



Quit India Movement in Manbhum: The Role of Satyagrahis in Selected Police Stations

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Abstract

The young blood to old women, every single person from all over India joined the Quit India Movement in 1942. Along with the Santals, Sabors, Kherias, Bhumijis, all the tribals, the residents of all classes of villages and cities, shoulder to shoulder, sacrificed themselves in front of the British bullets. Such a big awakening of the people had never happened before. This was the call of every human being to free the motherland from the shackles of oppression. All Congress institutions, meetings and committees were declared illegal by the British government. On August 10, all the leaders were arrested. The 'Shilpashram' was surrounded by the police. Since there was an arrest warrant against the Congress leaders, the residents of the 'Shilpashram' were asked to leave the ashram. But they did not agree. As a result, everyone was arrested. Atul Chandra Ghosh was arrested on his way back from attending the Congress session in Mumbai. Organizations like 'Mukti' press, Shilpashram, Nibaranpalli Shilpo-Sangha, Congress office and ashram were confiscated. This order was in force till 1945. Despite widespread arrests, the movement did not subside. Picketing, processions, strikes in educational institutions, occupation of police stations at various places, destruction of government property and so on did not stop. When one group was arrested, another group came forward. According to the official report sent from Bihar to the Government of India in 1942, there were 442 people arrested in Manbhum and 91 went to jail in this movement. The aim of this article is to explain the role played by the erstwhile Congress leadership and workers of different parts of district Manbhum as Satyagrahi in liberating the motherland.

Keywords: *Gandhi, Movement, Manbhum, Congress*

INTRODUCTION

The decision to 'Quit India Movement' of 1942 was taken on 8th August in Bombay city; in a meeting of the highest committee of the National Congress, the 'All India Congress Committee' (Banerjee, 1995). Incidentally, on the morning of 10th August, the police raided the Congress head office and commune 'Shilpashram' located in Telkal Para of Purulia city. In fact, the police had surrounded the 'Shilpashram'. The ashram was confiscated. But the Shilpashram was actually a home for the men and women residents of the ashram. They had no other place to live. As a result, all of them were sent to jail. The ashram was kept under police guard. During the this Movement in Manbhum, when the front-line Congress leadership was all in jail, the responsibility of taking the movement forward fell on the second-line leaders. Nibaran Chandra Dasgupta's daughter Basanti Roy, son Chittabhushan Dasgupta and Atul Chandra Ghosh's youngest son Amal Ghosh; they were given a manifesto from Gandhi on the 'Quit India Movement'. This manifesto had instructions to paralyze the government through the movement. But they had no idea how non-violent or violent this movement would be. This manifesto stated that satyagrahis should go out to die and not to live by their death the nation will survive (Das, 1979). After hearing the news of the destruction



in Bombay and the destruction in North Bihar, they felt that it was necessary to carry out destruction in Manbhum as well. However, they had no idea to what extent this destruction would follow Gandhian principles, that is, to what extent it would be non-violent and to what extent it would be violent.

Bandowan Police Station during The Movement:

The Manbhum Congress Committee decided that all the records, letters and government office papers of the police station, the liquor store should be burnt. All these works should be done by the workers of their respective police stations. On 1st October 1942, all the workers were ordered to reach Purulia and hold Satyagraha at the court and stop government work. The workers started on the road from the next day to implement the program of capturing the Bandowan police station. The response was very good from the workers. The workers felt that something should be done at the Bandowan police station in the midst of the nationwide movement. Accordingly, on the night of 29th September, the Satyagrahis entered the police station in groups and tied up five policemen. They broke the key of the police station, opened the door, gathered all the papers and set the house on fire. A gun and a pistol were burnt in the police station. Then the liquor store and tax office papers were also burnt. By the morning of 30th September, all the work was completed.

Similarly, the Barabazar police station was also burnt. The tired and hungry workers returned to Bandowan after taking food and water. It was decided that the workers of Bandowan and Patamda police stations would burn the Patamda police station together. Accordingly, the day for burning the Patamda police station was fixed as 8th October 1942. Arrangements were made for food and drink for every family in the surrounding villages. Everyone was asked to leave for Patamda in groups. There was a military depot on the side of the road and the Satyagrahis also set it on fire. At that time, a military jeep stopped, the angry crowd started throwing stones at the vehicle. Five jawans started firing in large numbers, due to which the crowd dispersed. Later, after discussion, the Patamda police station siege program was called off. After the burning of the Bandowan police station, widespread police terror started in the villages. Meanwhile, a letter from Basanti Devi, wife of Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das, reached Majhihira village (Roy, 1998). It instructed them to stop the movement and surrender to the police. Accordingly, the agitators appeared at the Bandowan police station at a specified time to be arrested.

