining districts of British Bengal. The leaders of Barak Valley carried these influences and adopted a similar process of movement in this region. The modified resolutions of the all India Khilafat leaders were observed throughout the Surma Valley with hartals and meetings. In Assam, Middle Class members both Hindus and the Muslims equally responded to the call of the Khilafatists. Surma Valley including, Sylhet, Karimganj, Nilambazar, Habiganj, Maulavi Bazar set an example during this movement. The school teachers' active participation was also observed in Karimganj.²*

KEY WORDS: *Khilafat, Gandhian, Barak Valley, Non co-operation.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Muslim Community of the valley also actively joined this movement to popularise the programme. The leaders toured from Sylhet to Silchar to spread the ideology of Khilafat Movement. Maulana Abdul Mushabbir and Maulana Rasid of Sylhet visited Cachar to conduct the programmes in favour of the movement. In 1919, Cachar Khilafat Committee was established by the President Maulana Pir Muhammad and he had also established their Head Office at Madhurband, Silchar. The mainstream Khilafat leaders in Cachar were Maulana Pir Muhammad Yakub, Khan Sahib Rasid Ali Laskar, Maulana Mahashin Ali, Maulana Umar Ali, Maulana Tbaqor Ali Barlaskar, Maulana Umed Ali, Maulana Ibrahim Ali and Maulana Uchman Ali. They all belonged to middle class groups. They directly maintained a relation with the all India mainstream leaders of the country. A group of leaders from the Hindu community in Cachar also came into forefront. They were Babu Mahim Chandra Biswas, Dr. Nagendra Nath Datta, Dinanath Datta, Gandadayal Dixit, and Sanat Kumar Das. Sanat Kumar Datta Choudhury, Ashok Kumar Chanda, third son of Kamini Kumar Chanda, had a chequered career and retired from the service as the Auditor and Controller General of India. He along with Satindra Mohan Dev and Jatindra Mohan Dev Laskar supported the Muslim brethren and jointly fought against the government. These personalities played a leadership role. A group of ninety thousand volunteers were raised in the district under the leadership of Satindra Mohan Dev and Md. Gulsar Ali Mazumdar who were the captain and secretary respectively while Maulana Alim Uddin, Md Hamidur Raza, Maulavi Khured Aland Munshi Manshad Ali were also the organisers of the volunteer force.³

¹ Ranjit Dey, "Non-co-operation Khilafat Movement : Spectrum of Protest in Barak Valley and Tripura" *Journal of Assam University*, Vol.-II, No.1, January 1997, pp. 11-19.

² S P Dey and A C Bhuyan (ed.), *op. cit.*, n-4, pp. 4-5.

³ Azad, (Bengali Weekly), 15th August, Silchar, 1974.

II. AN OVERVIEW OF MOVEMENT

The programme of this movements was related to five fold boycott viz. boycott of (1) Titles and Darbars, (ii) Schools and Colleges, (ii) Courts, (iv) Councils and (v) Foreign goods. In a later phase non-payment of taxes and the struggle for attainment of Swaraj were also included in the programme.⁴In 1920, the fourth Surma Valley Political Conference was held at Karimganj. Bipin Chandra Pal, President of the conference strongly urged upon the spirit advocated by the propagators of the movement. Shrish Chandra Datta, principal organiser of the conference put additional impetus to the movement. Both Hindu and Muslim jointly organised the Non-cooperation Movement. In Silchar and Sylhet, many members of the Bar like Satish Chandra Deb, Khirode Chandra Deb, gave up their practice and other renowned political leaders refused the Government titles. Kamini Kumar Chandra had already refused to accept the title honoured by the Government. Students from various institutions boycotted the Government schools and colleges. The nationalist leaders of Cachar branded the Silchar Government High School as 'Golam Khana' and called upon the students to boycott the school. Spontaneous boycott of schools both from guardian level to students clearly stated that it was a wide spread movement in Barak Valley. The hearty response of all classes, under the shadow of middle class leadership played a dynamic role to mould the public opinion of the masses against the Governments brutality. In this political juncture Arun Kumar Chanda established a National School at Silchar. Kamini Kumar Chanda and other leaders started a new school for the girls called Dinanath Nabakishore Balika Vidyalaya better known as the Swadeshi High School at Silchar. Shyama Charan Deb, the Secretary Cachar District Congress Committee and was earlier a teacher in the National School in Sylhet joined as the first Headmaster of this school. The wife of Shyama Charan Deb, Saudamani Devi joined the Mission Girls High School as a teacher. Some native leaders like Shrish Chandra Datta along with other nationalist leaders took an active part in Surma valley's political movement at that time. Tea gardens were also centres of activities of revolutionary terrorists. For the growth of economic stability Cachar 'Co-operative Apex Bank' was established in 1921. During the period of Non-co-operation Movement, the districts of Cachar and Sylhet remained as before, under the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee.

III. AN HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF MOVEMENT

The prominent leaders who organised the Non-co-operation Movement in the valley were, Kamini Kumar Chanda, Shyama Charan Deb, Sanat Kumar Das, Sibendra Kumar Biswas, Prakash Chandra Bhattacharjee, Gangadayaal Dixit and others. In Karimganj, leaders like Satish Chandra Deb, Shrish Chandra Datta, Radha Benode Das, Kshirode Chandra Deb and in Sylhet Basanta Kumar Das, Brojendra Narayan Choudhury. All these personalities showed their leadership capabilities and encouraged a new spirit with the help of the ideology of Non-co-operation Movement. They also boycotted all foreign goods including liquor and opium shops, foreign cloths and used cheap Khadi clothes.

