

The freedom struggle of Malda district with special reference to Harishchandrapur, 1920-1942

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***Abstract:** The present work attempts a detailed study of the freedom struggle in the Malda District with special reference to Harishchandrapur, 1920-1942. The emergence of Indian nationalism was the result of the major contradictions between the interests of Indian people and those of colonial rule in India. After the establishment of the Indian national congress in 1885, it became institutionalized. It launched an anti-British struggle since its foundation to gain constitutional rights within the colonial state apparatus. This district was greatly influenced by national thinking. To spread the idea of Swadeshi and boycott, many centres and schools were established in Malda as well as at Harishchandrapur. After the arrival of Mahatma Gandhi in Indian politics, the nature of the political agitation changed movement assumed a mass character. All sort of British exploitations became the target of the movement. Since that time, it was not only a struggle for political freedom but also an organized attack on the vested interest in Indian society. Millions of men and women were also mobilized in different ways. Influenced by this, different sections of people of Malda District participated in the freedom struggle and through the Non-Co-operation movement, Civil disobedience movement, Quit India movement it reached the grass-root level.*

***Keywords:** Nationalism, Khadi, Violent, Malda, Harishchandrapur*

Malda, a district of colonial Bengal had been exploratory of the freedom struggle in 1920-1942. This district was formed out of some portions of outlying areas of Purnia, Dinajpur and Rajshahi districts in 1813.¹ The total area of the district is 3733 square kilometers. Malda District is called the gateway of North Bengal.² This District under the study had been the forerunner in the freedom struggles since the Non-Co-operation Movement in 1920-22, the Civil Disobedience in 1930-34 and the Quit India Movement in 1942 what brought the mass people of the district to the district Congress was local issues. The success of the District Congress Committee, as well as the Congress Committee of Harishchandrapur, rested informing the united front

against the colonial rule on the local question of the district.³

The history of the freedom struggle of Malda District is very glorious. Malda District of Bengal where the Nationalist Movement created and sustained social alliances among the contending classes in the context of the anti-imperialist struggle. During the period from the establishment of colonial rule to the attainment of independence, the district witnessed numerous anti-British movements, revolts, demonstrations, protests and criticism of the government in local newspapers. The leaders used the local issues like the establishment of Union Boards in 1919, Bengal Village Self Government in 1919, Swaraj Kutir at Mokdumpur in 1921, and Chowkidari Tax in 1930 to launch the anti-imperialist Movement. Most of them took place in a non-violent way, but in some cases, they turned violent. The revolutionary youths who took part in those activities did not hesitate to harass the police superintendent and even the district magistrate, including the murderers, thinking that they were 'servants of life and death'. All this happened at different times following the course and direction of the national liberation struggle. Sometimes the influence of policy and ideological differences between the national leadership became apparent in the district leadership and the movement gained momentum but the responsibility of organizing and directing different stages of the freedom struggle was in the hands of the district leadership of the National Congress.

Objectives

The present study paper focuses on the following objectives

- To highlight the growth of the national freedom struggle in Malda district.
- As well as to highlight the growth of nationalist struggle at Harishchandra Pur.
- To highlight the contribution of women along with men in the growth of the national freedom struggle in Malda.

Research Methodology:

Quantitative and Qualitative two methods will be followed in dealing with the study. Objectivity will be taken as a tool to study the subject matter. To reveal the truth different sources will be applied in writing the subject matter under study. To reveal the truth course examination will be followed based on the available sources materials. Two types of sources will be applied Primary, Secondary Sources.

Non-Co-operation Movement in Malda District:

In the year 1920 Gandhiji first began the mass movement on an Indian basis for achieving independence (swaraj). In 1920 September a special conference of the Indian National Congress took place in Calcutta under the

chairmanship of Lala Lajpat Roy.⁴ There Gandhiji proposed an all-out non-violent and Non-Co-operation movement against the British government. In that meeting, the proposal of Gandhiji was adopted in spite of the opposition of the leaders like Chittaranjan Das, Lala Lajpat Roy, Madan Mohan Malawi etc. In the same year, the non-violent and Non-Co-operation movement's proposal was adopted at the Nagpur conference of the Indian National Congress in December.⁵

An unprecedented awakening was noticed among all sections of people, female, male, Hindu-Muslim, rich-poor, labor-peasant, etc. It took the form of an all-India mass movement as the Khilafat and the Non-Co-operation movement were merged into one. Due to the Non-Co-operation movement, the Lawyers boycotted the court; students boycotted the schools, colleges and joined the national educational centre all over the country. Liquor shops, foreign goods were boycotted and burnt and people became enthusiastic to use the indigenous goods.⁶