In the 1942 movement, three police stations in Manbhum district were set on fire by freedom fighters. Among them, Bandowan police station was one of them; the other two were Barabazar and Manbazar. The 1942 movement also had the greatest impact on South Manbhum. Manbazar, Barabazar, Bandowan, and Patamda police stations were without administration for about seven days. Gunfire was fired at Manbazar police station. Many poor people, agricultural laborers, middle farmers, marginal farmers, and the sole earner of their families who sacrificed their lives in the freedom movement participated in this movement. Such self-sacrifice was seen in Bandowan police station, forgetting the distinction between rich and poor, regardless of caste, religion, or caste. Many teachers who were strong supporters of this movement were punished by having their salaries stopped. Later, with great difficulty, they got their salaries back. Jitan village of Bandowan police station was a leading village in the freedom movement. The main planning of the 1942 movement was done in this village on 23rd September.

In the Quit India Movement of 1942, the patriotic people of South Manbhum left their homes and embarked on a fierce struggle to sacrifice their lives. The imprisonment of about 90 people from one police station proves how they sacrificed their lives for the sake of the motherland, making life and death their less important. The freedom movement of Manbhum could not be linked to the mainstream of the Indian

freedom movement (Majumder, 1996). Aversion to propaganda and lack of awareness together kept this movement hidden from the public eye. The way the people of South Manbhum participated in the 'Quit India Movement', regardless of caste or religion, is no less remarkable than any other police station in India. Bandowan police station is basically an area dominated by non-Aryans. The number of employed people was very small. Basically, agricultural and forest dependent people; Inspired by the ideals of Nibaran Chandra Dasgupta, Atul Chandra Ghosh, and Bibhuti Bhushan Dasgupta, they engaged in a vocal struggle against the British Raj, disregarding family, society, and poverty.

Barabazar Police Station:

Barabazar police station played a vital role in this Movement. In a secret meeting in Jitan village, it was decided that on the night of September 29, 1942, all the police stations in the district should be occupied and the official documents as well as the police stations should be burnt. Accordingly, all the policemen of the police station were tied up. All the documents, tables and chairs of the police station were brought out and set on fire. A hurricane was burning in the room. Their rifles were taken away. The sepoys were also tied up. The guns were thrown into the fire. The satyagrahis were very excited and tried to beat the inspector and sepoys, but on the orders of the satyagrahi Bhim Mahato, the rest of the workers restrained themselves. The office was set on fire. The ganja shop was burnt. All the liquor in the liquor store was brought out and burnt. At that time, news reached that shooting was also going on in Manbazar. All the Satyagrahis set out for Manbazar to find out the real facts. They had secretly met and decided that the railway line should be removed and the telegraph wires should be cut. The entire railway line could not be removed, but the railway line was rendered useless. On the other hand, the Congress opponents, along with the administration, formed a peace committee. They kept an eye on all the movements of the Satyagrahis. They tried to get all the information through spies and then resorted to police torture. This terror first started in Barabazar. Only the frontline leadership of the Congress was spared. The 1942 movement ended with the arrest of Satyagrahis in every village.

Protest against Chharra Aerodrome:

In 1942, World War II was raging. In this situation, the Japanese air raids on the metropolis of Kolkata continued, and a decision was made to build an air base by confiscating several hundred bighas of land on the eastern edge of Charra station in Manbhum district from the farmers of the neighboring villages. Girish Chandra Majumdar, the Manbhum district Congress leader, stood on behalf of the farmers who were uprooted from their land. He was known as 'Guru Gandhi' in the district. The farmers got together. The political atmosphere in the district became heated. The Satyagrahis of the district protested for farmers of Charra. The government also adopted various strategies to oppose them. The District Magistrate of the district himself went to Charra and tried to talk to the farmers and convince them. The farmers demanded that they would not allow the fertile soil to be destroyed. Those who were doing the work of throwing stones on the ground also agreed to the farmers' demand and stopped working. The government had increased the wages of the workers, but even then the workers were not joining the work. At that time, confusion arose about the nature of the movement as the frontline Congress leadership of the district was in prison. After informing the workers of Manbazar and Bandowan, a meeting was held and it was decided that protests, picketing and hoisting of the national flag would be held in each police station. These programs were successfully implemented in Barabazar and Manbazar police stations.