The women also played a noteworthy role in the socio-political field during the period of Non-co-operation Movement. The renowned women like Sibsundari Devi wife of Kamini Kumar Chanda and Saudamani Devi wife of Shyama Charan Deb started a new venture for the social awakening of women in Cachar. The women workers of the Congress Committee formed an association, called The Silchar Mahila Samiti and published the newspaper Vijoyini. In rural areas panchayat and Kisan Sabha were also founded. The bard Mukanda Das composed songs for the growth of nationalism in the valley. Labour strike in the tea garden was another notable phenomena in the tea garden areas during the time of Non-cooperation Movement.⁵ Hailakandi and the hills remained outside the periphery of this movement.⁶

Gangadayaal Dixit, a cloth merchant of Lakhipur, Deosharan Tripathi and Ramaprasad Choubey and other Trade Union leaders started propaganda in the British tea garden areas to inspire the labourers.⁷ The boycott call had equally appealed to the students of the Surma valley. On January 1921 many students came out from the Murari Chand College, Sylhet. Some of the Non-co-operating vakeels took up as full time worker for political propaganda. Gandhiji's visit to Assam gave an additional impetus to the Congress workers to carry out the Non-cooperation Movement in a more vigorous way. On the whole Gandhiji's visit was a tremendous success.⁸ The middle class lawyers in response to the boycott call suspended their practice in the Surma Valley and took up the organisational work on a full-time basis.⁹ Both Non-co-operation and Khilafat agitation were

⁴ Ranjit Dey, *op. cit.*, n-5, pp. 11-19.

⁵ Azad, (Bengali Weekly), 15th August, 1974, Silchar; S P Sen (ed), *Dictionary of National Biography*, Vol-I, Calcutta, 1922, pp. 259-260.

⁶ Ranjit Dey, *op. cit.*, n-5, pp. 11-19.

⁷ *The Indian Daily* (Newspaper), 30th May, 1921, Calcutta.

⁸ S P Dey, *op. cit.*, n-4, p. 43.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

vigorously pursued in Barak Valley. Political meetings, use of Swadeshi and the cult of Charka which were the gospel of Non-co-operation Movement spread with extraordinary rapidity among the rural people of the valley. Both in Surma Valley and Cachar district (present Barak Valley) nationalist views were carried by two newspapers viz, Janasakti from Sylhet and Surma published from Silchar. The government put heavy pressure to sabotage the activities of this two news papers.¹⁰

IV. CONCLUSION

The Chandpur tragedy also left a deep sensation in Barak Valley. Young volunteers demonstrated and picketed all over Cachar. Gangadayaal Dixit inspired the labourers to withdraw from the tea garden works. It hampered the interests of the tea garden planters economically. At this critical juncture in August 1921, Mahatma Gandhi came to Silchar accompanied by the Ali Brothers, Muhammad Ali and Shaukat Ali. They stayed at Chanda Bhavan as a guest of Kamini Kumar Chanda. A mammoth procession was organised by the Khilafat volunteers along with Gandhiji and Muhammad Ali, which covered all the important roads of Silchar town. At Fatak Bazar, Gandhiji and Ali Brothers delivered their extempore speeches. In this meeting 10,000 people attended. Their goal was to achieve Swaraj and Hindu-Muslim unity. Kamini Kumar Chanda and Shrish Chandra Datta and others also addressed the meeting. Gandhi and Muhammad Ali and Begum Saheba then addressed the women of Silchar at the theatre hall. The visit of Gandhiji's at Silchar already created a great enthusiasm among common people of the society. The communication gap between the local leaders and masses were also stronger than earlier. They tried to gain mass political support by the mobilisation of the common people. Gangadayaal was sentenced to imprisonment. A group of leaders of Cachar were sentenced to imprisonment which included Shyama Charan Deb, Dharendra Kumar Gupta, Pekuram Kanu, Satindra Mohan Deb, Jatindra Mohan Dev Laskar, Imran Mia Barbhuiya, Suryamoni Roy, Jafar Ali Barbhuiya, Mabarak Ali Barbhuiya, Rezam Ali, Munshi Golam Robbani, Sana Kumar Das, Md Tabarak Ali Barlaskar, Md Alimuddin, Md Nur Ali, Hazi Suruj Ali, Munshi Abbas Ali, Md Usman Ali, Md Ibrahim Ali, Hazi Khushed Ali, Munshi Shikandar Ali, Gulzar Ali Mazumdar, Basarat Ali Mazumdar, Munshi Mansur Ali, Maulavi Umar Ali, Md Mahsin Ali, Md Mauzraf Ali laskar and Masraf Ali Choudhury. During the period of Non-co-operation, Khilafat Movement collective fines were imposed on the villagers of Kalain, Barkhola, Bhuribail, Udharband, and Banskandi. In 1921, Assam was upgraded to the status of a governor's province. The new province, as provided in the "Government of India Act. 1919" had a legislative council consisting of the members of the executive council nominated by the Governor and the members were elected by the people also. The council were, therefore, manned by the European civilians and the moderates mostly title holders. From Cachar district, Raibahadur Romoni Mohan Das, Rai Bahadur, Bipin Chandra Deb Laskar and Khan Saheb Rasid Ali Laskar were the members. Bipin Chandra Deblaskar, Romoni Mohan Das, Rasid Ali Laskar were elected as the member of Assam Legislative Council from Cachar district. Middle class leaders played a very positive role in the Assam legislative Council.¹¹ They changed their role and sent their leaders inside the administration to remove the difficulties which had been created by the Government itself.

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¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

¹¹ *The Bengalee* (Weekly), 30th November, 1926, Calcutta; *Ibid*, 2nd July, 1926 ; *Ibid*, 21st November, 1926