The wave of non-violent and Non-Co-operation movements reached Malda on a wider scale. A large number of people of various social sectors joined in this movement. Due to the Khilafat movement, Hindus and Muslims united by joining in this movement in this district also. Government office boycott, renouncing government title, school, college, court, foreign goods boycott etc also took place in Malda. During the period of the non-cooperation movement in Malda, District Congress adopted the program of volunteer corps training, picketing in front of Liquor shops, foreign goods boycott, establishing cottage industry, etc.⁷

The main centres of non-violent and Non-Co-operation movements in Malda were English Bazar, Old Malda, Harishchandrapur, Chanchal, Kaligram, Nawabganj, Gomastapur, Kaliachak etc. During the period of this movement, the prominent figures of Malda District Congress were Bibhuti Bhushan Chakravorty, Bhupendra Krishna Mishra and Sachindranath Mishra of Harishchandrapur, Charuchandra Sarkar and Manindranath of Kaligram, Rameshchandra Ghosh, Rameshchandra Bagchi and Bipin Bihari Ghosh of English Bazar, Phani Dube and Baroda Dube of Kaliachak, Satishchandra Agarwal and Surya Prasad Behani of Old Malda, Krishnagopal Sen of Bachamari, Debendranath Jhan and Bhupendranath Jhan of Bangitola, Jatindranath Singha of Nagharia.⁸

Boycotting the government-sponsored educational institutions was a significant step of the non-cooperation movement. The boycotting of schools, College i.e, the government-sponsored educational institutions achieved tremendous success in Malda. District Congress leaders appealed to the students to boycott the government-sponsored educational institutions. The students who responded to this appeal were Sachindranath Mishra of Harishchandrapur high school who became engaged in organizing the students in support of the Non-Co-operation movement. Charu Chandra

Sarkar, Manindranath of Kaligram boycotted the government-sponsored educational institutions and joined the Non-Co-operation movement.⁹ Priyanath Ghosh became the pioneer to organize the students of Gomastapur and Nawabganj. The students of the famous educational institution Akrumoni of Malda joined the Non-Co-operation movement. Besides the boycotting of government-sponsored educational institutions, another significant aspect of the Non-Co-operation movement was to establish a national educational institution. In 1921, Jatiya Shiksha Mandir was established at Malda and another national school was established at Kaligram.¹⁰

The chief executive of Malda District Congress Bipin Bihari Ghosh joined with professor Binoy Kumar Sarkar in the movement for the spread of national education while he was a student.¹¹ He was practicing as a pleader in the Malda Court during the period of the Non-Co-operation movement. Responding to the call of the Non-Co-operation movement he boycotted the British Court and the profession of a Lawyer and dedicated his life for the service of the nation. In 1921 when Congress leader Chittaranjan Das came to visit Malda nationalist movement became encouraged here.¹² Responding to his call famous lawyer Rameshchandra Bagchi, Moulvi Tahiruddin Ahmed, Gangacharan Dutta, Rameshchandra Ghosh, Ganendrashi Gupta, etc gave up their practicing as a lawyer and joined the non-cooperation movement. Congress leaders of the District appealed to the common people to boycott the Court.¹³

Gandhiji adopted a policy to stop tax payment at the extreme point of the Non-Co-operation movement. The programme of tax boycott made a deep influence on Malda also. District Congress leaders appealed to all sections of people to abstain from tax-paying. When the Union Board of Malda increased the chowkidar tax by 50% the movement reached the extreme point at Harishchandrapur, Kaligram and Bangitola. This movement was led by Manindranath Roy Choudhury, Sachindranath Misra, Debendranath Jha etc.¹⁴