The satyagrahis of the district were informed that all the satyagrahis would have to go to Charra to protest; there would be a satyagraha. Satyagrahis from Pancha, Manbazar, Patamda, and Barabazar reached Charra village. The farmers supported them in large numbers. It was heard that the local workers had stopped work despite the increase in wages. At that time, the government imported workers from Bilaspur. They also refused to work. Satyagraha took place. The



farmers' movement reached a very high level with the support of the satyagrahis (Chakrabarty, 2003). Work had also stopped at the aerodrome base camp. During the World War, India was preparing herself for freedom movement in August simultaneously, even which the police did not know about the planned Quit India Movement of 1942, which was being carried out in great secrecy. Their plan was to keep the police's attention focused on that direction by holding satyagrahas, picketing, and hoisting flags. On September 30, 1942, a decision was taken to burn the police stations in the entire district. The police intelligence department did not get a glimpse of this decision. But the brokers' gang was active in the Charra movement. They kept up a counter-movement with the protesting leadership by luring them to increase the price of land and the wages of the workers. At that time, the main leaders of the Charra movement, Girish Chandra Majumdar and Ram Chandra Adhikari, were imprisoned in Purulia on the same day. This almost ruined the movement. The government convinced the farmers on the condition of paying compensation and increasing wages and made them sign a document saying 'I have received compensation'. The government was also able to keep the brokers' gang under their control with money. The Charra movement ended in failure. Consequently British was succeeded to built aerodrome at Charra.

Manbazar Police Station:

It was decided in the Jitan meeting that all the police stations in the entire district would be attacked and burnt to ashes by the morning of September 30th. The leaders of the Manbazar police station did not inform the general members of the date of the attack on the police station. The reason for this secrecy was that if the date somehow got out, the whole plan would be foiled. Everyone was told that no one should be beaten up, no things should be looted. Everyone along with the team set off for the liquor store in Boro village. Upon reaching the liquor store, the workers were asked to come out with their clothes and belongings. When the workers came out, the liquor store was set on fire. The liquor store was burnt to ashes. Then everyone reached the ganja shop. A Muslim man ran a ganja shop. He came out and said that his family lives in this house. The owner was told to throw all the ganja outside. All the ganja was burnt.

The most brutal incident in Manbhum district during the Quit India Movement took place at Manbazar police station. Two Satyagrahis were martyred in police firing, about 70 were injured, and about 15 were seriously injured. Many activist leaders who had to live their lives paralyzed due to police firing were at Manbazar police station. When the march towards Manbazar started, the Satyagrahis came to know that the police had received information; they were prepared; the activists might die. If anyone was in doubt, they should go back home. Everyone started walking towards Manbazar while chanting 'VandeMataram'. Everyone was instructed to remain non-violent. Some of satyagrahis were the first to march towards Manbazar. On reaching the police station, the inspector and other police personnel were seen standing in a row with rifles in their hands. The Satyagrahis said in unison to the police, "We have no anger against you. You move away. We will burn all the government documents" (Goswami, 2011). The inspector also threatened that if the satyagrahis did not move, they would open fire. When the satyagrahis were trying to enter the police station, the police set entire police station on fire. The police station premises were covered in blood. The villagers were agitated and started throwing bricks at the police station. The people became violent. When the satyagrahis who were injured in the bullets came forward to give them water, the police threatened that they would open fire if they gave them water. Satyagrahis Girish Mahato suffered injuries in both his legs. After a few days, on the orders of the leadership, all of them surrendered to the police and were arrested. After their arrest, the Satyagrahis were first kept in Purulia Jail and then transferred to Bhagalpur Camp Jail. All of the satyagrahis were released from the jail after few years.