Non-Cooperation Movement at Harishchandrapur

The wave of the Non-Co-operation movement reached the Harishchandrapur police station area like other parts of Malda. Bibhuti Bhusan Chakraborty, the son of a poor family of Pipla village was influenced by the ideal of Swaraj (Independence) of Gandhiji and preached the concept of Swadeshi and Swaraj among the village people of that area.¹⁵ Simultaneously, he dedicated himself to consolidating the District Congress organization. Influenced by his leadership spinning wheel was introduced at the villages Pipla, Harishchandrapur, Bhaluka, Kusida, etc. Picketing against the sale of foreign goods, burning the imported clothes, picketing in front of the Liquor shops, boycotting the government-sponsored educational institutions, police stations and government offices, etc. various programmes were performed. Police arrested Bibhuti Bhusan Chakraborty along with the Congress workers

engaged in the movement. He was imprisoned for one year for joining the Non-Co-operation movement. Another meritorious youth Bhupendra Krishna Mishra of a poor family of Pipla village joined the Non-Co-operation movement. He stood first entrance examination of the eight districts of Rajshahi Division and obtained a scholarship. Influenced by the ideals of Gandhiji he joined the Congress during student life and worked as a volunteer in the Non-Co-operation movement. Sachindranath Mishra the son of a Land Lord of Harishchandrapur joined the Non-Co-operation movement. He became engaged in the work of persuading the students of Harishchandrapur High School to be involved in the Non-Co-operation movement.¹⁶ Police searched his house and confiscated a book named 'Arabian Nights'. It was said that there were Red and Blue pencil marks along with the name of the book and police took it as a symbolic code. Then Sachindranath Mishra was kept at house detained during the period of the non-co-operation movement.¹⁷

Leaders of the Non-Co-operation movement of Malda District established a swadeshi practicing centre named Swaraj Kutir at Mokdumpur. The volunteers of the Non-Co-operation movement took an initiative for making khadi cloth and took part in card-cotton, spinning yarn, spinning with a wheel, making cotton lump and then supplying these to the weavers for knitting khadi clothes. All the volunteers would wear hand-made khadi clothes. They would encourage the common people to introduce the spinning wheel as a household affair. In this way, the volunteers remained engaged in Swadeshi activities for the whole of the day and sometimes sang patriotic songs in the night and kept the Swaraj Kutir full of activities. In the year 1922 in January, the prominent District Congress leader Satyaranjan Sen established a Khadi Bhandar (store) in Malda District. Influenced by the Swadeshi ideal many people of town and villages began to wear Khadi clothes.¹⁸

On the 5th February in the year, 1922 Gandhiji was too much shocked at the violent incident of Chori-Chora. Gandhiji withdrew the Non-Co-operation movement on 25th February.¹⁹ As a result, the nationalist leaders became divided into Pro-changer and No-changer groups. Most of the Malda District Congress leaders were supporters of the No-changer group. Only Debendranath Jhan and Atul Kumar were supporters of Pro-changer i.e. supporters of Chittaranjan.²⁰

Civil Disobedience Movement in Malda District:

In defiance of the Salt-law regulations on 12th March 1930, Gandhiji left the Sabarmati Ashram on foot with about 78 males and females and made Salt on the Sea-shore in his hand on 6th April and thus began the Civil Disobedience movement.²¹ The wave of this movement was noticed in Malda District also. On 12th March Ashutosh Kumar convened a meeting at Araidanga of Malda and prayed for Gandhiji's success. District Congress leaders appealed to the youths and students to organize themselves for the

sake of the nations.²²

An attempt was made to ban the meeting, assembly and protest by imposing the ordinance of 144 and also to stop picketing in front of the shop of foreign clothes, drugs and liquors; Malda District Congress deputed 200 volunteers at English Bazar. They made arrangements for picketing in front of the shop of foreign goods.²³ Many times the volunteers informed the police beforehand by notice for slanting the Satyagraha movement. Malda District Congress workers requested the local businessmen not sell the foreign goods. The local businessmen promised the leaders not to sell the foreign goods.²⁴

The students of Malda Akromony Coronation Institution, Zilla School, Chanchal Siddheswari Institution had to suffer heavy police torture for picketing. In various parts of Malda, common people purchased the Salt with much enthusiasm when the volunteers of the non-violent movement sold Salt. Police arrested 12 students along with District Congress youth leader Atulchandra Kumar for the offense of selling Salt. Ultimately when the Civil Disobedience movement was revoked in the year 1934, the nationalist volunteers of Malda became disheartened.²⁵

The youths who joined the Civil Disobedience movement of Malda District are as follows:- Kshitish Choudhury, Narendranath Chakravorty of Malda, Bhupendranath Jhan and Debendranath Jhan of Bangitola. Besides this innumerable congress workers of town and village areas, volunteers and common people participated in the various programmes of the movement and thus make the Civil Disobedience movement irresistible in the whole of the district.

Civil Disobedience Movement at Harishchandrapur:

The wave of the Civil Disobedience movement made a deep influence on Harishchandrapur along with other parts of the Malda District. Subodh Chandra Mishra, Bibhutibhusan Chakravorty, Sachindranath Mishra joined the Civil Disobedience movement from Harishchandrapur Dutidhar Roy and his wife Surendrabala Roy of Bhaluka were also among them.²⁶ Subhodhkumar Mishra became influenced by the ideal of Gandhiji while he was reading at Bhagalpur College.²⁷ Responding to the call of the Civil Disobedience movement he came back at Harishchandrapur and became a Satyagrahi and was arrested. He was imprisoned for six months for violating the 144 Act. Sachindra Nath Mishra also became a revolutionary while reading at Bhagalpur College. He joined the Civil Disobedience movement and suffers imprisonment of 6 months.

There was an arrest warrant against Birsha Dhangar but he went underground for the sake of the movement. Mrs. Surendra Bala Roy daughter of Bhaluka Land Lord Mohini Mohan Mishra was an undaunted Satyagrahi. She was influenced and encouraged by her husband Dutidhar Roy to join the movement. Police first cautioned both the husband and wife for picketing in

front of the government office and liquor shops. After this when they were engaged in Satyagraha, both of them were arrested. Both of them were imprisoned for one year. All these workers of the movement made arrangements for the meeting, assembly and protest. They boycotted the foreign clothes and became engaged in picketing in front of the drug and liquor shops. Police arrested almost all these leaders for suppressing their movement and imprisoned them also.²⁸

Quit India Movement in Malda District:

After the failure of the Cripps Mission in India in March 1942, the proposal of the Quit India movement was adopted in the All India Congress working committee conference in Bombay on 8th August.²⁹ On that particular night, all the congress leaders including Gandhiji were arrested. On the next day in the morning when the news of the arrest of the nationalist leaders was published, there were spontaneous strikes, protests, meeting procession and scattered mass uprisings.³⁰

The quit India movement spread in Malda District also. The main centres of the Quit India movement in Malda were English Bazar, Harishchandrapur, Bhaluka, Singhabad, Shibganj, Nawabganj, Gomastapur, Habibpur, Adina, etc. There appeared a procession in the Malda town on 9th August where the people uttering the slogan; British quit India, Do or Die. After the procession, Kaliranjan Das and Deben Saha were arrested while delivering a lecture. Gandhiji supporter congress leader Ramhari Roy adopted a plan of movement in his Mokdumpur house. Attempts were made for being engaged in the aggressive movement to send petrol and kerosene to various centres. When Ramhari Roy was arrested for delivering a lecture in a meeting, her wife Uma Roy took the responsibility in her hand. Singhabad rail station was burnt up. Harishchandrapur, Bhaluka and Kumedpur rail stations were set on fire. Journalist Sudhir Chakravorty reached Purnea from Samsi on foot and he was arrested there.³¹

In 1942 in the middle of August, a secret meeting was held at the 'Goranga Mission' of Mokdumpur of Digindra Narayan Bhattacharya for adopting a resolution of the famous leaders of the movement. The decision for deciding the programme for leading the movement was adopted here in a well-planned way. Sri Bijay Kumar Dasgupta, Kaliranjan Das and Dhirendranath Poddar were in charge of the Sibganj and Gomastapur police station of undivided Malda District, Rameshchandra Bagchi and Rameshchandra Ghosh were in charge of Nawabganj of the movement. A student procession on of the Quit India movement took part in a walking programme in the Malda town, Zilla School students Binoy Saha and Debendranath Sen were arrested for this offense. They had to suffer rigorous imprisonment for two months.³²

The main organizer Satya Ranjan Sen of Bhaluka and Harishchandrapur kept himself away from police's notice and remained inside a house at

Sadullahpur Garh. He adopted the next course of action from this house. As per the decision adopted Satya Ranjan Sen took shelter in Kahala village along with Digindra Narayan and Bhupendranath Jhan. All three leaders were arrested due to the secret information sent by the villagers. The Liquor shop of Gopalpur of Habibpur police station was set on fire by Sambhu Sardar, Sitaram Sandar and Chhotka Santal. Nikunja Bihari Mujumdar and his wife of Aiho village helped and gave shelter to these revolutionaries.³³

Quit India Movement at Harishchandrapur:

Harishchandrapur was the most noticeable place of Malda where the influence of the Quit India movement was too much strong. The revolutionary youths of Pipla, Bhaluka along with the Land Lord sons of Harishchandrapur joined this movement. On 9th August the British built government office, post office, rail station, rail line, telegraph connection etc of Harishchandrapur were demolished. At that time all the surrounding areas remained inundated due to flood. The freedom fighters of Bhaluka went in the darkness of night by boat to the Jogiapara rail bridge of Harishchandrapur and demolished it and thus disconnected the rail connection between Malda and Katihar. On 9th August morning Jyotishchandra Saha, Ramprasad Choudhury, Bhabesh Mujumdar and Sashibhusan Saha with other 25-30 youths uttering the term 'Bandemataram', 'Mahatma Gandhi Ki Joy' marched towards Bhaluka Bazar in front of Naresh Sengupta Liquor shop make damage to it and the registers were set on fire. After this, they marched in procession towards the post office and Union Board unlocked these offices, entered into the room and burnt all the furniture and registers. Bomkesh Roy son of the leader of Bhaluka Surendra Bala Roy, Brajamohan Sarkar, Jyotishchandra Saha, Sumit Mandal etc. entered the rail station of Bhaluka, burnt the furniture's, ticket counter and disconnected the telegraph line of two sides. On 10th August, the revolutionaries attacked a Liquor shop and the temporary post office and demolished all these.³⁴

When the Quit India movement became violent at Bhaluka, on the other side Subodh Kumar Mishra of Pipla took part in direct action along with a group of 150 people marching in a procession at Harishchandrapur. Their slogans were 'British quit India', Gandhi-ki-Jai, 'Do or Die' (either we shall liberate the country or we will die). The supporters of the movement first destroyed the furniture's of the post office and then made damage of the records and burnt by the direction of Subodh Mishra. Police arrested Subodh Mishra and took him into the police station, then the local congress youth leader Parameshchandra Roy along with the supporters of the movement forcibly rescued Subodh Mishra. After this, the supporters of the movement made damage at the Harishchandrapur rail station and uprooted the rail line. A large number of common people of the surrounding villages spontaneously joined the movement and it became just like an uprising. The police became bitter at this incident and arrested the people indiscriminately.³⁵

Subodh Kumar Mishra came back from Baruduary after presiding in a meeting on his way back to the home he was arrested by the sub-inspector of police Hemanta Sarkar of Harishchandrapur. As a result, the movement spread all over Harishchandrapur. Ramaprasanna Roy a member of the Union Board shouted by saying, if you take away Subodh Babu then you must take all of us with him. When the police took him to the station for sending him to Malda for trial, the sub-inspector of police allowed Subodh Mishra to say something under pressure from the supporters of the movement. But the audience turned violent after hearing his speech. Then Subodh Mishra was released by the order of the circle officer. After this, the elated audience uprooted all the poles and wires of telegraph from the rail station to the post office. In the night some members ransacked the Union Board office.³⁶

The quit India movement became more severe at Harishchandrapur, so the police first confiscated 32 license holding guns. After this, the police of Harishchandrapur police station arrested Bimalcharan Chakravorty, Biren Chakravorty, Sushil Roy, Pankaj Maitra, Dijon Chakravorty, Aswini Chakravorty of Pipla and Paramesh Roy, Kamala Roy, Ramaprasanna Roy, Kanai Roy, Jagadishchandra Mishra, Gobinda Chakravorty, Ram Lakshman Paswan, Birsha Oraon, Bishnubrata Bhattacharya of Harishchandrapur and Mohan Malakar, Jyotishchandra Saha, Sashibhusan Saha, Gour Saha, Banwari, Mohan Mistri of Bhaluka, etc. 25 revolutionaries. Police arrested most of the revolutionaries of Harishchandrapur but could not arrest Subodh Kumar Mishra of Pipla. After receiving information of the arrest of all revolutionaries Subodh Mishra reached Malda by boat and surrendered to the D.M. After a few days they were all released.³⁷

In the first half of the twentieth century, the Malda district of Bengal province of colonial India was a significant center in the history of the freedom movement. English Bazar, Harishchandrapur, Bhaluka, Singhabad, Nagharia, Habibpur, Adina, etc. played a pivotal role in the freedom movement. From 1920 to 1942 the anti-colonial non-violent, Non-Co-operation movement, Civil Disobedience movement, Quit India movement, etc. had a deep influence on Malda and it shock the very foundation of the British Empire. Particularly, during the quit India movement at the Harishchandrapur circle of Malda district, the movement became violent.

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