Conclusion:



During the Quit India Movement of 1942, police terror was unleashed on Congress workers on a large scale. 'Shilpashram', 'Mukti' press, 'Deshbandhu Press' were confiscated. Almost every frontline Congress leaders and workers of Manbhum district were imprisoned unethically. At that time, the Congress had no program. There was despair all around. The organization was dilapidated. There was a shortage of the basic needs of common people everywhere. There was a wave of theft and robbery in the villages. In South Manbhum, theft and robbery had become a major social problem. The Congress Committee informed the district administration in detail about this plight of the people. In a meeting of the Congress leadership with the administration, it was decided that clothes, sugar, and kerosene would be distributed through cooperatives in all the police stations. The cooperation of the people was needed in this regard. Therefore, a committee was formed with one representative from each village in a gathering of people from different villages. The list was submitted to the administration. According to the census report, it was ordered to distribute the goods through the Civil Supply Control Committee. From there, goods like cloth, sugar, kerosene, salu, makmal etc. were distributed eventually. Even in the interest of overcoming shortage, special distribution arrangements were made during special occasions like marriages and festivals. The British government banned the hoisting of the Indian national flag from 1943 to 1944. The Indian National Congress was busy implementing its constructive programme at that time, so it remained silent against the ban, but the Congress workers of Manbhum could not accept this humiliating ban. The then District Congress President of Manbhum, Atul Chandra Ghosh, had sought permission from Gandhi to launch a Satyagraha movement against the British ban and had started a Satyagraha movement in Manbhum with hundreds of workers.

Even after 78 years of independence, the significant discussion of this mass movement is not very visible. If we analyze it, we see that the number of people from the Mahato community was the largest in the movements. The number of people from the Majhi, Bhumij, and Shabar castes was also not less. A Brahmin, a Vaishnava, a Muslim, a few Tantubay, a few Garai, and two teachers participated in this movement and honored the great profession of teaching. Only those two were employees. The number of well-off farmers was comparatively less. Most of them were middle-scale farmers, marginal farmers, landless, whose profession was collecting forest leaves and fruits, and whose livelihood was agricultural labor. It is surprising how such people left their homes for the great ideal of national liberation. That remote, unconnected region surrounded by rivers, forests, and mountains was Bandowan Thana. It was also called the 'Andaman of Manbhum' in the 80s, about which there was a proverb that 'there are 12 rivers and thirteen canals, and beyond it is Kuilapal'. It is amazing how the message of freedom reached us despite that remoteness. 'Mukti' press and the magazine both were confiscated by the ruler during the movement. Since there was no official source of information, confusion arose later when collecting information from the writings. It is worth noting that Chittabhushan Dasgupta's writings were published in a few issues after the publication of 'Mukti' in 1948. The writings of Padak Chandra Mahato, Bhajahari Mahato and Chunaram Mahato were written in the 1980s for the book 'Swadhinota Andolone Rokte Ranga Manbhum' (Mahato, 1995). Although it was written four decades after the movement, there have been different opinions on knowing the real information.

'Nawagarh Anand Ashram' was built in 1929. 'Anand Ashram' once had a very bright place among the Congress Party's approved ashrams in the district. The founder of the ashram was Shrish Banerjee, a senior leader of Manbhum District Congress. The entire Panchakot royal family cooperated tirelessly in building 'Anand Ashram' in Nawagarh; especially Narendra Lal Singhdeo, Deviprasad Lal Singhdeo and his son Rajkishore Lal Singhdeo are particularly noteworthy in establishing the ashram (Chakrabarty, 2007). Patriotic workers used the ashram as a center for the work of the freedom movement, village formation, epidemic treatment and education. Rajkishore Lal Singhdeo used to bear the largest share of the expenses of running the ashram. The women of the village royal family used to provide food to the freedom



movement workers, i.e. the residents of the ashram. In fact, the ashram was used as a place for political propaganda and a hiding place for revolutionaries. The revolutionaries of Nawagarh played a significant role in the 'Quit India' movement of 1942, which has not been discussed in history in the same way even today. The ashram was a place of political consultation, exchange of views, in short, a framework for revolutionary activities. Stick fighting, knife fighting, and wrestling were taught there at night. Many famous revolutionaries used to stay there in disguise. This 'Anand Ashram' has been subjected to contempt, neglect, and disregard and has now completely turned into dust. Only some of its history can be heard from the elders. The site is currently within the boundaries of Rajna wagarh DPM High School and has been transferred to its ownership. No attempt has been made to preserve the history of this place so far. In 1992, a memorial pillar was built on the main ashram land. The memorial pillar attempts to preserve history by mentioning the names of the imprisoned revolutionaries of 'Naw agarh Anand Ashram'. The memorial pillar, dated March 6, 1992, was unveiled by Jaga bandhu Bhattacharya, a prominent Congress leader of Manbhum. The common people of the area are still eagerly waiting for the government to take the responsibility of developing the Anand Ashram premises as a tourist attraction.

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